



STORIES AND RITUALS

LESSON 2

Stories & Rituals: The Bible in Broad Strokes

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God Promises Abram Descendants

Texts: Genesis 15

Big Idea: God makes a covenant with humanity.

Lesson Objectives

Participants will:

1. Explain the importance of commitment by listing different commitments they make.
2. Recognize God's covenant with humanity by hearing a re-telling of the story of Abram.
3. Demonstrate an understanding of God's faithfulness through covenant by completing a collaborative art project.

ACTIVITY (TIME)

Dive In (10 minutes)
Group Check-In

Community Builder (15 minutes)
Commitments

The Story (15 minutes)
God Promises Abram Descendants

The Ritual (15 minutes)
Faithfulness in the Stars

Dig Deeper (10 minutes)
Planting Commitment

Wrap it Up (5 minutes)
Closing Prayer

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Nothing

- Paper
- Pencils or Pens
- Stopwatch or clock

- Copy of Lesson Sheet 2.1

- Soft, instrumental music (optional)
- Method for playing music (optional)
- Copies of Lesson Sheet 2.2 on yellow paper (at least one per person)
- Pens or pencils
- Scissors
- Tape
- Large banner of paper

- Small paper cups (one per person)
- Soil
- Seeds
- Water

- Nothing

LESSON OVERVIEW



What's the Story?

Today your group will explore the story of Abram in Genesis 15. Abram (also known to us as Abraham) was called by God to move with his family to a new land. Abram and his wife, Sarai (also known to us as Sarah), did not have any children of their own. When Abram approaches God about this, God tells Abram that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky, and that his descendants will live in the land that God has promised them. In response, Abram completes a ritual sacrifice that seals the covenant between him and God.

This story is important in the Biblical narrative in a couple of different ways. First, God's covenant with Abram helps us understand God's faithfulness. This idea of faithfulness comes up time and time again in Scripture, and in the stories that will be told in future lessons. Second, verses 13-16 give us a foretaste of the Israelites' enslavement in Egypt, freedom, and wandering in the wilderness. Finally, in verses 18-21, God promises Abram and his descendants the Promised Land. This promise will bring hope to the Israelites as they escape Egypt and journey to the place that God has given them.



What's the "Big Idea?"

Today's lesson focuses on the big idea that *God makes a covenant with humanity*. The word "covenant" is an important way to describe our relationship with God. In this covenant, God does more than make a promise—God makes a lasting commitment to Abram and his descendants. God makes the same commitment to love and be faithful to us, too. In a world where relationships are broken and where we face broken promises and disappointment, it is important for us to realize that God will always live out this covenant with humanity, no matter what.



What's the Symbol?

God's covenant with Abram is made concrete when God takes Abram outside and tells him to look at the stars in the sky. God promises Abram that the number of his descendants will rival the number of the stars he sees above. Stars are a recognizable and concrete symbol of today's story. Stars play a key role in the activity of today's ritual, described below.



What's the Ritual?

Today's ritual will invite participants to think about the places in their life where God has lived out the covenant to be faithful to humanity. Then, they will write these ideas on paper stars. The group will share their stars by taping them onto a large sheet of paper, creating a collaborative art project. This banner can be hung in your meeting space as a continued reminder of God's faithfulness in our lives.



Setting Up Your Space

Set up your "altar" area. Cover a large table with a piece of fabric or linen. On the altar place a cross, some candles, and cutouts of stars in different sizes. Cut a large banner of paper (butcher paper works well for this) and lay it in front of the altar. Have pens/pencils, scissors, tape, and paper stars nearby (you may wish to display them on the altar, too) for the ritual.

DIVE IN (10 MINUTES)

Group Check-In

Materials:

- Nothing

During the session:

- **Open your session with a quick prayer. Use this one or a prayer of your own: Holy Lord, open our eyes, ears, and hearts to see your love and faithfulness in the world around us. Help us see your love for us in your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**
- **Let's start our time together by sharing some of the great and not-so-great things that have happened to us this week.** What were the high points and low points of your week? Go around the group and invite everyone to share.

COMMUNITY BUILDER (15 MINUTES)

Commitments

Materials:

- Paper
- Pencils or pens
- Stopwatch/clock

During the session:

- **Today we're going to talk about the meaning of the word "covenant." A covenant is a type of commitment. What are the commitments you make in your life? Let's find out.**
- Divide the group into teams of 3-4 people each. Give each team a sheet of paper and a pencil.
- **Have you ever played the game "Scattergories?" We're going to play a game like that today. Each round I'm going to give you a different place or person. You'll have one minute to write down as many different commitments you make to that place or person. Your team will get one point for each original answer.**
- Give teams one of the following categories: (*commitments at school, commitments at home, commitments in friendships, commitments at church, commitments with family*). Then, give them one minute to write down as many ideas as they can.
- After one minute, have teams share their lists, one at a time. Each team should start at the top of their list and read off each item. If a team has the same item on their list, both teams must cross the item off their list.
- At the end of the round, each team gets one point for every item that is not crossed off. Start a new round by giving the teams a new person or place.
- **Is it easy or hard to keep these commitments? Why? What is the hardest commitment you've ever had to keep?** [Answers will vary.]



THE STORY

(15 MINUTES)

God Promises Abram Descendants

Materials:

- Copy of Lesson Sheet 2.1

Before the session:

- Make a copy of Lesson Sheet 2.1.
- Practice reading through the story several times so you are familiar with it.

During the session:

- Tell the story on Lesson Sheet 2.1.
- After the story, ask: **What is this story telling us about God?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: God makes promises to us; God promises to be faithful to us; God makes a covenant with us to be faithful to us.]*
- **What is this story telling us about humanity?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: We have our own wants and needs, and we trust that God will provide for us; we are in a covenant relationship with God and this covenant requires us to be people of worship and praise.]*
- **What is this story telling us about the world?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: The world is filled with God's promises to us; it is filled with evidence of God's faithfulness to humanity.]*
- **God made a covenant with Abram. God promised Abram that he would have descendants as numerous as the stars and Abram trusted that God would live out this promise. A covenant isn't ever a one way promise, though. Abram also made a promise to be faithful and worship God, and he did this by honoring God through a ritual sacrifice.**



THE RITUAL

(15 MINUTES)

Faithfulness in the Stars

Materials:

- Soft, instrumental music (optional)
- Method for playing music (optional)
- Copies of Lesson Sheet 2.2 on yellow paper (at least one per person)
- Pens or pencils
- Scissors
- Tape
- Large banner of paper

Before the session:

- Make copies of Lesson Sheet 2.2 on yellow copy paper.
- Set up a large banner of paper in front of your altar area.

During the session:

- If you have not done so, light the candle on your altar area. If you are playing music, begin playing it softly.
- **In today's story, God promises Abram that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky. The stars are a symbol of God's faithfulness to Abram and his family.**
- Give each person a copy of Lesson Sheet 2.2 and a pencil or pen. **God promised Abram faithfulness, and God promises us faithfulness, too. Think about some of the ways that God has proven faithful to you. Maybe it's through an answered prayer. Maybe it's through a blessing you've received. Write these things on the stars on your sheet.**
- Give the group time to write. **As you finish writing, grab a pair of scissors and cut out your stars. Hold on to them... you'll need them in a moment.**
- Give the group time to finish writing and cut out their stars. **In a moment, we are going to perform a ritual of thanksgiving to God for being faithful to us. Abram showed his thankfulness to God by performing a sacrifice. We are going to show our thankfulness to God by creating a mural with our stars. One at a time, I will invite you to come to our banner of paper and tape your stars to the sheet. As you tape your stars, thank God for being faithful to you in your life.**
- Invite the group to approach the paper one at a time, taping their stars. After everyone has attached their stars to the banner, have someone help you hold it up so everyone can see. Read the words on some of the stars.
- **It looks like God is faithful to us, just as God was faithful to Abram and his family. God is faithful to us now, too. God has made a covenant to always be with us and to be faithful to us. Even when it doesn't seem like it, God is present and active in our lives and will never abandon us. How do we live out our promise to remain faithful to God, just as God is faithful to us?** [Answers will vary, but may include: worship, prayer, reading Scripture, following God's commandments, etc.]

DIG DEEPER

(10 MINUTES)

Planting Commitment

Materials:

- Small paper cups (one per person)
- Soil
- Seeds
- Water

During the session:

- **Through the covenant with Abram, God promised never to leave Abram's family and descendants. God would always take care of people. That's a big commitment. Today we're going to make a commitment to take care of something, too.**
- Give each person a small paper cup. Invite them to plant a seed by scooping some soil into their cup, planting a couple of seeds, and watering them.
- **How do we show commitment to a plant or garden?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: We make sure the plants are watered; we weed it; we care for it and tend it.]*
- **How is God's commitment to us like our commitment to our plants?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: God also cares for us and tends us; God nourishes us and makes sure we are fed.]*

WRAP IT UP

(5 MINUTES)

Closing Prayer

Invite the group to share any prayer concerns or requests they may have for the week. Close your time together in prayer. Use the following or pray your own prayer:

Mighty God, just as you promised to be faithful to Abram and his descendants, you promise to be faithful to us, too. Grant that we might see your love and grace in our lives, and that we might be faithful disciples to you every day. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Lesson Sheet 2.1

God Promises Abram Descendants (Genesis 15)

One day, the Lord came to Abram through a vision and told him that he would receive a great reward.

Abram said to God, “What reward could you give me? I have no children. Without any children, the head of my household will be my heir, and he isn’t even of my own.”

God responded to Abram, saying, “You will have a child of your own who will be your heir.”

Then God led Abram outside. God told Abram to look up and try to count the stars in the sky. As Abram looked at the stars, God said that Abram’s descendants would be just as numerous as these stars. This word became God’s covenant with Abram, and Abram trusted that God would keep this covenant with him.

Then God said to Abram, “I am the Lord, your God who brought you from your home to give you this land. This land will belong to you and your family.”

But Abram responded, “How do I know that this land belongs to me?”

God gave Abram some specific instructions for a ritual. Abram was told to bring these things: a female calf, a female goat and a ram, each three years old, and a turtledove, and a pigeon.

Abram brought all these things to God. The calf, goat, and ram he split in half, but the birds he kept whole. As he prepared the sacrifice, several birds of prey tried to steal and eat the animals. But, instead of letting them eat, Abram drove them away.

After the sacrifice was prepared, darkness came and Abram fell into a deep sleep. Then, as Abram slept, God told Abram that life would not be easy for his descendants. God said, “Your offspring will live in a land that isn’t theirs, working hard and facing oppression for 400 years. But their oppressors will receive my judgment, and they will leave that land with great reward. And you will live a long life and be buried with your ancestors in peace. The fourth generation will return to this land, when it will finally be their time.”

Once it became dark, a large flame and smoke passed through the animals split in half. With that action, God made a covenant with Abram. God told Abram, “Your descendants will receive this land I give them. The land between the great rivers in Egypt and the Euphrates—that land will be theirs.”

STARS

