



## YEAR 3—The God Who Pursues Relationship: A Story of God's People

### Module 1—Genesis Part 1

#### Lesson 6: God Chooses a Leader for God's People—Genesis 12; 15:1-6

### BIBLICAL REFLECTION

*(A theological and biblical reflection on today's Scripture passage.)*

### INTRODUCTION

Much of the book of Genesis (chapters 11-25) focuses on the events in the life of Abraham (his name is Abram until God changes it to Abraham in chapter 17). Abraham, as is well known, is considered the father of the multitudes or the father of many nations. He is the first Patriarch of the Israel nation and one of the primary models of obedience and faithfulness in Christianity. Let's take a look at the life of Abraham.

Abraham's story begins with a journey, along with the rest of his family, out of Ur. Ur was in southern Babylonia. His family journeyed along the common route, a trade route deciding to settle in Haran, which was a few hundred miles to the northwest of Ur.

While living in Haran, at the age of 75, Abraham is called by God to go to a land—a strange land that God would show him. This call came with a promise. God promised Abraham that God would make Abraham and his descendants into a great nation (see Genesis 12:1-3). Because his wife, Sarah was unable to have children, this promise likely seemed very unrealistic to both Abraham and his wife. Although mystified I am sure, Abraham believed God and obeyed him. God directed Abraham, Sarah and Abraham's nephew Lot to a land that God would show them.

Ultimately, after traveling along the common trade routes, God showed Abraham and his family to the land of Canaan. This land was governed by the Canaanites, a powerful people. Again, Abraham and his family must choose to believe and obey God. However, Abraham once again reveals his desire to obey God and put forth a faith mighty enough to trust God.

Due to a famine throughout the land, Abraham moved his family to Egypt. While in Egypt, Sarah was taken to Pharaoh's palace. Sarah was introduced by Abraham as his sister, not his wife, so Pharaoh took Sarah to be a part of his harem. It is likely that Abraham lied about his wife being his sister to protect his own life. Due to various plagues on Pharaoh's house and family, Sarah is given back to Abraham and they set out for the land of Canaan. During their journey to Canaan God institutes the covenant of circumcision to symbolize that God is the redeemer of Abraham and all of his descendants.

Isaac was born to Sarah, (Genesis 21:1-7) just as God had promised years earlier. God asked Abraham to obey again by killing his son, Isaac. Although Abraham was willing, God spared Isaac at the last minute and God's promise of offspring that numbered the stars remained intact. Abraham was indeed the father of many nations. Although there were many obstacles along the way, the faith of Abraham to believe in God's promises prevailed. The blessing of Abraham was passed down to Isaac and his grandson Jacob.

## ***GOD'S STORY***

God is a God of covenants. In a general, big picture sense, a covenant is an agreement between two or more parties. Throughout the Old Testament we realize that God is the maker of the covenants. God initiates, confirms and even fulfills the covenants. Humanity's role is to follow and obey. Covenants are the generous means of relationship with God for a people who do not deserve grace but receive it anyway.

There are three major components to the covenants that God initiates. First, there is one-sided formation. This means that God creates covenants. Humans are not in a position to develop a covenant with God. Rather, humans can only respond to the covenants that God creates. Second, each of the covenants that God establishes has a personal pledge. God's covenants are not merely about property, wealth, or other materials. God's covenants involve a very particular, private and personal stake. God's covenants involve the very essence of life—a loving relationship. Finally, God's covenants require definitive promise. In other words, the covenants that God establishes cannot be partially committed to—it is all or nothing. Along with one-sided formation, personal pledge and definitive promise, God's covenants involve two other key aspects. God's covenants are marked by time and term. This allows both God and humans to faithfully fulfill their corresponding roles.

This covenant that God makes with Abraham is about two things—relationship and redemption. God promises protection and blessing in this relationship, Israel must promise obedience and loyalty. God also, through this covenant with Abraham, sets up God's plan for the salvation of humanity. Through this covenant, God marks God's desire to embark on a course of action which reclaims and reconciles the relationship God originally set up with humans at the time of creation.

## ***OUR STORY***

When God asks Abraham to obey his calling he asks Abraham to do three things. First, he asked Abraham to leave his land. God promises Abraham and his family a new land, but God clearly takes Abraham and Sarah out of the land of Ur into the land of Canaan disrupting Abraham's familiarity and heritage.

Second, God asks Abraham to leave his family, his people. God asks Abraham to leave what he knows and journey into an unknown land and also an unknown way of life. In biblical times, a family provided security and protection. In exchange for leaving this familiarity behind, God promises that Abraham will be the father of a great nation.

Finally, Abraham is asked to leave his inheritance. An inheritance involved material possessions, land, and the taking ones place as the patriarch of the family. This would be very similar to today in that many of our families pass down belongings and other items of importance such as money and land. God asks Abraham to put all of this behind him in order to accomplish a greater purpose. We know now what this meant, but to Abraham at the time, this must have been a very difficult thing to do.

God's request of Abraham means these three things:

1. God will bless him
2. He will be a blessing
3. He will be a channel of future blessing

Abraham's decision to believe and trust God meant these three things:

1. Abraham and his family will come under God's protection and care (God will bless him).
2. Abraham will in turn protect and care for God's people (He will be a blessing).
3. Abraham will bring blessing to other people (future generations) through his obedience (He will be a channel of future blessing).

## *OTHERS' STORY*

If we are to understand and take on the three same covenant tenants (as outlined above) then we too are blessed, a blessing, and a portal for future blessing. This means that we are agents of God's grace, not merely people who are accumulators but distributors of God's grace. We are not designed to be reservoirs, but instead pipes in which the grace of God flows into and out of us.

As with the covenant between God and Abraham, God is revealed to the world through our actions and followers of Jesus. Just as Abraham had a connection between God and the Israelites, we have a connection between God and people, through the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. How do we as Christians (that are blessed), be a blessing showing the world that God has indeed not forgotten them?

## *THE WORLD'S STORY*

How else does a non-religious world know how much God loves them? In what ways is your faith community reaching out to non-religious and nominally religious people in order to be a channel of blessing?

I completely trust that God is in fact restoring the world to its intended wholeness, just as God promised to do. I trust that God's promise to act in the coming days is as real and significant as the fact that God has acted in the past. I believe that God is using the church to do this.

Therefore, my hope in the future promises of God (restoration, justice, peace, and so on) does not make me want to withdraw from the world with the wish that a better world will somehow evolve. Instead, it pushes me to choose to live into the hope that we've been promised. The promise of God given to the Israelites in Isaiah 40 remains true today. God is and forever will be an incomparable God who still cares and has not given up on humanity (Isaiah 40:27). This promise of God to the world today is a continuation of the covenant that God established with Abraham. Because of Abraham's obedience and loyalty to God, we are now blessed to be a blessing.