

# Stars for the Nighttime Fears and Doubts

## Topic

God's knowledge

## Theme

God is omniscient and omnipotent and worthy of our trust.

## Desired Learner Response

The learner will consider his trust in God and what he might do to strengthen it.

## Materials

- Resources 1, 7, and 9
- Handout 1 from resource CD

## Scripture Focus

Genesis 15–17

## Summary

God repeated and expanded His promises to Abram. Abram believed God, and God counted him righteous due to this trust. Sarai initiated a foolish plan for helping God accomplish His promises. Abram carried out the plan. God then communicated that Abram would be the father of a multitude of nations but not through Hagar's son, Ishmael. God demonstrated His omniscience and omnipotence by repeatedly communicating detailed prophecies regarding the future fulfillment of His promises to Abram and his descendants.

## Outline

### I. God Reiterates His Promises (15)

- A. God promises an heir (15:1–6)
- B. God promises possession of the land (15:7–21)

### II. God Knows the Future (16; 17)

- A. God's knowledge demonstrated to Hagar (16)
- B. God's knowledge communicated to Abram (17)

## Memory Verse

*"After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward" (Genesis 15:1).*



### Shield Logo Search

There are at least a dozen insurance companies that use a shield in their company name or logo. Have the learners partner with someone who has access to the web through a handheld device. Have the pairs or small groups list insurance companies that use a shield in their logo. They can use the web to help them make their list. Give them four minutes to work. Congratulate the learners who came up with the most examples.

The following is a list of some of the insurance companies with shields in their logos:

- Farmers Insurance Group
- Shelter Insurance
- BlueCross BlueShield
- PEMCO Insurance
- Safeway Insurance
- Sheffield
- Travelers
- United Healthcare
- Federal Insurance
- RBC Insurance
- Calvary Insurance
- Clifton Insurance

**ASK:** Why would so many insurance companies use a shield in their logo?

**ASK:** From what are they promising to protect their customers?

A shield is a comforting visual for those who are concerned or worried about the unknown. God appeared to Abram and used a shield metaphor to communicate some important truths about Himself. We will study that account today and learn that those truths will help us know and trust God better.

### Twinkling Metaphors

**ASK:** During what part of a day do most people have the hardest time facing their fears and doubts? *Nighttime when they are alone with their thoughts.*

When the busyness of the day goes away, we are often faced with our fears and doubts to think about. What may have seemed like a small problem during the day becomes magnified at night. As the fears and doubts grow, we become anxious and upset and even lose sleep. We might question why the fear or doubt that seems so big at night didn't overwhelm us during the day.

**ASK:** What are examples of fears and doubts that could overwhelm people at night? (Q1)



**ASK:** What are ways people might try to calm their fears? (Q2)

God gave Abram a metaphor to help him especially in the night seasons when his troubles and doubts looked the most insurmountable. He showed Abram the stars of the sky and forever identified them with His omniscience and omnipotence. We will study that account today and learn that those same stars shine forth the same message about God for us today.

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

### I. God Reiterates His Promises (15)

God shared His covenantal promises with Abram in multiple encounters over several years. Each separate encounter developed a fuller understanding of the depth and breadth of God's promises for Abram.

**RESOURCE:** Display resource 7 to review the aspects of the Abrahamic Covenant as you see fit throughout the lesson.

#### A. God promises an heir (15:1–6)

God appeared again to Abram (Gen. 15:1). This time He told Abram not to fear. The fact that the Lord started His message to Abram by telling him to *fear not* is a clue that Abram was probably experiencing some fear.

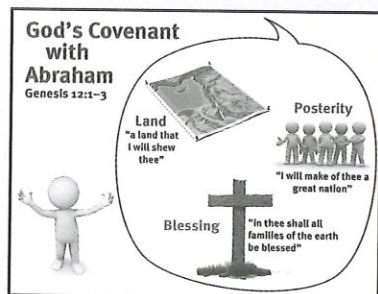
**READ:** Genesis 14:14–16. **ASK:** Why would Abram have reason to fear, particularly at night, following the events in this passage? (Q3) *It was during the night that he defeated the four kings of the east. There was always the chance that some night they could return to attack him.*

**READ:** Genesis 15:1. **ASK:** What encouraging message did God give to Abram concerning his fears? (Q4) *That Abram had no reason to fear because He was Abram's shield.*

**RESOURCE:** Display resource 9. **ASK:** What can we learn about God by His comparison of Himself to a shield? (Record or reveal answers.) (Q5) *That He is on our side, has a vested interest in us, and is aware of what frightens us.*

The second part of God's initial message deals with Abram's doubt. The 120-mile chase of the kings of the east, the battle, and the long trip back were over. The heightened drama was done, a tremendous victory was wrought, but Abram still had neither an heir nor any land that actually belonged to him. God addressed these problems by telling Abram that He was Abram's *exceeding great reward*.

Abram responded to the Lord with a question that fixated on reality from his perspective (15:2, 3). Abram asked the Lord what He would give him since he was still childless and Eliezer of Damascus was his current heir. It was as if Abram was saying, *Lord, the promises You've made me are great. I just don't see any progress*





on Your part in carrying those out. Abram was simply grappling with the realities of his advancing age and childless marriage. That God did not rebuke Abram but rather encouraged him is notable.

**READ:** Genesis 15:4. **ASK:** How did the Lord respond to Abram when he pointed out that his current heir was a son born to one of his servants? (Q6) *The Lord told Abram that his own son, not an adopted heir, would be the heir of promise.*

The Lord led Abram outside his tent to gaze into the night sky to help Abram see the promise that he would become a great nation. The Lord told Abram to count the stars of heaven if he was able to number them (15:5). The Lord was subtly pointing out that Abram could never number the stars. No one will ever be able to number all the stars. Even with today's satellite telescopes, trying to number the stars is an exercise in futility.

The Lord obviously knew Abram couldn't number the stars. He then told Abram that his descendants would be like the stars, that is, so great as to be innumerable (15:5). This metaphor gave Abram a source of assurance for when he faced nighttime doubts and fears. Whenever he doubted God's abilities, he could gaze to the heavens and see the countless stars that God had not only numbered, but also created. God's infinite power and wisdom meant God's promises were sure.

**RESOURCE:** Display resource 9. **ASK:** What assurances about God could we gain from gazing at the stars? (Q7) *That He is omnipotent, sovereign, wise, and omniscient.*

**READ:** Genesis 15:6. **ASK:** How had Abram chosen to respond to the Lord's revelation of Himself? (Q8) *Abram had chosen to believe in the Lord.*

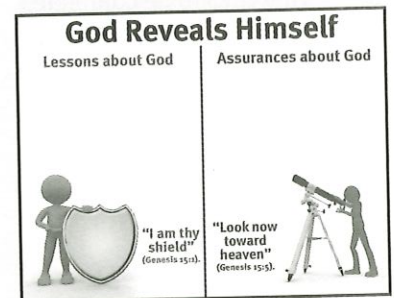
Abram had already trusted in God when he left Ur (12:1). Genesis 15:6 was a recording of what had already taken place. The verb tense for *believed* suggests such an understanding. It should also be noted that the Abrahamic Covenant had nothing to do with Abram's salvation. His salvation didn't come because God chose him and made promises to him. Abraham had to put his trust in the Lord.

Genesis 15:6 is one of the key verses in all of Scripture. Abram's belief provides a template for belief for people today (Gal. 3:6, 7). The characteristic of Abram's belief that is counted as righteousness is trust. Abram did not just believe that God said he would have a son and that God could accomplish this feat. Abram trusted that God would in fact accomplish what He had said. Although the content of Abram's belief was different than that of believers today, the foundational principle remains the same. People must trust that God will accomplish what He has promised.

### B. God promises possession of the land (15:7–21)

The first section of chapter 15 focuses on God's promise to give Abram a son and eventually innumerable descendants. The second section (15:7–21) reaffirms God's promise to give Abram the Promised Land. The structure of this section is very similar to Genesis 15:1–6. God reaffirmed a promise, this time the land. Next

Genesis 13:16 communicates that Abram's offspring will be like the dust of the earth.





God is often accomplishing multiple purposes in His dealings with humanity. Abram's family's sojourn also would give time for the iniquity of the Amorites to be completed (Gen. 15:16).

Although Israel may have exerted economic influence over nearly all of this area during Israel's Golden Age of David's and Solomon's reigns, Israel has never fully possessed all the Promised Land.

Abram questioned the Lord and His promise. Finally, God reaffirmed Abram.

God began the process of reassuring Abram about the land by asking him to bring a heifer, goat, ram, turtledove, and young pigeon. Somehow Abram knew that the animals, excluding the birds, were to be cut in half. Abram watched over the animals and kept the vultures away as he waited for God to act (15:11).

Late in the day, God caused Abram to fall into a deep sleep (15:12). A deep darkness fell upon Abram as God shared how Abram's descendants would sojourn in another land for 400 years (15:13). The dreadful darkness was probably to the 400-year sojourn that Abram's descendants would endure. Although they would face difficulty, God communicated that ultimately the descendants would come out with great possessions (15:14). God also communicated that Abram would have a long, peaceful life (15:15).

**ASK:** How might knowing some of the details about the possession of the Promised Land affect Abram's confidence? (Q9) *The details most likely helped Abram gain confidence that God would eventually work to give the Promised Land to his descendants. No doubt it also helped Abram's confidence that he would indeed have an heir.*

After the sun went down, God's presence was then symbolically communicated to Abram by a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch that passed between the previously divided animal carcasses. The text then says that God *made* a covenant with Abram (15:18). The word *made* is literally *to cut* and likely provides the explanation of the need for Abram to split the animals used in the covenant-making process. God was the only One to walk through the animals. That means the keeping of the covenant was completely dependent on Him. Abram didn't have a part of the covenant to keep in order for it to be fulfilled. It was unconditional.

God continued by naming the expansive boundaries of the Promised Land, the river of Egypt and the Euphrates River (15:18). God promised that between these two boundaries, Abram's family would possess the land of the people groups He listed (15:19–21).

## II. God Knows the Future (16; 17)

While the focus of God's communication to Abram has largely been on His promise of the land with an accompanying lesser emphasis on the promise of the seed, God focused more on the seed in Genesis 16 and following.

### A. God's knowledge demonstrated to Hagar (16)

Sarai, not trusting that God would use her to bear the promised son from Abram's own body, suggested a surrogate arrangement with her servant Hagar. Abram agreed and predictably problems ensued (16:1–3).

**READ:** Genesis 16:1, 2. **ASK:** Based on her own plan, what must Sarai have thought about God's plan? (Q10) *She thought God's actions, restraining her from bearing children, and His plan for her to have an heir were contradictory. She doubted God would do what He promised because it hadn't happened for so many years.*



Sarai believed she needed to take matters into her own hands. If she could get a legal heir for Abram through Hagar, then her bareness would no longer be an issue. She didn't realize the problems she would birth through her plan.

Upon conceiving, Hagar began to look down upon Sarai. Sarai responded by dealing harshly with Hagar, forcing Hagar to flee for relief (16:3–6).

**READ:** Genesis 16:3–6. **ASK:** What three words would you use to describe the results of Sarai's attempt to secure an heir for Abram? (Q11) *Perhaps conflict, pain, and sin.*

Hagar's retreat into the wilderness occasioned another demonstration of God's omniscience. The Angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar (16:7). In language reminiscent of the previous communications to Abram, Hagar learned from the Angel of the Lord that her descendants would be innumerable. Hagar also learned that her son, to be named Ishmael, meaning *God hears*, would be an individualistic, violent man bent on conflict. This prophecy communicated that the promise for Abram to be a blessing to all people would not be fulfilled through Ishmael; another son must fulfill that promise (16:10–12).

**READ:** Genesis 16:13. **ASK:** How did Hagar describe God after her encounter with the Angel of the Lord? (Q12) *As the God Who sees.*

Hagar's identification of God as the God Who sees is a Hebrew pun unrecognized in English. The Hebrew term can be translated both as the *God who sees me*, which matches what happened, and as the *God I see*, which matches Hagar's following explanation. Both communicate important truths. The first understanding communicates that God sees and cares for people. God met with Hagar and cared for her when she was at a low point. God's knowledge is caring. The second understanding communicates that Hagar experienced some type of revelation of God, she saw Him.

God's knowledge is highlighted throughout this account. The account also develops, through a negative example, a proper understanding of belief and trust. Truly trusting God means being completely dependent upon Him to fulfill His purposes. This does not mean there is no place for human involvement in God's plans, but Sarai clearly acted without consulting God. Her actions brought disruptive and destructive results.

## **B. God's knowledge communicated to Abram (17)**

Thirteen years after the account of Hagar and Ishmael (Gen. 16), God resumed His communication with Abram. The time gap between Genesis 16 and 17 is a reminder that God's plans are not bound to human timing.

**READ:** Genesis 17:1. **ASK:** What is the subtle relationship between Abram's age and the name God called Himself? (Q13) *Abram's age suggests he was too old to have an heir. It would take a miracle. When God introduced Himself as the Almighty God, He was pointing out that He had the power to provide an heir for Abram.*

Later in the passage Abram laughed at the notion of him having a child by Sarai (17:17). God knew Abram had yet to learn just how powerful He is. God's name

The Angel of the Lord is most likely a preincarnate appearance of Christ, for later in the narrative Hagar calls Him God (16:13).



The New Covenant communicated in passages such as Jeremiah 31:31–34 is the ultimate means that allows Israel to perfectly obey God and enjoy the blessings of the unconditional covenants forever.

may have come to mean more to Abram in retrospect after Isaac's birth than it did in the immediate setting.

**ASK:** What apparent condition was added to God's dealing with Abram (17:1)? (Q13) *The need to walk blamelessly before God.*

God once again reaffirmed His promises to Abram. God conditioned Abram's enjoyment of the covenant promises with the need to walk blamelessly before Him. This condition is not a change to the ultimate unconditional nature of the Abrahamic Covenant. It does mean though that total obedience was necessary for Abram to benefit from the promises of the covenant. This same principle was communicated to Solomon (1 Kings 9:4, 5) and Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:3). A change seems to have taken place in Abram. His history from this point onward is overwhelmingly positive. His commitment to obedience will be especially evidenced in later dramatic accounts involving the son of promise, Isaac.

God communicated to Abram that he will be the father of a multitude of nations. So God changed Abram's name to Abraham. The name *Abram* means *exalted father*, and the name *Abraham* means *father of a multitude*. God told Abraham that the many nations descending from him would be blessed because of their connection with him (17:4–8).

God established circumcision as the sign of covenant between God, Abraham, and his descendants (17:9–14). This sign was a reminder of the promises God made. Failure to participate in the sign of the covenant meant that Abraham's descendants would not realize the benefits of the covenant. Just as God had communicated that Abraham's enjoyment of the covenant depended upon his obedience (17:1), so too, enjoyment of the covenant depended upon circumcision. Failure to keep this sign of the covenant did not negate the unconditional promises God made to Abraham, it just temporarily prevented the full benefit of them.

God continued in His communication with Abraham about Abraham's promised son.

**READ:** Genesis 17:15–18. **ASK:** What limits did Abraham put on God? (Q14) *The natural laws of child-bearing. Abraham didn't see a way around the fact that Sarah's womb was long dead.*

Abraham found the notion of having a child by Sarah laughable. He kept his thoughts about the notion to himself, though his laugh was apparently audible. There is actually a possibility that Abraham's laughter is what caused him to fall to his face. God knew exactly what Abraham was thinking of course. And He was not surprised when Abraham suggested that Ishmael could fit the role of heir.

God's response to Abraham's suggestion was a definite no. Sarah would be the mother of Abraham's son. And Abraham was to call him *Isaac*, meaning *he laughs*. Isaac's name would be a constant reminder of the doubt Abraham and Sarah had in God's ability to open her womb so she could bear a child in her old age.

God even went on to talk about His covenant with Isaac and his descendants after him (17:19) meaning God talked about Abraham as a grandfather and great-grandfather while Abraham was still struggling with the idea of fathering a child in his old age.



God also told Abraham that He would not abandon Abraham's son Ishmael but would make him fruitful and cause him to become a great nation. Twelve of Ishmael's sons would become princes (17:20). The fact that Ishmael is Abraham's son is the reason for the blessings. Ishmael certainly didn't do anything to earn a special blessing from God. However, God's covenant is not with Ishmael; He will instead *establish* His covenant with Isaac. God uses the word *establish* because He had already *made* His covenant with Abraham. God's covenant with Abraham remains the same with Isaac, Jacob, and the nation.

**READ:** Genesis 17:21. **ASK:** What was God communicating by calling the timeframe for Isaac's birth a *set time*? (Q15) *He was communicating that He had an appointed time for Isaac's birth all along. The events were unfolding exactly as He had planned.*

Hearing there was a *set time* within the next year for Isaac's birth had to be encouraging for Abraham. He responded by immediately obeying God; he circumcised all the men of his household regardless of their age, social standing, and ethnicity (17:23–27). God's omniscience and omnipotence were becoming real to Abraham. Instead of laughing he started trusting and obeying.

## MAKING IT PERSONAL

### Message in the Night Sky

**ASK:** How have God's omniscience and omnipotence affected your life? (Q16)

**ASK:** Are you able to trust God in the night when your troubles seem especially overwhelming? Explain. (Q17)

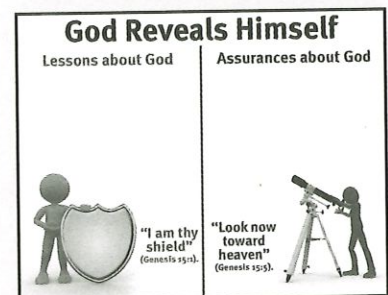
God used the stars to help Abram see a reason to trust Him. We can gaze at those same stars today.

**ASK:** How might the stars help you *see* that God is omniscient and omnipotent? (Q18)

**RESOURCE:** Display resource 9 to review what assurances about God we can gain from considering the stars.

### Heavenly Insurance Card

Copy the insurance cards (handout 1) onto cardstock, cut them out, and distribute them to your learners. Have the learners add a name for the *insurance plan* based on today's lesson. Have them write a slogan on the back of the card that captures the essence of God's omniscience and omnipotence. Encourage your learners to keep the card as a reminder that God is worthy of their trust because He is omniscient and omnipotent.



Responding to God & His Plan

1. Understand and enjoy God's revelation of Himself through creation.	8.
2. Recognize Christ as the only solution to sin.	9.
3. Take sin seriously and share God's grace.	10.
4. Submit to God's sovereign plan for your life.	11.
5. Be faithful in response to God's faithfulness.	12.
6. Focus your affections on God.	13.
7. Trust God for He knows all and can do all.	

**Genesis**  
GOD'S PLAN BEGINS

## Summary and Memory Verse

**RESOURCE:** Display resource 1. Add a summary statement for lesson 7 or use the following: Trust God, for He knows all and can do all.

Encourage learners to memorize Genesis 15:1. Give them an opportunity to say the verse in class next week.