

**Topic**

God's knowledge

**Theme**

God is omniscient and omnipotent and worthy of our trust.

**Desired Learner Response**

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

**Materials**

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

Stars for the Nighttime Fears and Doubts

**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**

1. **God Reiterates His Promises (15)**
	1. God promises an heir (15:1-6)
	2. God promises possession of the land (15:7-21)
2. **God Knows the Future (16; 17)**
	1. God's knowledge demonstrated to Hagar (16)
	2. 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).*

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# GETTING STARTED

## Shield Logo Search

There are at least a dozen insurancecompanies that use a shield in their company name or logo. Have the learners partner with someonewho has access to the web through a handheld device.Have the pairs or small groups list insu rance compan ies 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 so me of the insurance companies with shields in their logos:

* Farmers InsuranceGroup
* ShelterInsurance
* BlueCross BlueShield
* PEMCO Insurance
* Safeway Insurance
* Sheffield
* Travelers
* United Hea lthcar e
* Federallnsurance
* RBC Insurance
* Calvary Ins urance
* Clifton Insura nce

**ASK:** Why wou ld so many insur ancecompanies use a shi eld in t h eir logo?

**ASK:** From what are they promising to p rote ct their cust omers?

A s hield is a comforting visual for those whoare concerned or worried about the unknown. God appeared to Abram and used a shield metaphor to communi­ cate some important truths about Himself. We will s tudy that account today and learn that those truths will help us knowand trust God better.

## Twinkling Metaphors

**ASK:** During what part of a day do most people have th e hardest t im e facing th eir 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 haveseemed like a small problem during the daybecomes magnified at night. As the fears and doubts grow, we become

anxiousand 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 doubt s t hat could overwhelm people at night ? (Q1)

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**ASK:** What are ways people might try to calm their fears? (02)

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 omnipo­ tence. 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

## God Reiterates His Promises (15)

God shared His covenantal promiseswith 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 aspec t s of t he Abrahamic Cov­ enant as you see fit throughout the lesson.

**Genesis n :t- 3**

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* + - 1. **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, par­ ticularly at night, following the events in this passage? (0 3) *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 concernin g his fears? (0 4) *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 revea l answers.) (05) *That He is on our side,has* a *vested interest in us, and is aware of what frightens us.*

**God Reveals Himself**

**Lessons about God I AssurancesaboutGod**

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The second part of God's initial message deals with Abram's doubt. The 120- mile chase of the kingsof 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 ma rriage.That God did not reb uke Abram but rather encouraged him is notable.

**READ:** Genesis 15:4. **ASK:** How did the Lord respond to Abram when he point­ ed out that his current heir was a son born to one of his servants? (Q6) *TheLord told Abram that his own son, not an adoptedheir, wou ld be theheir of promise.*

The Lord led Abramoutside 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 sub­ tly pointing out that Abram could nevernumber 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 knewAbram couldn't number the stars. He then told Abram that his descendants would be like the stars, that is, so great as to be innu­ merable (15:5). This metaphor gave Abram a source of assurance for when he faced nighttime doubts and fears. Whenever he doubted Go d'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 mea nt 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). Ge nesis 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. Abr am'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 believethat God sa id he would have a son and that God could accomplish this feat. Abram trust- ed that God would in fact accomplish what He had said. Although the content of Abram's belief was diffe rent than that of believers today,the foundationalprin­ ciple remains the same. People must trust that God will accomplish what He has promised.

## 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 Go d's promise to give Abram the Promised Land. The structure of this section is very similar to Ge nesis 15:1- 6. God reaffirmeda promise, this time the land. Next

Genesis 13:16 commu­ nicates that Abram's offs pring will be like the dust of the earth.

**God Reveals Himself**

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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 descendant s would end ure. 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).

God is often accomplish­ ing multiple purposes in His dealings with hu­ manity. 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 influ­ ence 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.

**ASK:** How might knowing some of the details about the possession of the Promised Land affect Abram's confidence? (Q9) *Thedetails most likely helped Abram gain confidence tha t God would eventually work to give the Promised Land to his descendanst. 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 communicat­ ed 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 cove­ nant 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-mak­ ing 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).

* + 1. **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.

### 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 pl an, what mu st Sarai have though t about God's plan? (Ql O) *She thought God's actions, restraining her from bearing children, and His plan for her to have an heir were contradictory.Shedoubt­ ed 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 s he couldget 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? (011) *Perhaps conflict, pain, and sin.*

Hagar 's retreat into the wilderness occasioned anotherdemonstration of God's omniscience. The Angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar (16:7). In languageremi­ niscent of the previous communications to Abram, Hagar learned from the Ange l of the Lord that her descendants would be innumerab le. Hagar also learned that her son, to be named Ishmae l, mean ing *God hears,* would be an individualistic, violentman bent on conflict. This prophecycommunicated that the promise for Abram to be a blessing to all people would not be fulfilled through Ishmael; an­ other 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? (012) *As theGod Who sees.*

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

Hagar's identification of God as the God Who sees is a Hebrew pun unrecogniz­ able in English. The Hebrew term can be translated both as the *God whosees me,* which matcheswhat happened, and as the *God I see,* which matches Hagar's follow­ ing explanation. Both communicate important truths. The first understanding com­ municatesthat God sees and cares for people. God met withHagar and cared for her whenshe was at a low point. God's knowledgeis 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 nega tiveexample, a proper understanding of belief and trust.

Truly trusting God mea ns being completelydependent 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 consultingGod. Her actions brought disrup­ tive anddestructive results.

### God's knowledge communicated to Abram (17)

Thirteen years after the account of Ha gar 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? (013) *Abram's age suggests he was too old to have an heir. It would takea miracle. When God introduced Himself as the Almighty God, He was pointing out that He hadthepower to provide an heir for Abram.*

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

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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)? (Ql 3) *The need to walk blamelessly beforeGod.*

The New Covenant com­ municated 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 uncondi­ tional covenants forever.

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 over­

whelmingly 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 na­ tions. 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 connec­ tion with him (17:4-8).

God established circumcision as the sign of covenant between God, Abra­ ham, 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 de­ scendants would not realize the benefits of the covenant. Just as God had commu­ nicated 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 prom- ised son.

**READ:** Genesis 17:15- 18. **ASK:** What limits did Abraham put on God? (Ql 4) *The natural laws ofchild-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 hisdescendants 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'sbirth a *set* time? (Ql 5) *He was communicatingthat He had an appointed time for Isaac's birth all along. Theevents 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 res ponded by immediately obeying God; he circum­ cised all the men of his household regardlessof their age, social standin g, and ethnicity (17:23- 27). God's omniscience and omnipotence were becomingrea l 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?

(Ql 6)

**ASK:** Are you able to trust God in the night when your troubles seem espe­ cially overwhelming? Explain. (Ql 7)

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

**ASK:** How might the stars he lp you *see* that God is omniscient and omnipo­ tent? (Ql 8)

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

**God Reveals Himself**

**Lessons aboutGod I Assurancesabout God**

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## 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 namefor the *insurance plan* based on today's lesson. Have them write a sloganon the back of the card that captures the esse nce of God's omniscienceand omnipotence. Encourage your learners to keep the card as a reminder that God is worthy of their trust because He is omniscient and omnipotent.

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### Summary and Memory Verse

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

Encourage lea rners to memorize Genesis the verse in class next week.

15:1.

Give them an opportunity to say