

Bible Study Guide: Genesis 13–18

Overview

Genesis 13–18 records the continued development of God’s covenant with Abram. As Abram faces conflict, warfare, delayed promises, and impossible circumstances, God repeatedly assures him that His promises will be fulfilled. These chapters contrast trusting God’s word with relying on appearances, human effort, or personal understanding.

Opening Question

Why is it sometimes difficult to wait for God’s promises rather than trying to accomplish His purposes through our own efforts?

Genesis 13

After returning from Egypt, Abram resumed worship at the altar he had first built between Bethel and Ai. Both he and Lot had become exceedingly wealthy, and the land could no longer sustain their combined flocks and herds. When conflict arose between their herdsmen, Abram sought peace by generously allowing Lot to choose whichever portion of the land he desired. Lot chose the fertile Jordan Valley because it appeared well-watered and prosperous, pitching his tents near the wicked city of Sodom. After Lot departed, the Lord reaffirmed His covenant with Abram, promising that all the land would belong to his descendants and that his offspring would become as numerous as the dust of the earth. Abram responded in faith by settling near Hebron and building another altar to worship the Lord.

Read Aloud: Genesis 13:14–18

Discussion Questions

1. Abram chose peace over insisting on his rights. What does his response teach us about trusting God instead of fighting for what we think we deserve?
2. Lot based his decision on what looked attractive, while Abram trusted God's promise. What are some ways people are tempted to make decisions by sight rather than by faith?
3. Why do you think God repeated His promises to Abram after Lot had separated from him?
4. How does Abram's generosity demonstrate confidence in God's ability to provide for him?

Genesis 14

After Lot settled near Sodom, a coalition of eastern kings invaded the region, defeated the kings of the Jordan Valley, and carried away many captives, including Lot and his household. When Abram learned

that his nephew had been taken, he gathered 318 trained men from his household, pursued the invading armies, and rescued Lot along with the other captives and their possessions.

Following the victory, Abram was met by two very different kings. The king of Sodom offered Abram the recovered possessions as a reward. In contrast, Melchizedek, the king of Salem and priest of God Most High, brought out bread and wine, blessed Abram, and declared that God alone had given him the victory. Abram responded by giving Melchizedek a tenth of everything, acknowledging that all he possessed ultimately belonged to the Lord.

This is the first explicit mention of the tithe in Scripture. Unlike the tithe that would later be commanded under the Law of Moses, Abram's gift was given voluntarily as an act of worship and gratitude. Earlier in Genesis, Abel demonstrated the principle of bringing the first and best of his flock to the Lord. Here, God reveals the next stage in biblical giving as Abram entrusts a tenth of his increase to God's priest-king. The pattern of giving continues to unfold as God's redemptive plan progresses.

Read Aloud: Genesis 14:18–24

Discussion Questions

1. What contrast do you see between Melchizedek and the king of Sodom?
2. Why was it significant that Abram gave a tenth of his possessions before the tithe was ever commanded?
3. What does Abram's refusal of the king of Sodom's reward reveal about where he placed his trust?
4. How can gratitude for God's provision shape the way we use the resources He has entrusted to us?

Genesis 15

Although God had repeatedly promised Abram descendants and a land of inheritance, Abram remained childless. Rather than rebuking him for his questions, the Lord graciously invited Abram to express his concerns. God assured him that his heir would not come through his servant, but through a son of his own. Then the Lord brought Abram outside and told him to count the stars if he was able, declaring that his descendants would be just as numerous.

Genesis 15 contains one of the most significant statements in the Old Testament: **"Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness."** Abram was declared righteous not because of his works, but because he trusted God's promise. This verse becomes foundational for the New Testament's teaching that salvation has always been by grace through faith.

The Lord then formally confirmed His covenant with Abram through an ancient covenant ceremony. Normally, both parties would walk between the divided animals, signifying that each accepted the covenant's obligations. Instead, after causing Abram to fall into a deep sleep, God alone passed between

the pieces in the form of a smoking oven and a flaming torch. God also revealed that Abram's descendants would spend four hundred years in a foreign land before returning to inherit Canaan.

Read Aloud: Genesis 15:1–6. Genesis 15:17–21

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think God welcomed Abram's honest questions instead of condemning his doubts?
2. What does Abram's faith teach us about the relationship between God's promises and our circumstances?
3. Why is it significant that God alone passed between the pieces of the covenant?
4. How does knowing that God always keeps His promises strengthen our faith during seasons of waiting?

Genesis 16

Years passed, yet God's promise of a son remained unfulfilled. Instead of continuing to wait upon the Lord, Sarai proposed that Abram have a child through her Egyptian servant, Hagar. This arrangement reflected a common custom in the ancient Near East, but it was never God's design for marriage or the fulfillment of His covenant. Abram agreed, and Hagar conceived.

Rather than solving the problem, their decision created conflict within the household. Hagar began to despise Sarai, and Sarai responded harshly toward her. After fleeing into the wilderness, Hagar was met by the Angel of the Lord, who instructed her to return and submit to Sarai. The Lord also promised that her son, Ishmael, would become the father of a great nation. Overwhelmed by God's compassion, Hagar called Him **El Roi**, meaning, "the God who sees me," recognizing that the Lord had seen her affliction and cared for her in her distress.

Read Aloud: Genesis 16:7–13

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Abram and Sarai were tempted to take God's promise into their own hands?
2. What does this chapter teach about the consequences of relying upon human wisdom instead of waiting for God's timing?
3. Why is Hagar's description of God as "**the God who sees me**" so significant?
4. How does God's treatment of Hagar demonstrate both His compassion and His faithfulness, even in the midst of human failure?

Genesis 17

Thirteen years after the birth of Ishmael, the Lord again appeared to Abram and reaffirmed His covenant. God identified Himself as **God Almighty (El Shaddai)** and called Abram to walk before Him in faithful obedience. The covenant promises remained unchanged, but God now expanded them by declaring that Abram would become the father of many nations.

As a sign of this covenant, God instituted circumcision. Every male among Abram's descendants was to receive this physical sign, setting apart God's covenant people from the surrounding nations. Circumcision did not establish the covenant; rather, it served as an outward reminder of the relationship God had already established by His grace.

God also changed Abram's name to **Abraham**, meaning "father of a multitude," and Sarai's name to **Sarah**, affirming that she would be the mother of the promised son. Although Abraham laughed at the thought of having a son in his old age, God made it clear that His covenant would be established through Isaac, the son who would be born to Sarah. While God promised to bless Ishmael and make him into a great nation, Isaac alone would be the child through whom the covenant promises would continue.

Read Aloud: Genesis 17:1–8. Genesis 17:15–19

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think God changed Abram's and Sarai's names at this point in the covenant?
2. Why is it significant that God's covenant would continue through Isaac rather than Ishmael?
3. How does this chapter encourage us to trust God's promises even when they seem humanly impossible?

Genesis 18

The Lord appeared to Abraham in the form of three visitors while he was sitting at the entrance of his tent. Abraham immediately extended generous hospitality, providing water, rest, and a carefully prepared meal. During the visit, the Lord reaffirmed that Sarah would bear a son within the year. Sarah laughed to herself because both she and Abraham were well beyond childbearing years. The Lord responded with a question that becomes one of the defining truths of Scripture: **"Is anything too difficult for the LORD?"** What seemed impossible from a human perspective was entirely possible for God.

As the visitors departed toward Sodom, the Lord revealed His intention to judge the city because of its great wickedness. Rather than remaining silent, Abraham humbly interceded for the righteous who might be living there. Beginning with fifty and continuing down to ten, Abraham appealed to God's justice and mercy. His confidence rested in the character of God, asking, **"Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?"**

Genesis 18 presents Abraham growing in both faith and fellowship with God. He believes God's seemingly impossible promise, welcomes the Lord with joyful hospitality, and intercedes on behalf of

others. His prayer demonstrates that genuine faith not only trusts God's promises but also confidently approaches Him, knowing that He is both perfectly just and abundantly merciful.

Read Aloud: Genesis 18:9–15. Genesis 18:22–33

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think the Lord repeated His promise of Isaac's birth after so many years of waiting?
2. What does God's question, "**Is anything too difficult for the LORD?**", teach us about His power and faithfulness?
3. What does Abraham's intercession for Sodom reveal about his relationship with God?
4. How can Abraham's example encourage us to pray with both humility and confidence for others?

Seeing the Gospel

Genesis 13–18 advances God's plan of redemption by developing the covenant He made with Abraham, but it also introduces a remarkable figure who points forward to Christ. **Melchizedek**, the king of Salem and priest of God Most High, appears without genealogy or recorded beginning or end, blessing Abraham and receiving his tithe. Centuries later, David would declare that the coming Messiah would be "**a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek**" (Psalm 110:4), and the book of Hebrews identifies Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of that promise (Hebrews 5–7). Whether Melchizedek was a historical king specially appointed by God or a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ, his unique role as both **king and priest** unmistakably foreshadows the ministry of Jesus.

These chapters also continue developing God's covenant with Abraham. Despite Abraham's imperfect faith and Sarah's attempts to accomplish God's promises through human effort, God remains faithful to His word. His covenant rests upon His own faithfulness rather than human performance.

The New Testament reveals that God's promise to Abraham ultimately finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Through Him, the promised blessing extends to all nations, and everyone who places their faith in Christ becomes an heir of the promises first given to Abraham (Galatians 3:8, 16, 29).