

# ***The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant Children of the Promise***

Lesson #5 for May 1, 2021

Scriptures: Genesis 11:4; 12:2; 15:1-3; Isaiah 25:8; 1 Corinthians 2:9; Revelation 22:1-5; 1 Peter 2:9.

1. How many covenant promises did God make to Abram/Abraham (referred to as Abraham or Abram/Abraham in this handout except when discussing the change of his name as recorded in Genesis 17 or in quotations using *Abram*)? In what way was the Lord a “shield” to Abraham? How were “all families in the earth” to be blessed through Abraham? What was the greatest of all covenant promises?
2. In Genesis 14 we read about Abraham, with the help of some others, defeating a large army, attacking them, and destroying them. This caused Abraham to worry that he would become a target.

Abraham gladly returned to his tents and his flocks, but his mind was disturbed by harassing thoughts. He had been a man of peace, so far as possible shunning enmity and strife; and with horror he recalled the scene of carnage he had witnessed. **But the nations whose forces he had defeated would doubtless renew the invasion of Canaan, and make him the special object of their vengeance. Becoming thus involved in national quarrels, the peaceful quiet of his life would be broken. Furthermore, he had not entered upon the possession of Canaan, nor could he now hope for an heir, to whom the promise might be fulfilled.**—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*\* 136.2.† [Would one dare to attack Abraham?]<sup>†</sup>

**Genesis 15:1-3:** <sup>1</sup> After this, Abram had a vision and heard the LORD say to him, “Do not be afraid, Abram. **I will shield you** from danger and give you a great reward.”

<sup>2</sup> But Abram answered, “Sovereign LORD, what good will your reward do me, since I have no children? My only heir is Eliezer of Damascus. <sup>3</sup>You have given me no children, and one of my slaves will inherit my property.”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation*\* (2nd ed., Genesis 15:1–3). New York: American Bible Society.†

3. Notice in this passage that God said to Abraham, “I [the God of the Universe] will shield you.”<sup>†</sup> What are the implications of having God personally as your shield? There are many other references designating God’s shield found in Scripture such as Deuteronomy 33:29; Psalm 18:30; Psalm 84:11; 144:2. But, these are directed in the third person in respect to the nation of Israel. In Abraham’s case, the promise was personal and individual.
4. How do you suppose Abraham understood that promise from God? Was it primarily intended to be physical protection? Abraham had become almost a small nation of his own. His household was enormous! Did this promise include them? To protect his sheep, he employed 318 fighting men, not counting his many shepherds. It was these fighting men that he took with him to conquer the enemies who had captured Lot and his family.

God called Abraham to be a teacher of His word, He chose him to be the father of a great nation, because He saw that Abraham would instruct his children and his household in the principles of God’s law. **And that which gave power to Abraham’s teaching was the influence of his own life. His great household consisted of more than a thousand souls, many of them**

**heads of families, and not a few but newly converted from heathenism. Such a household required a firm hand at the helm. No weak, vacillating methods would suffice.** Of Abraham God said, “I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him.” Genesis 18:19. **Yet his authority was exercised with such wisdom and tenderness that hearts were won.** The testimony of the divine Watcher is, “They shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment.” Genesis 18:19. And Abraham’s influence extended beyond his own household. Wherever he pitched his tent, he set up beside it the altar for sacrifice and worship. When the tent was removed, the altar remained; and many a roving Canaanite, whose knowledge of God had been gained from the life of Abraham His servant, tarried at that altar to offer sacrifice to Jehovah.—Ellen G. White, *Education\** 187.2.<sup>†</sup> Compare *Patriarchs and Prophets* 141.1.

5. How did the other people regard Abraham? As we consider this wonderful promise made to him, do we have any promises of a similar nature addressed to us as Christians?

**1 Corinthians 10:13:** Every test that you have experienced is the kind that normally comes to people. But God keeps his promise, and **he will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm; at the time you are put to the test, he will give you the strength to endure it, and so provide you with a way out.**—*Good News Bible.*<sup>\*†</sup>

6. Read Genesis 28:14. That covenant promise to Abraham was repeated to Jacob as he fled from his brother.

**Genesis 28:14:** [God said:] “They will be as numerous as the specks of dust on the earth. They will extend their territory in all directions, and **through you and your descendants I will bless all the nations.**”—*Good News Bible.*<sup>\*†</sup>

7. And we can all be a part of Abraham’s “family.”

**Galatians 3:29:** **If you belong to Christ, then you are the descendants of Abraham and will receive what God has promised.**—*Good News Bible.*<sup>\*†</sup>

8. There is the possibility that all families on this earth could be blessed. How many does that include? Billions! If it were not true that this promise to Abraham and fulfilled in Christ includes all that we receive through the life and death of Christ, of what use would it be? Humanly, it might be nice to be the father of a great nation; but, how does that compare to being the ancestor of the Savior of the world? Or, inheriting eternal life with God?
9. After the flood, God gave the promise associated with the rainbow. But, of what use would that be if there was no hope of eternal life? **There was no reason for Christ to have come the first time if He is not planning to come back!** Surely, we all recognize that Jesus is our only hope of salvation! What could anyone want more than the promise of eternal life in a place where there is no pain, no evil, no suffering, and where we can enjoy eternal fellowship with the God who is our Father and the God of the universe?
10. Can we be sure that those promises to Abraham include us?

**Galatians 3:8-9,27-29:** <sup>8</sup>The scripture predicted that God would put the Gentiles right with himself through faith. And so **the scripture announced the Good News to Abraham: “Through you God will bless the whole human race.”**

<sup>9</sup>Abraham believed and was blessed; so all who believe are blessed as he was....

<sup>27</sup> You were baptized into union with Christ, and now you are clothed, so to

speak, with the life of Christ himself. <sup>28</sup>**So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free people, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus.** <sup>29</sup>If you belong to Christ, then you are the descendants of Abraham and will receive what God has promised.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup> [These words were written by a former Pharisee of the Pharisees! Do you get the idea that his ideas had changed?]<sup>‡</sup>

11. Has God placed within our hearts and minds an earnest longing to return to that Edenic environment? What else did God promise to Abraham that might impact us?

“To enjoy true happiness we must travel into a very far country, and even out of ourselves.”—Thomas Browne.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* for Tuesday, April 27].<sup>‡</sup>

12. The greatest happiness of all comes to those who are in full compliance with God’s plans for their lives. And even if one should die, the promise still holds. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18; Revelation 3:12)

13. Augustine, (died A.D. 430) one of the first Christian apologists, had some interesting words to say about the human condition.

“This life of ours—if a life so full of such great ills can properly be called a life—bears witness to the fact that, from its very start, the race of mortal men has been a race condemned. Think, first, of the dreadful abyss of ignorance from which all error flows and so engulfs the sons of Adam in a darksome pool that no one can escape without the toll of toils and tears and fears. Then, take our very love for all those things that prove so vain and poisonous and breed so many heartaches, troubles, griefs, and fears; such insane joys in discord, strife, and wars; such fraud and theft and robbery; such perfidy and pride, envy and ambition, homicide and murder, cruelty and savagery, lawlessness and lust; all the shameless passions of the impure—fornication and adultery, incest and unnatural sins, rape and countless other uncleannesses too nasty to be mentioned; the sins against religion—sacrilege and heresy, blasphemy and perjury; the iniquities against our neighbors—calumnies and cheating, lies and false witness, violence to persons and property; the injustices of the courts and the innumerable other miseries and maladies that fill the world, yet escape attention.”—Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1958), p. 519.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 60].<sup>‡§</sup>

14. Do you think those words could apply to some of the places in which we live today? In what kind of environment did Augustine live 1500 years ago?

15. Are there times in your daily existence when you have to look up and think of God’s promises in order to make it through the day? Look at these promises from God.

**Isaiah 25:8: The Sovereign LORD will destroy death for ever! He will wipe away the tears from everyone’s eyes** and take away the disgrace his people have suffered throughout the world. The LORD himself has spoken!—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

**1 Corinthians 2:9:** However, as the scripture says:

“What no one ever saw or heard,  
what no one ever thought could happen,  
is the very thing God prepared for those who love him.”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup>

**Revelation 22:1-5:** <sup>1</sup>The angel also showed me the river of the water of life, sparkling like crystal, and coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup>and flowing down the middle of the city's street. On each side of the river was the tree of life, which bears fruit twelve times a year, once each month; and its leaves are for the healing of the nations. <sup>3</sup>Nothing that is under God's curse will be found in the city. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will worship him. <sup>4</sup>**They will see his face, and his name will be written on their foreheads.** <sup>5</sup>There shall be no more night, and they will not need lamps or sunlight, because the Lord God will be their light, and they will rule as kings for ever and ever.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

16. If God is the light, how will we know when days start? Or, stop? This earth will still rotate!
17. Imagine Abraham's thoughts racing as he, nearly 100 years old and married to a woman long past childbearing age, was told by God Himself that he would become "the father of a great and mighty nation."
18. When were those promises to Abraham fulfilled? And why would God want to make a great nation out of Abraham's seed? Was there ever a time when Abraham's descendants became great, wonderful witnesses to the world? What was God's plan?

**Exodus 19:5-6:** <sup>5</sup> "Now, if you will obey me [the LORD] and keep my covenant, you will be my own people. The whole earth is mine, but you will be my chosen people, <sup>6</sup>a people dedicated to me alone, and you will serve me as priests."—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

**Isaiah 60:1-3:** <sup>1</sup> Arise, Jerusalem, and shine like the sun;

The glory of the LORD is shining on you!

<sup>2</sup> Other nations will be covered by darkness,

But on you the light of the LORD will shine;

The brightness of his presence will be with you.

<sup>3</sup> Nations will be drawn to your light,

And kings to the dawning of your new day.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup>

**Deuteronomy 4:6-8:** <sup>6</sup> "Obey them faithfully, and **this will show the people of other nations how wise you are. When they hear of all these laws, they will say, 'What wisdom and understanding this great nation has!'**

<sup>7</sup> "No other nation, no matter how great, has a god who is so near when they need him as the LORD our God is to us. **He answers us whenever we call for help.** <sup>8</sup>**No other nation, no matter how great, has laws so just as those that I have taught you today.**"—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

19. **It was clearly God's plan for Abraham's descendants to be witnesses to the entire world. Is that why He gave them a home at the crossroads of the ancient world?**

**Isaiah 56:7:** "I will bring you to Zion, my sacred hill, give you joy in my house of prayer, and accept the sacrifices you offer on my altar. My Temple will be called a house of prayer **for the people of all nations.**"—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

The children of Israel were to occupy all the territory which God appointed them. Those nations that rejected the worship and service of the true God were to be **dispossessed**. But **it was God's purpose that by the revelation of His character through Israel men should be drawn unto Him.** To all the

world the gospel invitation was to be given. **Through the teaching of the sacrificial service Christ was to be uplifted before the nations, and all who would look unto Him should live.**—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*\* 290.1.† [Contrast Exodus 23:20-33 with Deuteronomy 20:16-18.]‡

20. Since Abraham and his descendants did not accomplish all that God wanted them to do, was that task passed on to us?

**1 Peter 2:9:** But you are the chosen race, the King's priests, the holy nation, God's own people, chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his own marvellous light.—*Good News Bible*.\*

21. What does it mean to *make someone's name great*? (Genesis 12:2) Why did God make that promise to Abraham?

**Romans 4:1-5:** <sup>1</sup> What shall we say, then, of Abraham, the father of our race? What was his experience? <sup>2</sup>If he was put right with God by the things he did, he would have something to boast about—but not in God's sight. <sup>3</sup>The scripture says, "**Abraham believed God, and because of his faith God accepted him as righteous.**" <sup>4</sup>Those who work are paid wages, but they are not regarded as a gift; they are something that has been earned. <sup>5</sup>But those who depend on faith, not on deeds, and who believe in the God who declares the guilty to be innocent, it is this faith that God takes into account in order to put them right with himself.—*Good News Bible*.\*†

**James 2:21-24:** <sup>21</sup>How was our ancestor Abraham put right with God? It was through his actions, when he offered his son Isaac on the altar. <sup>22</sup>Can't you see? **His faith and his actions worked together; his faith was made perfect through his actions.** <sup>23</sup>And the scripture came true that said, "Abraham believed God, and because of his faith God accepted him as righteous." And so **Abraham was called God's friend.** <sup>24</sup>You see, then, that **it is by people's actions that they are put right with God, and not by their faith alone.**—*Good News Bible*.\*†

**2 Chronicles 20:7:** [King Jehoshaphat prayed aloud:] "You are our God. When your people Israel moved into this land, you drove out the people who were living here and gave the land to the descendants of **Abraham, your friend**, to be theirs for ever."—*Good News Bible*.\*††

22. What kind of people are considered to be great in our day? How would you compare what you know about Abraham to what you know about modern-day actors, politicians, artists, and the wealthy?

23. Contrast the thoughts of the builders of the Tower of Babel with those promises given to Abraham.

**Genesis 11:4:** They said, "Now let's build a city with a tower that reaches the sky, so that we can make a name for ourselves and not be scattered all over the earth."—*Good News Bible*.\*

**Genesis 12:2:** [The LORD said to Abraham:] "I will give you many descendants, and they will become a great nation. I will bless you and make your name famous, so that you will be a blessing."—*Good News Bible*.\*‡

24. But, a much wider audience is involved than what might immediately be apparent to us.

However much the plan of salvation rests only upon the work of Christ in our behalf, we—as recipients of God's grace—are, nevertheless, still involved. We

have a role to play; our free choice comes into prominence. **The drama of the ages, the battle between Christ and Satan, is still being played out in and through us. Both humanity and angels are watching what is happening with us in the conflict (1 Cor. 4:9)** [as quoted just below]. Thus, who we are, what we say, what we do, far from having no importance beyond our own immediate sphere, has implications that can, in a sense, **reverberate across the universe**. By our words, our actions, even our attitudes, we can help bring glory to the Lord, who has done so much for us, or we can bring shame upon Him and His name. Thus, when the Lord said to Abraham that He would make his name great, He surely was not talking about it in the same way the world talks about someone as having a great name. **What makes a name great in the eyes of God is character, faith, obedience, humility, and love for others, traits that might often be respected in the world but are not usually the factors the world would deem as making someone's name great.**—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Thursday, April 29.<sup>†§</sup>

**1 Corinthians 4:9: For it seems to me that God has given the very last place to us apostles, like people condemned to die in public as a spectacle for the whole world of angels and of humanity.**—Good News Bible.\*<sup>†</sup>

25. And what about that final terrible test that was brought upon Abraham when God instructed him to go to a distant place and sacrifice his miracle son.

It was no light test that was thus brought upon Abraham, no small sacrifice that was required of him.... But he did not hesitate to obey the call. He had no question to ask concerning the land of promise.... God has spoken, and His servant must obey; **the happiest place on earth for him was the place where God would have him to be.**—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets\** 126.3.<sup>†</sup>

26. There was a lot more involved in that trial than most imagine. (See Colossians 1:19-20.)

The sacrifice required of Abraham was not alone for his own good, nor solely for the benefit of succeeding generations; but **it was also for the instruction of the sinless intelligences of heaven and of other worlds**. The field of the controversy between Christ and Satan—the field on which the plan of redemption is wrought out—is the lesson book of the universe. Because Abraham had [155] shown a lack of faith in God's promises, **Satan had accused him before the angels and before God of having failed to comply with the conditions of the covenant, and as unworthy of its blessings**. God desired to prove the loyalty of His servant before all heaven, to demonstrate that nothing less than perfect obedience can be accepted, and to open more fully before them the plan of salvation.

**Heavenly beings were witnesses of the scene as the faith of Abraham and the submission of Isaac were tested. The trial was far more severe than that which had been brought upon Adam.** Compliance with the prohibition laid upon our first parents involved no suffering, but the command to Abraham demanded the most agonizing sacrifice. All heaven beheld with wonder and admiration Abraham's unfaltering obedience. All heaven applauded his fidelity. **Satan's accusations were shown to be false.** God declared to His servant, "Now I know that thou fearest God [notwithstanding Satan's charges], seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from

Me.” God’s covenant, confirmed to Abraham by an oath before the intelligences of other worlds, testified that obedience will be rewarded.

It had been difficult even for the angels to grasp the mystery of redemption—to comprehend that the Commander of heaven, the Son of God, must die for guilty man. When the command was given to Abraham to offer up his son, the interest of all heavenly beings was enlisted. With intense earnestness they watched each step in the fulfillment of this command. When to Isaac’s question, “Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham made answer, “God will provide Himself a lamb;” and when the father’s hand was stayed as he was about to slay his son, and the ram which God had provided was offered in the place of **Isaac—then light was shed upon the mystery of redemption, and even the angels understood more clearly the wonderful provision that God had made for man’s salvation.** 1 Peter 1:12.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*\* 154.3-155.2.<sup>†‡</sup> [Note that the brackets and the words in brackets in the paragraph above, i.e. *notwithstanding Satan’s charges*, are in the original printed source and in the electronic source.]<sup>‡</sup>

27. Some of the conversations God had with Abraham after he entered Canaan could be summarized as follows:

When Abram entered Canaan, the Lord appeared to him and made it clear that he was to sojourn in the land that would be given to his descendants (*Gen. 12:7*). God repeated this promise several times (*see Gen. 13:14, 15, 17; Gen. 15:13, 16, 18; Gen. 17:8; Gen. 28:13, 15; Gen. 35:12*). Some four hundred years later, in fulfillment of the promise (*Gen. 15:13, 16*), the Lord announced to Moses that He would bring Israel out of Egypt into a land flowing with milk and honey (*Exod. 3:8, 17; Exod. 6:8*). God repeated the promise to Joshua (*Josh. 1:3*), and in David’s day it was largely, but not completely, fulfilled (*Gen. 15:18-21, 2 Sam. 8:1-14, 1 Kings 4:21, 1 Chron. 19:1-19*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* for Friday, April 30.<sup>§</sup>

28. Was there ever a time when Abraham’s descendants ruled from the Euphrates to Egypt?

**1 Kings 4:21: Solomon’s kingdom included all the nations from the River Euphrates to Philistia and the Egyptian border.** They paid him taxes and were subject to him all his life.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

29. It is very interesting to read what later inspired writers have said about Abraham.

**Hebrews 11:9-16:** <sup>9</sup>By faith he [Abraham] lived as a foreigner in the country that God had promised him. He lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who received the same promise from God. <sup>10</sup>For Abraham was waiting for the city which God has designed and built, the city with permanent foundations.

<sup>11</sup> It was faith that made Abraham able to become a father, even though he was too old and Sarah herself could not have children. **He trusted God to keep his promise.** <sup>12</sup>Though Abraham was practically dead, from this one man came as many descendants as there are stars in the sky, as many as the numberless grains of sand on the seashore.

<sup>13</sup> It was in faith that all these persons died. They did not receive the things God had promised, but from a long way off they saw them and welcomed them, and admitted openly that they were foreigners and refugees on earth.

<sup>14</sup>Those who say such things make it clear that they are looking for a country of their own. <sup>15</sup>They did not keep thinking about the country they had left; if

they had, they would have had the chance to return. <sup>16</sup>Instead, **it was a better country they longed for, the heavenly country.** And so God is not ashamed for them to call him their God, because he has prepared a city for them.—*Good News Bible.*<sup>\*†‡</sup>

30. What promises do we still enjoy at God's hands? How do they impact our living on a day-by-day basis?

**Matthew 5:5:** [Jesus said:] “Happy are those who are humble; they will receive what God has promised!”—*Good News Bible.*<sup>\*‡</sup>

**2 Corinthians 4:17-18:** <sup>17</sup>And this small and temporary trouble we suffer will bring us a tremendous and eternal glory, much greater than the trouble. <sup>18</sup>For we fix our attention, not on things that are seen, but on things that are unseen. What can be seen lasts only for a time, but what cannot be seen lasts for ever.—*Good News Bible.*<sup>\*</sup>

**Revelation 21:9-10:** <sup>9</sup> One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came to me and said, “Come, and I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.” <sup>10</sup>The Spirit took control of me, and the angel carried me to the top of a very high mountain. He showed me Jerusalem, the Holy City, coming down out of heaven from God.—*Good News Bible.*<sup>\*</sup>

**Revelation 22:17:** The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come!”—*Good News Bible.*<sup>\*</sup>

31. Do you consider God's covenants as timeless? Is God's promise given in connection with the rainbow still valid? And what about the promises given to Abraham and Moses?

32. How much is included in God's promise to be Abraham's shield?

“The ‘shield’ or protection spoken of here does not refer to physical protection in war or physical protection from misfortune. Rather, it refers to protection from the possibility that the covenant promise would not be fulfilled through Abraham and his future seed. . . . If we are Abraham's seed (and all who have the faith of Abraham are Abraham's seed), then we also have the assurance that God will be our shield.”—Gerhard M. Hasel and Michael G. Hasel, *The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant*, p. 44.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*<sup>\* 65.</sup>]<sup>‡§</sup>

33. Why do you think it was so hard for the people in Jesus's day to recognize that He had come to deliver them from their bondage to sin instead of just delivering them from the Romans?

34. What should we be doing as individuals and as a church to try to finish the gospel?

35. God's original covenant with Abram/Abraham seemed to suggest that He had Abraham's lineal descendants in mind. Later, we find in the New Testament that God's covenant promise to Abraham was to go to all who have faith, Jew and Gentile. Did God change His mind?

36. Are we prepared to take up the challenges presented in this lesson? Abraham was a wandering nomad; but, God, recognizing His commitments, often visited him in vision or even in person. Would God do that for us today?

© 2021, Kenneth Hart, MD, MA, MPH. Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution of all or of a portion of this material such as to a Bible study class is encouraged. <sup>\*</sup>Electronic version. <sup>†</sup>Bold type is added. <sup>‡</sup>Text in brackets is added. <sup>§</sup>Italic type is in the source. [Info@theox.org](mailto:Info@theox.org)

Last Modified: March 14, 2021

Z:\My Documents\WP\SSTG-Hart\The Covenant\SS-5-Covenant-2021\_05\_01-Fin+.wpd