

# BASIC BIBLE THEMES

## SESSION 1: COVENANT

### STUDENT

**Scripture Background:** Genesis 15:1-21; 28:15; Psalm 46:1; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Philippians 4:13, 19; Hebrews 13:6; James 1:5

#### 1. Engage Interest

Rate, from 1 to 5, your degree of confidence that the following promises will be kept. A rating of 1 means “almost no confidence,” while 5 is “complete confidence.”

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Your best friend promises to take you out to lunch next week.                                 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | A political candidate promises sweeping reforms in government.                                |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Your child promises to complete a chore you have assigned by the deadline you have specified. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Your boss promises you a raise or a promotion.  |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Your teenager promises to be in by curfew.  |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Your supervisor at work promises to put in a good word for you with the big boss.             |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | A local grocery chain promises lower prices than a competing store.                           |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Your neighbor promises to keep her children out of your flower beds.                          |

What factors determined the level of confidence you felt in these promises?

#### 2. Explore the Word

Genesis 15:1-21

- What was Abram’s fear? (vv. 2-3)
- Why do you think having a son as an heir was so important to Abram?
- Do people today feel the same way as Abram? Why?
- What promise did God make to Abram? (vv. 4-5)
- Why do you think Abram wanted some proof that God’s promise would come true? (v.8)
- What modern actions would be similar to the cutting in half of the animals to “seal” God’s covenant with Abram? (vv.9-18)
- Why does God initiate such covenants with people?

### 3. Examine Life

The following ideas are helpful for interpreting and applying scripture promises:

- Carefully read the context of the promise.
- Ask questions like these:
  - To whom was the promise first made?
  - How universal does this promise sound? Does it seem to include many people or only those to whom it was given?
  - Is the affirmation in this promise repeated in other parts of the Bible?
  - What circumstances affected the first recipients of the promise? How are these similar or different from our circumstances?
  - Do these particular circumstances in any way define the way we should interpret the promise or limit its application? How?
  - What cultural factors should we be aware of that might cause us to misinterpret and misapply a promise?
  - Are there conditions attached to the fulfillment of the promise? If so, what are they?
- Be aware that God does not fulfill all promises immediately.
- Apply the interpretive principles above to the following passages:
  - Genesis 28:15
  - Psalm 46:1
  - 1 Corinthians 10:13
  - Philippians 4:13
  - Philippians 4:19
  - Hebrews 13:6
  - James 1:5

### 4. Exercise Your Faith

- Identify the most exciting new insight.
- What statement did you find most encouraging spiritually?
- What principle do you want to put into practice immediately?

# LESSON SUMMARY

“A promise made is a debt unpaid,” a debt to be satisfied at any cost. In the Bible, we find that God takes His promises seriously, satisfying each one. Whether it was His promise to rescue His people from Egypt, to satisfy their physical needs, to protect them from danger, or to bring the Messiah, God always kept His word.

While there is much to be said about God the “promise keeper,” we ought to recognize the profound implications of the fact that God makes promises at all. Throughout Scripture, we find recurring themes that wrap themselves in and around the stories about God’s people: faithfulness, loving kindness, obedience, love, grace, fellowship, worship. Once we have grasped these key concepts, we have come a long way in understanding the heart of the Bible. And all of these important ideas are contained in one word: covenant.

Another word for covenant is “testament” and, in fact, the rest of the Old and New “Testaments” build on what takes place in Genesis 15. The covenant we read about in this passage is the same covenant that was renewed with Moses and the Israelites at Sinai. And it is a part of the same covenant He made centuries later by offering His only Son as a final sign and seal that God, more than anything else, wants to live in close relationship with His people.

Genesis 15 is one of the great passages of the Bible because it so clearly shows the loving, promise-making and promise-keeping character of God. The covenant made here was not a contract between equals. Based on His undeserving love for all of humanity, God chose to make a promise—that He himself guaranteed—with someone He had created. God made the covenant with faithful Abraham, and its benefits carry all the way down to our present day, for all who choose to enter into a relationship of love and obedience with the God of the universe.

When we promise our children something we know they have been longing for and

something we know we can deliver, are we not looking primarily for the delight that our promise will bring? Why do we want to delight them if not because we love them? At times, Christians struggle with feelings of loneliness and discouragement. Problems loom before us like mountains, and the deep darkness of an uncertain future hides our path. God seems so distant as our prayers go unanswered. At times like this, God’s promises remind us that He is willing to “pass between the pieces” for His people. He knows our struggles with delay and He lovingly provides, through His promises, a bench on which to rest while we wait.

While we are right to celebrate a promise-keeping God, we can also rejoice in a God who makes promises. His promises show that He is a God with an important plan, a plan that means salvation for all. He is a God who longs to cultivate faith in His people, knowing that we need faith to follow Him. A God who makes promises shows that He loves people enough to “pass between the pieces” for them.