

Q2 L04 - **An Everlasting Covenant** - 2021-04-24

Rod Thompson: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the Granite Bay Hilltop Church "Sabbath School Study Hour." I want to welcome you whether you're here in the sanctuary with us, whether you're watching online at home or across the country or around the world. We are continuing our study in "The Promise," and today's topic is "The Everlasting Covenant." That's study number 4, and Pastor Luccas Rodor is going to lead us in that, but before he comes out I want to point out our free offering for today.

It's called "The Name of God," and you can get that by going to 866-788-3966 and ask for free offer number 779. Again, that's 866-Study-More, or you can text the number "SH145" to number 40544. Again, that is "The Name of God." That's our free offering for today. I hope you'll take advantage of that, but before Pastor Rodor comes out why don't we have a word of prayer.

O loving Father, we want to thank You for the Sabbath. We want to thank You for the opportunity to open up Your Word and study, and, Lord, we want to connect with You. We want to learn, and we want to grow. And Lord, we are asking that You will work powerfully in our lives today. We pray that You would speak through Pastor Rodor, that You would show us, Lord, what You would have us do in these last days. And Lord, as we study the everlasting covenant, use it to draw us closer to You and may You be glorified through us. That's our desire, and that's our prayer, in Jesus's name, amen.

Luccas Rodor: Thank you, Pastor Rod. It's such a blessing to be here. Thank you for being with us. As Pastor Rod said, wherever you are in the world, we are praying here and hoping that you are blessed by today's study. We have so much to talk about, and this subject, friends, is one of the core contents of the Bible, of Scripture, and as we study this, I'm very sure that God will be blessing us. He will be guiding us. There's a lot to learn not only in today's lesson but in the study throughout the whole quarter. This subject is one that has to be understood. It is one of those cornerstone, foundational subjects. So, thank you so much for being with us, and thank you also for the local community, for spending this time with us.

The title of this lesson, of lesson 4, is "An Everlasting Covenant," and I love the title itself, because all the way from the title we understand that this isn't something just for a specific moment. This was not something designed just for one person or for one group of people. This is a broad subject. "The Everlasting Covenant." What does the word "everlasting" mean if not forever? Everlasting. Forever. The memory verse for this week's lesson comes from Genesis chapter 17, verse 7, and it says, "I," God, "will establish My covenant between Me and you," Abraham, "and your descendants after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you."

Friends, when it comes to the covenant, when it comes to the subject right here, we have to begin at the very beginning, and that's actually what we've been doing all the way here in the study of the first three lessons. We've been talking about what the covenant is, what are the terms of the covenant. On broad strokes we've seen what "covenant" means. It's a deal, right, between God and humanity, and so throughout the next few weeks, and starting last week, we're going to be analyzing what the covenant is for different people and in different moments throughout the Bible. So, really, that's the topic, that's the subject, here that we're going to be talking about today.

We're going to be talking about the covenant according to Abraham, the Abrahamic covenant. But before we do actually get into the meat, into the content, of what that means, we're going to talk about a little few things that really contextualize and really help us understand a little bit better what this whole covenant with Abraham was.

Friends, regarding humankind, one of the first lessons that we learn in Scripture, if not the first lesson, is that humans are created beings. We were created by God. We were created in His image. Truly, when you look at the first 11 chapters of the Bible, there are three basic lessons that, really, go out to the rest of Scripture and that we extract from these first 11 chapters. In truth, if you want to summarize the entire Bible, the entirety of Scripture, in three subjects, you could. You could do that. You could do that.

The first subject, the first great category, of Scripture is that God is a creator. God made everything. Everything that we see-- the heaven, the earth, the animals, all of creation-- comes from this omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent being that is a being of love and of power and of glory and of majesty. That's the first great lesson. So, we find creation, we find conflict, and the next and last great lesson--and this really-- this is interwoven throughout the rest of Scripture. We find covenant. Creation, conflict, and covenant.

God is a God of covenant. Not only did God create us, not only did He make us perfect, not only did a battle, a war, a conflict, enter our planet, but God reacted to that. God decided that He wanted to do something, that He wanted to provide a cure to that disease called sin, and that's where we find the covenant, the agreement. It's God reaching out, extending His hand, and saying, "Look, I want to fix this problem. I want to fix this mess." And so, that's what we find here in Scripture.

We find, really, in the first 3 chapters of the Bible-- in the first 11 chapters of the Bible-- in the first 3 you'll find the first great problem, which is a broken relationship with God, right? We find that sin-- it altered our relationship with God, and as a consequence of that, we also find that that sin altered our relationship with each other. So, the broken relationship with God appears in Genesis chapter 3, and a broken relationship with each other appears in its biggest form, all right? And you see the traces from this all the way from chapter 3 of Genesis, but you'll see it coming to a climax in chapter 11 with the Tower of Babel, where God, in a preemptive strike, He comes down. He confuses the languages, and people that at that time saw themselves as one, in that one coalition building that tower, then they become divided and separate, right? And so, this is all the backdrop and the context of what's going on in the beginning of this whole subject of covenant.

Now, so, the first lesson that we are going to talk about here is that humans are created beings. We were created by God uniquely, beautifully. However, the second lesson that we find regarding humanity is that this creature became enslaved to sin. We fell into the bondage of sin, and from that point onward our primary, natural orientation without God-- our primary nature without Him is to be against His will. That's one of the core elements of sin. Sin is this rebellion against God's will, against God's personality. Just like a ship whose rudder is tied in a wrong angle, that is the human nature without God. We're crooked. Sin is just this state of rebellion. It means to belong to the enemy's camp. It is the spiritual inclination that makes it impossible-- again, devoid of God's grace and His strength it makes it impossible for humans to see correctly, to feel correctly, to think correctly, to behave correctly, and to act correctly.

Sin became, in itself, a pandemic, and I really believe that now more than any point, at least in the last hundred years, we can truly relate to what it means to be caught in the midst of a pandemic. Sin became a pandemic affecting all of us, affecting every aspect of natural human nature. People became centralized in themselves. According to the Bible, human nature became debased, became blinded, futile, alienated, dark, and ignorant. It became a wicked enemy. It became deceitful, vain, puffed up. And friends, the prognosis of this disease is haunting. It's terrifying.

The Bible provides at least 12 words that define and describe sin as this disease, and none of them are synonyms. All of them describe a different aspect of what this disease is. Each of these terms emphasize a certain aspect of this malady that has infected and infected-- affected and infected all of us. Sin is a

leprosy that according to Isaiah 16 has disfigured God's beautiful creation, but what we find and what I find marvelous in the Bible, that in the middle of this chaos, in the middle of this conflict, God was never taken by surprise. God wasn't caught by surprise.

You can never catch God by surprise. You can never surprise Him. God is never overwhelmed. From the first day of the Fall all the way up to today, history is the story of divine intervention in rescuing the fallen race, in rescuing us, and in the final resolution of this whole problem created by sin. And so, friends, this divine plan initially involved the choice of one man, of one family, and of one nation: Abraham, the patriarchs, and Israel, who were the depositories of God's revelation, from whose very lineage the Messiah, the Anointed One, would come, the one who would ultimately fix the problem of sin, the Redeemer.

And so, what we find in the Bible-- and this is really the introduction to this week's lesson-- God called Abram. He planned to establish, through this man, a people to whom He could trust the revelation of Himself and of His plans, because God is a transparent God. I hope you know that by now. God is a transparent God. Friends, God could have created our world like this, in a snap of His fingers. God could have done that easily. Why didn't He? Why did He create the world in six days, resting on the seventh? Why did He decide to go that route? Because He wants us to understand His process.

God wants us to know Him. He wants us to relate to Him. He wants to be transparent, and so in the act of saving and redeeming us from this disease, from this horrible situation, God decided to be transparent and to teach us. And so, this way God entered into a covenant with Abram and with his posterity-- a covenant that emphasized the divine plan to save humanity from the very results of sin. And so, this week's lesson, "An Everlasting Covenant," emphasizes and focuses on the development of the promises of this covenant to Abraham, right? And that's what we're going to talk about.

So, when we enter the lesson and we start, you know, from the true content, the first day there with Sunday, the title here is "Yahweh and the Abrahamic Covenant." And the main verse that we're analyzing is Genesis 15, verse 7, that says, "And He said unto him, I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it." You know, usually the first piece of information that we have on any person is their name. That's how we introduce ourselves. You'll come up to someone, "Hi, my name is--" right? I lived in Brazil for a very long time. My family is from Brazil and, you know, in Brazil, at school, the school teaches the students English, right? It's the second language that they'll teach you in-- at school, and the first thing that every child learns all the way from when they start English classes is "my name is." "Hi, my name is--"

And so, that just reveals that names, for us, have this context of identity. When we tell people our name, we're just telling them, you know, how they can address us, who we are. In Western culture, names are sort of a cultural etiquette, right? You'll be polite. You'll tell someone your name, and so they'll be able to address you in that way, and it's used to distinguish one person from another.

However, in the biblical times we find a completely different mentality. Names represent details that reveal personality, that reveal expectations, or part of the history of either the person receiving the name or what the expectations for their life is, or the history of the person that is giving the name. In the book--there's a very interesting book called "The Names of God." The author is a man called Ken Hemphill. He lists 19 names that are frequently used to describe God in the Old Testament.

Now, these names, they're more than designations. This is what's beautiful about God in Scripture. You'll find that in the Bible God is absolutely multi-chromatic, and what that means is that whichever way that you look and you see God, you'll see Him in a different way. I remember when my family and I, we went-- I was a lot younger. We went to the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History in Washington,

D.C, and I got to see the Hope Diamond. At the time, it was the largest diamond in the world. I don't know what it is now, but it's this big diamond. And they had many lights shone into that diamond, right? They were just shining in, and from whichever way that you looked, the prism made it seem as though-- you know, you looked in one angle and it was yellow. In another angle it was blue and purple and red and orange. It was beautiful.

God is the same way, and His names describe these different aspects of who He is. I'll give you an example of this. In the Bible, we find that Jesus is described as the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world. Jesus is described as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and He's also described as the Good Shepherd. So, which is it? Is He the Lion, is He the Lamb, or is He the Shepherd? He's all three of those, and so much more, so you see that in Scripture, God is multi-chromatic. You can see Him in so many different ways, and these names are a description of God's personality. God's names in the Bible are sermons about who He is. They're messages about who He is. The names of God are, in fact, complete sermons about His personality.

Now, during these biblical times, people in the Near East, they attached a great importance to the meaning of names. The Hebrews always thought that a name-- they always thought of a name as something special, something that indicated either the personal characteristics of the person being named or the person giving the name, the emotions of the one giving the name at the time. When God enters into this covenant with Abram, He introduces Himself as, "I am the Lord." He introduces Himself as Yahweh. "I am the Lord, the self-existent one." That's powerful. When translated to English, the word "LORD," we'll find it in the English versions printed all in capitals. When you see that in the Bible-- all in capital letters, know that in the manuscript, in Hebrew, the word appearing there is "Yahweh." It's God's personal name.

Another very common name for God is Elohim, and that's normally translated in English as "God," and this is more of a generic name for God in contrast to the personal name Yahweh. The meaning of Yahweh-- and this is the holy tetragram as they call it in-- called the sacred, like, YHWH, and it usually is understood as "the self-existent one." As it appears here in this verse, we understand it as the one who brought Abraham out of Ur. That's verse 7, and it refers back to the beginning of God's covenant with Abraham. It's the beginning of God's relationship with Abraham in Genesis chapter 12, verse 1 through 3.

What we find is that God, He kind of segments His covenant with Abraham throughout different chapters, right? So, you have chapter 12. You have the beginning of that covenant. Chapter 15, you'll find the continuation, the middle part. And then, in chapter 17 you'll find another part of this, and so God is truly trying to help Abraham understand what His plan is, because look. It's really easy-- actually, let me say it this way. Hindsight is always 20/20, right? That's what we say. So, as we look at Scripture through the lens of time, it's easier for us to understand, but for Abraham living in the moment, it was hard.

Sometimes understanding God's plans for us in the moment, it's difficult. It's a matter of faith, of sometimes even blind trust. Later on, when we see the development of the story, then we understand a little bit better. I'm sure that anyone here can relate to that reality, but in this case the meaning of Yahweh as the one who brought Abraham out of Ur, it refers back to God's relationship with Abraham. And so, Genesis 15, verse 7, it literally means, "I am Yahweh, the one who brought you out of," right?

The lesson tells us here-- and this is on Sunday's lesson-- there's a few sentences here that are extremely interesting, and they say that the name "Yahweh," though appearing 6,828 times in the Old Testament, is somewhat shrouded in mystery. It seems to be a form of the verb "hayah," to be, in which case it would mean "the eternal one," the existent one, the self-existing one, the self-sufficient one, or the one

who lives eternally. And so, the divine attribute seems to be emphasized by the title, and those are of the self-existence and the faithfulness of God.

And continuing here in this paragraph, it says, "They point to the Lord as the living God, the source of life, in contrast with the gods of the heathen, which had no existence apart from the imagination, the imagination of their worshippers." And God Himself, He explains the meaning of Yahweh in Exodus 3:14, when God says, "I am, I am who I am." And so, this meaning expresses the reality of God's unconditional existence, while it also suggests His rule over the past, the present, and the future.

Friends, when we understand God's-- when we understand God's personal name as Yahweh, we are understanding God as the self-existent being. God is far removed from this reality of time and space that we-- as we know it, because God created time and space as we know it. And so, in that sense, God is the self-existing one. Here, God's call for Abraham to leave Ur, one of the oldest civilizations of the world, it's really interesting. When you really go down and look at the details of what the-- of what Scripture is presenting here and compare it to the history of what's happening, it's extremely interesting, because by calling Abraham, or Abram at this point, to leave Ur, God did not only fulfill His promise that he would be the father of many nations, but He also placed him in a location in which this nation would have the most impact and influence.

So, Canaan was this land bridge between many empires. Canaan was the natural geographical choice for the people of God. From Canaan, they would interact with the Egyptians. They would interact with various Canaanite nations such as Ammon and Moab and Edom. They would interact with the Mesopotamian kingdoms to the east, with the Assyrians to the north, and so here we see that God put them kind of in the middle of everything. They were in the middle of all the drama and the wars happening, and God just placed them there so that they could impact and influence these nations to a greater extent.

But what I find really interesting is that there is perhaps here an even deeper reason, a more personal reason as to why God called Abraham and his family to leave Ur at the end here of the 3rd millennium B.C. At the time, Abraham didn't know this, but he didn't know that this flourishing kingdom, this flourishing city of Ur would have a very short-lived existence. Ur's third period came to an end in around 2004 or 2003 B.C., when the city was completely destroyed by the Elamites. It appears that not only did God want to establish a great nation through the seed of Abraham, but He also personally sought to bring him out of a city that was going to be destroyed very shortly. There's no way that that-- that the family would flourish there, because the city would be destroyed, and that's other than being a very heathen-- a very vile city.

And here we find, friends-- and I found this resonance in the Bible. So beautiful, because right here we find an echo of the call that is found in Revelation to come out of Babylon, the condemned city. Here, we find God calling Abraham to come out of Ur, to follow His will, to hear His call, and we find-- in a similar fashion we find the same call in Revelation, when God calls His people to come out of Babylon, the condemned city. Ur, the city where Abraham was ordered to leave, which is-- and that you'll find that in Genesis chapter 12, verse 1. It was located in what would become a Babylon, whereby the testimony of Joshua chapter 24, verse 2, Abraham's very forefathers served other gods. And so, this idolatrous Babylonians, these idolatrous Babylonians, they worshiped fire. They worshiped the sun. They worshiped the moon and the stars, the forces of nature. They worshiped metals. From ancient times, the Babylonian pantheon of gods included an incredible quantity of divinities, many, many, many gods. Nimrod, for example, that we find in the Bible in Genesis chapter 10, verse 9, that exalted himself against God and to whom the project of the Tower of Babel is attributed to, he later on became known as Marduk, the main Babylonian divinity. Shin, the god of light, was the most important divinity in Ur,

the city of Abraham. His wife, Shin's wife called Ishtar, was the deification of sexual passion, the patron of sacral prostitution, and she was promoted in her temples by priestesses.

It's no surprise that God called Abraham to leave the city, as it is no surprise that God calls His people in the end time to leave Babylon. Throughout Scripture, friends, and culminating with the book of Revelation, Babylon is described as this force that opposes God, that opposes the God of heaven. In the context of the final collapse of spiritual Babylon in the very end, just as it was in the beginning when God called Abraham to leave Ur, God has called His followers to leave the spiritual Babylon.

Just as it was in the times of the exile that God asked His people to leave the literal Babylon, He's calling us today, because there are many of God's people that are found in spiritual Babylon, a great multitude. And God's call us to come out of her, lest they share in her sins and lest they receive of her plagues. Those that literally left Babylon at that time, at the time-- at the postexilic moment, they came out in the direction of the Promised Land and of Jerusalem.

And now, friends, what is at stake is our entrance to the New Jerusalem. Babylon will find herself before the divine court of the universe, accused of pride, of arrogance, of lust, of spiritual adultery, of deceitfulness, of violence, of corruption, of idolatry, of blasphemy, and a plethora of more of accusations.

And so, my dear friend, if you still find yourself in spiritual Babylon hear God's call. Just as He called Abraham, just as He called his people, hear God's call. Come out of her. Come out of her. The lesson continues with another beautiful segment of this study with Monday's lesson, and the title's "El Shaddai," one of God's names. This focus is on Genesis chapter 17, verse 1, where we read, "And Abram was-- Abram was ninety years old and nine. The Lord appeared to him, and said, "I am the Lord-- I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect."

Friends, when Abraham was 99 years old, Yahweh appeared to him and identified Him as-- Himself as the Almighty God. And this identification is found-- you'll find that this word, this term for God, this name for God, the Almighty God, El Shaddai, it appears mainly in two biblical books, in two books of the Bible. You'll find this in the book of Genesis, and you'll find this a lot in the book of Job. This designation, the Almighty God, it's translated into English from El Shaddai, from the Hebrew El Shaddai. El is a--it's a generic Semite name that is used for deity, and it's used in the majority of the Old Testament as a synonym for Yah, for Yahweh, right? For the personal name of God. And there are multitudes of examples of this.

If you were to look, you would find this in the book of Numbers, in Psalms, in Isaiah. You'll find this in multiple places, this definition of "el" signifying and meaning Yahweh. The exact origin, on the other hand of Shaddai, that's more of a mystery. It's kind of uncertain. However, the translation that-- for Almighty that we find in the King James Version, it's very appropriate. It appears to be the very best translation for Shaddai, for Almighty.

The emphasis, friends, here is placed on God's might in contrast to Abraham. God appears to Abraham, and He says, "Look, Abraham. I am the Lord God Almighty." Who is He talking to? He's talking to Abraham. Ninety-nine years old, an old man, still awaiting a promise, so it's very significant that God says, "I am the Almighty God," because at this point, Abraham needed an Almighty God. To fulfill that promise, Abraham needed an Almighty God. God had promised Abraham a son almost a quarter of a century before. It was already ridiculous then, a quarter of a century before 99, 74 years. I don't know a lot of people that at 74 are thinking of having a child. Maybe someone here does and there's nothing-- I won't be against that, but it's not something normal.

And so, that was already something strange, but 25 years later, at 99, Abraham needed an Almighty God. At this point, Sarah and Abraham, they still found themselves without a child, and so they decided to take matters into their own hands, and so Ishmael was born. Almost a decade and a half after that, when Abraham now at 99, God appears to him to reaffirm His covenant. He appears to Abraham. "Let's do it. Come on. Let's fulfill this promise. In one year, you will have a son."

But think about it. What did Abraham do? At this point, Abraham, he's, "O Lord, all right? Here's the son. Here's Ishmael." I can imagine God, in that context, going, "Wait, wait, wait, wait. That's not what we talked about here. This is not what we talked about." And here we find that Abraham-- Abraham here, he manifested-- he revealed a very human emotion, the emotion of wanting to be in control. Humans want to be in control, don't we?

We don't like being out of control, but when it comes to God, friends, God is not a tame God. God isn't this little lamb that we can just guide. God is a ferocious God, and here Abraham had to understand that this God would not be coerced, would not be controlled, would not be commanded. However much he wanted to be in control, God is always in control. God is always in command and at that crucial point is when God introduces Himself as the Almighty God, to whom nothing is impossible.

Friends, hard-pressed men and women wavering in faith-- just as did Abraham-- you know, I find it the greatest irony that Abraham is called the father of faith, but in many points of Abraham's life we find him failing with faith. This is one of those moments. He wavered. He questioned. He doubted. He tried to take matters into his own hands, and this just reassures me that the covenant God is truly an Almighty God, Who brings about the fulfillment of His covenant, of His promises in His own time without human assistance.

God doesn't need us, friends. God doesn't need us, but we have the privilege. Because of His love we have the privilege of participating in this journey, in the spiritual journey. What God has promised to do, He can perform at any time through whichever means of divine providence that He sees fit. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul, he quotes this moment here of Abraham and Sarah, and he says that they were already dead in their flesh, since he was about a hundred years old, 99, and Sarah was 90 years old. It's interesting that Sarah laughed when she heard this. And to be very honest, I would probably laugh too. It's comical. Who had ever heard of a lady at 90 years of age giving birth to a child? What this means here is that they were beyond any biological possibility of bearing a child.

However, friends, the promise was not based on human possibilities, and this is something that we have to understand. God's logic is not illogical. It's merely supra-logical. It's above our powers of observation, or our powers of logic. God is supra-logic, not illogical but supra-, above. Other texts in the Bible with similar promises are found in Genesis 35, Genesis 43, 49. You could see here that God, He makes some ridiculous promises. Ridiculous, at least for us humans.

You see, friends, God is just-- the Almighty God that we're seeing here, this is a God that-- think of the children of Israel leaving Egypt after 400 years in Egypt, 200 years in bondage as slaves. They're leaving, the Exodus. There's an army, the most powerful army of the known world, behind them, mountains surrounding them, and a sea dead ahead. What could they do? What was their escape? What options did they have? None. But who could have guessed that the sea parting ways was an option? I find this kind of comical. Who could ever have imagined that the sea opening up and having a dry walkway, a dry path for them, who could ever have imagined that that was a possibility, that that was an option?

Joshua fighting, warring for the children of Israel, he needs more time. He cries out to God. Who could ever have imagined that the sun stopping was an option? That is our God, friends. That's what and that's who the Almighty God is, the God of the options that we could never imagine, options that we could

never imagine. El, the God of power and authority; and Shaddai, God of inexhaustible riches is willing to bestow upon those who seek Him in faith and obedience the limitless bounties of His power.

The next portion here of the lesson on Tuesday we find from Abram to Abraham. You know, the concept of names, as we've already mentioned, with theological and spiritual meanings, it's not something limited only to God. We don't only find God having various names in the Bible. The names of various people are often changed throughout Scripture. Nowadays, names don't really mean all that much, right? "I mean, oh, I think the name Mary is a beautiful name. I think the name Luccas-- my name is-- you know, it's a great name, so--" but it doesn't-- I mean, my name was almost-- I think it was Samuel that my parents told me or something like that.

Or Daniel, I don't know, but names, they're kind of chosen on that basis, but in biblical times it was very different. Names were full of meaning. The lesson says that all Semitic names of people have meaning and usually consist of a phrase or short sentence comprised of a wish or an expression of gratitude on the part of the parent. For example, Daniel means "God is my judge." Joel means "Yahweh is God." Nathan means "gift of God." And so, since these names were frequently tied to meaning, they were subject to change, in reflection to radical changes on the lives of people. Do you remember Naomi? She changed her name to what? Do you guys remember? Mara, bitter, because of the circumstances of her life. This is something normal in the biblical narrative.

Remember, also, another example, the new name promised to those who persevere in Revelation. It's not difficult to understand why God changed the name of Abraham, Abram, which means "father is exalted." God changes to Abraham, the father of a great nation, or the father of a multitude. You know, at a first glance, to Abraham this might have sounded as a joke. Imagine Abraham 99 years old; Sarah, 90. They have one son that's not really the son, and God comes about, and He says, "Your name now will be father of a multitude." It sounds like a bad joke. Little did Abraham know, God promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations. Chapter 17:6, "I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you." And this is where we enter the covenant aspect of the lesson--right?-- the Abrahamic covenant.

We find that God, He makes a covenant with Abraham in three individual stages. We find the first in Genesis 12:1 through 3, the second stage Genesis 15:1 through 21, and the third in Genesis 17:1 through 4. And unfortunately, because of time, we can't go into each one of them, although each one of these stages are rich in details and nuances, that if we were to really dive deep into them, our understanding of who God is and what His plan for our life, for our world is, we would be amazed. But we can go into a few things.

You know, chronological information in the narrative reveals that God engaged in this three-part covenant throughout a period of about 24 years, and these stages, as the lesson tells us, it can be summarized into three different subjects, right? The first is the approach of God to man. God appears to Abraham. He approaches him. I can just imagine Abraham at that moment. He's not a young man anymore. God appears to him and says, "Look, you got to leave your land, leave your family, leave your people." If it were me and I were, like, 70 years old and I was listening to a voice telling me that I got to leave everything that I already know, I'd be thinking, "Well, it's time. I'm going crazy." Maybe Abraham thought that.

Look, I'll tell you, if I hear a voice today tell me, at 30 years tell me, "You got to leave everything, leave your family behind and leave your--all your-- everything you know," if I heard a voice saying that, I would think that'd be going nuts. But here you see something different in Abraham. This is where you see the greatness of this man, at least the beginning of it, because while anyone else would have looked for some help, Abraham, he says, "Yes, I will go." "Leave your land. Leave your family."

The second stage is the call for human obedience, and the third is the divine promise. The second stage is particularly interesting, important. We find a very solemn ritual, where God appears to Abraham and He hovers between these carefully placed animal parts. Now, I will admit that the first time that I read this-- this sequence of events, I'll tell you that I was a little bit confused, because it seems a bit arbitrary to me. God appears--so, because this is what happens. If you read there in Genesis 15, I believe it's verse 8, Abraham, he's hearing God promise all these great things. "I will do this. I will do this. I will do this. I will make you a great nation. Kings will come from you." And God is promising all these marvelous things, but years had gone by. And in verse 8, Abraham, he comes out, and he says, "Lord, how do I know that these things are going to happen? How do I know?"

But instead of answering him, instead of saying something, God tells Abraham to get a few animals, cut them in half, why? And then, Abraham falls into a deep sleep, and he has this dream about that right there, and God is hovering in between these animals. I'll admit that the first times that I read this, this is one of those texts that you read in the Bible that when you've read the Bible enough times, you kind of skip over automatically, because you're like, "Well, I have no idea what's going on here." I don't know if that's what it is with you, but I know that that was-- it was that way with me. But this is a very beautiful symbol.

So, basically, what this means right here, in those ancient times this was like a handshake. This was normal, right? This wasn't something strange. This was, like, a normal handshake when two parties came together and they made a covenant. They made a deal, a bargain. They would do this. They would get these animals, they would split them in half, and both parties would walk between those animals. And basically, what they're saying is, "If I do not fulfill the terms of my covenant, the terms of my deal with you, let what happened to these animals happen to me." You understand? That's what that symbol means. "If the terms of my covenant with you don't come to pass, then may what happened to these animals happen to me."

Now, what's interesting in this whole story is that God hovers between-- He goes between the animals, but Abraham does not. And what's even more interesting is that later on, throughout the development of Scripture, we find that God did suffer the consequences of a broken covenant, although He broke no covenants. And those who broke the covenant were substituted. Do you see the beauty in this symbolism? God goes through, God doesn't break covenant, and yet God is the one who pays the consequence.

What all this means is that the covenant is all about God's promises that are made through His grace. Friends, sometimes we have this expectation that "you know, I'm going to promise God this, and I will make this deal with God." It's not about us. We have this mania sometimes of making all of this about us, about me. "I need to do this. I need to do that. I need to do this." That is such a big misunderstanding, because what you see in Scripture is God fulfilling His promises in spite of our inability of fulfilling our promises.

I'm not saying that we shouldn't keep our promises to God. I'm just saying that we have a really hard time, and God understands that. God did not make Abraham walk through that path of animals. I find that beautiful. It was God, who has a smoking oven and a burning torch, that passed between those pieces. It was God, who guaranteed the execution of the promise that was made, and today we know that the covenant of grace is today fulfilled with all those who have the faith of Abraham, those who trust in the mercies of-- and the promises of God. Galatians chapter 3, verse 7 says, "Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham." Only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham, but a few verses later, in verse 29, we read, "And if you are of Christ," or if you are Christ's, "then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

So, we can claim these promises not because we are of Abraham's physical seed, but because we are of Christ. And because we are of Christ we partake in the promises that were made to Abraham and his seed. These are no longer his physical descendants. We are no longer the physical descendants, but the people of the Messiah that have the faith of Abraham.

An important part here of covenants are the covenant obligations, and that appears on Thursday. One important thing for us to understand here, friends, is that from God's side the covenant is unconditional. The covenant on God's side is unconditional, because what was promised will happen, will come to pass. What was God's ultimate promise in the context of the covenant, God's ultimate promise? That one day someone would come. Someday, a messiah would come, because God was extending from the beginning to Adam, to Noah, to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, to the children of Israel, to the kings, to the patriarchs, to the prophets, God was extending His hand, the covenant of grace.

But the problem is that on the other side, on the human side, no human was able to latch on to the divine hand. You'll see that Adam failed. Noah failed. Abraham, to an extent, failed. Isaac, Jacob, the patriarchs, Israel, the kings, they all-- none of them were able to really latch on to God's hand. And so, the beauty of the story is that God, He divests Himself, and that's-- and this is the point where, really, theologians, pastors, we just--it's really like a blah-blah-blah because we cannot describe this. This is truly a mystery, how the God, the Almighty El Shaddai, He divests Himself. He steps around this curtain of glory, and He appears on a manger, helpless, and Jesus keeps covenant. From the moment He's born, Jesus keeps covenant.

And so, here we have the divine hand reaching out, the human counterpart never able to fully latch on, but here comes one who does latch on from the human side for the human side. However, from the human side, from the human point of view of Abraham's physical descendants, the covenant is, or was, conditional. God fulfilled what He promised, but the object of the fulfillment is not with Abraham's physical seed anymore but with those that belong to the people of the Messiah, those who have the faith of Abraham.

The covenant, friends, is based on God's grace, where He does for us what we could never do for ourselves. We could never do any of this for ourselves. In His grace, God chose Abraham, who appears in the biblical narrative without any merits, without any qualifications for this choice.

God's choice of Abraham-- and I find this absolutely astonishing. God's choice of Abraham was not based on any inherent superiority that called for a reward. Of course, Abraham was a faithful man, uncorrupted by the prevailing apostasy, one who steadfastly adhered to the worship of the one true God. You'll find that in "Patriarchs and Prophets," page 125. However, his faithfulness cannot be construed as any kind of merit that earned him the right to be chosen by God. God's choice is always grounded in divine grace, always in His love and in His mercy. Deuteronomy 7:6 through 8, "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all peoples on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers."

Then verse 9, "Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments." Unfortunately, the Jewish nation, they began to commit idolatry by worshiping their own virtues. According to the rabbinical tradition, Abraham was so important that God, when He went to create the world, He first consulted Abraham. Imagine that. The biblical record of Abraham's experience reveals a

number of actions totally unworthy of someone chosen to become God's counterpart of God's covenant.

Here, at the conclusion of God's covenant making with Abraham, God gave him a new name. The new name changed from "father is exalted" to "father of multitudes." He is the first person in the Bible to receive a new name coming from God, and this new name indicated the new covenant relationship that was sealed with a divine promise that was made certain, "No longer shall your name be Abraham-- Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations." And here we find a biblical example of spiritual maturity.

Do you want to know in the Bible what is spiritual maturity, what is wholeness, what it means to be blameless and upright? It's this: observe the people in Scripture that are called blameless and upright, like Abraham, like Noah, like Job. We don't find these people with this presumption of arrogance, or of being fine just as they are, or of having reached this position where they don't need Jesus anymore. You don't find that in these people. In Job 9:28, we see that even the patriarch of pain and of suffering, he didn't dare consider himself righteous. He says that "I know that God would not hold me innocent if I did such a thing."

No, friends, true spiritual maturity, as we see in Abraham, true blamelessness is an attitude of integrity, not of arrogance. Otherwise, in this sense, this maturity, this blamelessness would have the same effect as sin, which is removing us and separating us from God. We will always need God. You know, to finish this lesson, throughout the history of the children of Israel, you will see God reaching out and extending His hand. And like I said, no human counterpart was fully able to ever do that. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the children of Israel, they just got worse and worse as the kings came.

And finally, throughout this period of history, we find that they find themselves in Babylon, and I'm sure we're going to get to this point. I'm not going to talk too much about it because we're out of time and because someone will talk about it in the future, but I just can't not mention this. We find them in Babylon, and Daniel, Daniel chapter 9, one of those beautiful chapters in Scripture, Daniel falls before the Lord. And if there's a man that the Bible doesn't attribute to him any sin or unrighteousness-- he was a man just like us, human, but the Bible doesn't attribute to him any blame, any actions of sin. He falls before God in sackcloth, and he says, "O my God, O my Lord, we have broken your covenant; we have sinned."

But then, Daniel, he said something that is truly beautiful, and you'll find this in Daniel chapter 9. Daniel chapter 9, verse 1 through-- look at what it says. Verse 2 onward. "In the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of years specified by the Word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. And I prayed to the Lord my God, and made confession, and said, 'O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps,'" what? Who keeps His covenant. "Who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments."

And then, he starts in one of the most beautiful prayers of Scripture. Friend, this here resonates with Abraham, who through a multitude of hard knocks of life came to understand that the God of the covenant, He is the one who fulfills the promises. I don't know how your life has been going. I know that it has not been an easy year, and sometimes it might seem as though the promises that we claim from God, they're not panning out, but, friend, understand that God always fulfills His promises. Perhaps not the way that we would expect, but the way that God fulfills His promises are always better than what we would ever expect.

I hope that God may bless you. I loved studying the lesson with you this week, and I hope that you have a blessed study of lesson 5. Join us again next week for another "Sabbath School Study Hour." Understand that God is the God of the promises, and I'd like to close this moment with a word of prayer.

Dear Lord God, thank You so much because in your Word we know that You are the God of promises. You are the God that fulfills His promises. Lord, as we face a new week, help us implement this reality in our life, that You are the God of promises. Help us not only keep our promises to you but keep our promises to everyone around us, because that is a reflection of our children, of us being the children of God. Please give us a great day, a great rest of this week, and I ask in Jesus's name, amen and amen. May God bless you and may He bless you.

Male announcer: Don't forget to request today's life-changing, free resource. Not only can you receive this free gift in the mail, you can download a digital copy straight to your computer or mobile device. To get your digital copy of today's free gift, simply text the key word on your screen to 40544, or visit the web address shown on your screen, and be sure to select the digital download option on the request page. It's now easier than ever for you to study God's Word with Amazing Facts wherever and whenever you want, and most important, to share it with others.

Heather Shurtliff: We can do nothing without God, and sometimes He lets you get to that place where you realize there is nothing left, and you're just wondering if you want to live because it hurts and life is dark. When He lets you get to that place, then that's when He can break through to you and let you know He's there, and then He can work with you to bring beauty out of ashes and hope out of darkness.

My mom, when she was pregnant with me, was diagnosed with bipolar, and the times when my mom would be struggling, they might be trying her on different medications to help her with the mood swings. I kind of had a savior complex and had, like, a guilt complex that somehow that all my family's problems were my own fault, or I'm the one that was supposed to try to help or fix it, which is impossible for any human to do. Only Jesus can do that.

But I believe all-- stuffing all of those emotions and for so long, my world just started to crumble around me. I started having a nervous breakdown. I could not stuff any longer everything that I'd grown up with. I just slowly but surely just started to withdraw completely, and it got to the extent where I was like a prisoner of my own house, of my own fears. And if it wasn't for my mom making me come out of the basement and sometimes, you know, making me eat, I would just stay down in my room in the basement, and I remember how awful the darkness was and how terrible it is to live without hope.

I can still feel that in, like, my throat, in my heart. I remember what that feels like. I had been still contemplating suicide on and off for several months, and I knew that it was getting worse and that I was going to be successful unless something happened. And you know, just trying to talk to yourself out of it every day, but still just it just always being there, haunting me, and I just went to bed feeling really, really sick, and just told myself, "In counseling they'll tell you, you know, to always--don't do--make any impulsive decisions. It will always be brighter in the morning. You know, just see it through the night."

Sometimes the night are the longest, darkest hours, and I just went to sleep telling myself that and when I woke up in the morning there was no relief. It was worse than it was. It was just like knew what was waiting for me when I woke up in the morning. And so, then I went to class, and as soon as the class was getting going I asked the teacher if I could go get a drink of water, and I went into the kitchen and I started drinking some of the different cleaners.

And as I was there drinking the cleaners, choking on the cleaners, just such an awful place to be in. The chaplain, we have a very kind chaplain. He flipped on the kitchen lights, and he comes in with his bright smile, and he's like, "Heather," he's like, "how are you doing today?" And I'm like, "You know, I'm killing

myself." And I look at his face, and I cannot lie to him. He's such a kind man. I just look at him, and I just start sobbing. And he just-- he doesn't make a big deal. He just kindly and sweetly helps pick me up off the floor and walks me to his office, and so he just-- he talked to me. I told him what I had drank, and he got the ambulance.

After that hospital stay, you know, everybody was so scared for me, because it's not expected at all. But after that, somehow, I knew that suicide was not an option anymore, that I'd closed that door. Even though I still had that same pain and fear and I had no idea how God was going to pick up the pieces and I still had to be honest with God, I was like, "Okay, God, obviously You care. Obviously, I know that You spared my life, and I don't have any idea how You're going to help me fix this mess in my life."

But it was the beginning of me trusting Him again and just shutting that door to suicide. It's not ever being an option again. God used Amazing Facts and Pastor Doug in a powerful way to make His love for me, He's soon coming for me, and that He was calling me to share that with others real. And it was making it personal, God's love for me, and that was, really-- that's a seed that I will-- I'll never forget. And that I'm so grateful that my family didn't have to go through the pain and the tragedy of me taking my life and that I have the joy of being able to encourage other people that there's always hope.

Amazing Facts changed my life. I'm so grateful for their ministry. It's a precious blessing.