



09

SESSION NINE

God Reaffirms the Covenant

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session we see that God renews His promise to be with Abraham's offspring and to bless the world through them despite their sinful and unworthy ways. Abraham's descendants fight, lie, and manipulate one another, but God remains faithful and renews His promises again and again. We can take heart in knowing we serve a God who keeps His promises in unusual ways to unworthy people, a God who is present with us as we fulfill His mission.

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 25:19-26; 26:1-6

THE POINT

God promises to be faithful to His people even when they show themselves to be unworthy of His love.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

A typical childhood classic is the story of *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* (Warner Bros., 1971). Perhaps the most intriguing fictional characters in the story are the Oompa Loompas, the short and stout little men who helped Willy Wonka in the factory. Whenever one of the kids violated a rule and was nearly turned into a lump of chocolate (or some other frightful consequence) the Oompa Loompas would come out and sing a song with a moral lesson, like obeying your parents or avoiding gluttony. “Live this way and you will be happy”—that was their message. (If time allows, share a clip from the movie.)

I wonder sometimes if we look at the Old Testament in a similar way. We read the stories and think the point is to imitate the “good guys” and avoid the actions of the “bad guys” if we want to live a happy life. The problem is, that’s not the message of the Old Testament.

Within these pages we have plenty of examples of people who walked faithfully with God and still suffered. Likewise, we have examples of people who were unworthy of God’s blessing and yet they prospered. The message of the Old Testament centers not on “good people” but on a gracious God who keeps His promises to be with His people and bless them even though they are sinful and unworthy of His love.

- **Can you recall a time when you received something good, perhaps an accolade or a gift, even though it was undeserved and unexpected? What went through your mind upon receiving it?**

Option 2

Give each student a sheet of paper folded lengthwise. On one side, lead students to think of someone they consider to be extremely trustworthy and list specific reasons they trust this person. On the opposite side, lead them to think of someone they trust very little and list specific reasons they cannot trust this person. Without calling on students to name the people they listed, discuss how a person’s history determines our current level of trust for them. If they have proven untrustworthy in the past, we are cautious to trust them in the present.

On the board, write God. Emphasize that before you determine whether or not you believe God to be trustworthy, it is important to recall how He has acted in the past. Call on volunteers to name instances from their own lives, biblical accounts, or stories from the lives of others that illustrate God’s trustworthiness. List these on the board.

Next, call on volunteers to state things that God has never done. This list might include things such as: made a mistake, told a lie, asked for forgiveness, forgotten a promise, and so forth.

As you look over both lists, discuss the level of God’s trustworthiness based on His history.

- **How has God proven to His people that He is trustworthy? How has He proven His trustworthiness to you personally?**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God promises to be faithful to His people even when they show themselves to be unworthy of His love.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Isaac:** son of Abraham through whom God would renew His covenant

PLOT

In the previous sessions, we've seen how God chose Abraham to be the one through whom salvation would come to the world. We saw how Isaac was the child of promise, and how Abraham's faith was tested. But what happens when Abraham's descendants are unfaithful to God? How will God's promise go forward?

In this session, we see that God renews His promise to be with Abraham's offspring and to bless the world through them despite their sinful and unworthy ways. Abraham's descendants fight, lie, and manipulate one another, but God remains faithful and renews His promises again and again. We can take heart in knowing we serve a God who keeps His promises in unusual ways to unworthy people, a God who is present with us as we fulfill His mission.

TIMELINE

ABRAHAM'S HEIRS RECEIVE THE PROMISE

The promise of the covenant is passed to Abraham's descendants.

JACOB AND ESAU

Family dysfunction erupts between parents and sons for the birthright blessing.

JACOB WRESTLES WITH GOD

Jacob, the deceiver, is forever changed after being broken through his encounter with God.

GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES

We're still working through Genesis, the first book of the Bible, and we see how this book is divided into units by the key phrase "These are the generations of..." (see 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2). The use of this phrase in Genesis 25:19 indicates that a new section is starting, one that deals with Isaac and his children.

These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham fathered Isaac, and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife. And Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren. And the LORD granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived. The children struggled together within her, and she said, "If it is thus, why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. And the LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger." When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak, so they called his name Esau. Afterward his brother came out with his hand holding Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them. (Gen. 25:19-26)

We've seen that Isaac is the child of promise who carries forward the promises of land, offspring, and blessing that God gave to Abraham. But before the promises are carried forward, a crisis must be addressed. Like Abraham's wife, Isaac's wife, Rebekah, could not have children.

Rebekah's barrenness was not only tragic for the family, as painful as not being able to have children may be. In this case, barrenness was a cosmic tragedy because God had promised that the removal of the curse of sin and the defeat of Satan would come through the birth of a child (Gen. 3:15), and the restoration of the world would come through the offspring of Abraham (12:1-3). The fact that Rebekah could not have children again put those promises in jeopardy.

But Isaac prayed for his wife, and God miraculously opened her womb. Are you noticing the pattern here? God is using unlikely pregnancies and births to keep His promises and deliver His people, and He is asking His people to trust Him in the process.

Rebekah became pregnant with twins, and they fought inside her. She was perplexed by what was happening, so she prayed and asked God about it. God told her the fighting foreshadowed what their lives would be like. Two nations were in Rebekah's womb. They would war with each other, but the older would serve the younger.

When God promised the salvation of the world through the offspring of the woman in Genesis 3:15, He said that victory would come through warfare between the offspring of the woman and the serpent. This declaration plays out in Genesis, and it continues here as Edom—the descendants of Esau—will constantly war with Israel—the descendants of Jacob.

But through it all, God's salvation and blessing will come to the world. And how unusual will be the way it comes. In the ancient world the inheritance was given to the oldest son, but here God promised it to the younger son. Jacob would carry the promises forward, not Esau, the firstborn.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

God Is Truthful

The Scriptures are clear that in God there is no falsehood (Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2). God represents things as they really are. Everything He says can be trusted because God guarantees the truth of everything He tells us. The call for humans to be honest and not to bear false witness is rooted in the truthful character of our Creator. Telling the truth is one way we bear the image of God, whose Son is the Way, "the Truth," and the Life (John 14:6).

GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES EVEN WHEN PEOPLE ARE UNWORTHY

We've seen how God keeps His promises in unusual ways. As the story progresses, we watch how God's people prove to be unworthy of those promises by their behavior. They play favorites, lie, and manipulate. Yet God remains gracious to them.

While God's grace toward sinners is on the clearest and ultimate display in the cross of Jesus, God's grace toward sinners does not begin there. Through the entire Bible we see God's unmerited love given to unworthy people. We see that clearly here in Genesis 26, where God reaffirms His covenant with Abraham through his son Isaac.

Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines. And the LORD appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will

establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.” So Isaac settled in Gerar. (Gen. 26:1-6)

Here we read about another famine in the land, just like there was in the days of Abraham. The famine in Abraham’s day foreshadowed the exodus. Famine drove Abraham and his family to Egypt, where plagues were unleashed on Pharaoh’s house, and Abraham’s family left Egypt richer than they came. The same thing will happen generations later on a larger scale, when God rescues Israel from slavery in Egypt. God continues to rescue His people and keep His promise of land, offspring, and blessing despite horrible circumstances, such as famine and being away from their homeland.

This famine, which happened in the life of Isaac, shows God continuing to keep His promises in tough circumstances. God told Isaac not to go to Egypt but to live in the Philistine region of Gerar. Like his father before him and his descendants after him, Isaac spent time among the Gentiles outside of the promised land. Like his dad, he spent time among Abimelech, the king of the Philistines (see Gen. 20).

The horrible circumstances (starvation) and the unworthy characters that Isaac and his sons turn out to be make us wonder if God will truly keep the promise He has made. Can human disobedience or natural disasters keep Him from being true to His word?

The promises of land, offspring, and blessing were once again in jeopardy, but God took this opportunity to restate the promises to Isaac. God told Isaac to remain in the land of Gerar as a foreigner, and He promised to be with Isaac and to bless him. Then He promised to give this land—even the territory of the Gentiles—to Isaac and his offspring. He again promised offspring for Isaac as numerous as the stars, and He foretold that Isaac’s offspring would bless all the nations of the earth.

Why did He do this? God restated these promises because Isaac’s father, Abraham, obeyed His commands. It is intriguing that God would mention Abraham’s obedience because, at first, Abraham was anything but obedient. Remember how he took matters into his own hands rather than trust God? He tried to offer his servant Eliezar as the heir, and then he fathered Ishmael by Hagar.

But God graciously kept His promises to Abraham despite Abraham’s unworthiness. In the end, Abraham seems to have been transformed by God’s gracious presence. He became a man of faith and obedience, even willing to offer up the child of promise in obedient faith to God.

We see here in Genesis 26 a similar unworthiness in Isaac, and we also see God’s graciousness to keep the promises. Like his father, Isaac passed off his wife, Rebekah, as his sister because he feared the men of the area would

TIMELINE

JOSEPH'S HARDSHIPS

The sufferings of Joseph and the mercies of God.

THE SALVATION OF MANY

God brings good out of the evil done to Joseph.

Beginning Winter 2015-16

MOSES SPEAKS TO GOD

God reveals Himself to Moses and promises redemption.

kill him to take her as a wife since she was so beautiful. Yet despite Isaac's cowardly treatment of his wife, he was blessed in this foreign land and became rich, to the point the Philistines wanted him to leave. Eventually Isaac made it back to the land of promise in Beer-sheba, where God restated the promises to him yet again.

- **In what ways does remembering God's faithfulness in your past affect how you face difficult situations today?** (*p. 61, PSG*)

CHRIST CONNECTION

Consider this pattern throughout the Bible. God granted Isaac as a miracle child to Abraham and Sarah in order to keep His promise to them. Likewise, Esau and Jacob were an answer to Isaac's prayer. God granted a miraculous birth, the prophet Samuel, to Hannah who was barren. Manoah's wife faced infertility but gave birth to Samson, whom God used to judge Israel. Ultimately, the virgin Mary gave birth to the Savior of the world, an unlikely birth that was the culmination of all of God's promises.

There is no doubt that God graciously grants many things to us in the gospel. He gives us forgiveness of sin, adoption into His family, eternal life, an inheritance in His kingdom, and so much more. But the one thing the gospel of Jesus Christ secures for us that is far more glorious than any of these is God Himself.

The God-man, Jesus Christ—the One who shed His own blood for us and was raised from the dead to free us from the curse of sin—will live with His people forever. The promise of God to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob is the promise God has fulfilled for us in Jesus Christ. And if we learn anything about God's character from these biblical accounts and others, it is the fact that God is someone who keeps His promises, even at the cost of His own life!

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What are some ways you have seen God keep His promises in your life or in the life of someone you know?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What situations have caused you to doubt God's promises to you?** *Answers will vary, but may include a troubled past, broken relationships, abuse, etc.*
- **How can you battle your doubts and trust God's promises in these difficult circumstances?** *Answers may include fighting against doubt by recalling the promises of God in Scripture (which would involve Scripture reading, Scripture memory, and prayer); remembering God's character and the truth that He has never failed to keep His promises; remembering stories like this one where God was faithful to His people; etc.*
- **How has this session challenged you on a personal level?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of
Redemption
through His Son,
Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story
meets His.

YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

There's no question that God has made promises to us that are independent of our worthiness. Not only that, but God also keeps His promises even when we fail to live as we should. Yet, we often seem to believe that God is mad at us or that we forfeit His blessing if we fail Him. When we think this way, we reveal a works based mind-set at work within us.

- **Why is it easy to think God is perpetually angry with us when we fail Him?** *Oftentimes we think this way because of a works based mind-set. We think that if we do this then God will do that, or if we do that then He will do this, etc. We tend to see Him as primarily a Judge rather than a loving Father who disciplines those He loves.*
- **Why is it important that we change that way of thinking?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HEART

It is important to remember that God's grace, love, and mercy are unmerited—meaning we didn't do anything to deserve them. In fact, the Bible affirms that we love only because God first loved us, and that it is His kindness that leads us to repentance.

- **How can we stand on the promises of God we see in Genesis? How does this help us grow in love and obedience toward Him?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How does God's faithfulness lead to a deeper trust in Him?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HANDS

God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (see Pr. 3:34; Jas. 4:6). There is no place for pride or boasting in the Christian's mission, but only the desire to become more like Christ in the hope of expanding His kingdom in the hearts of people.

- **What are some limitations that may make a person feel unqualified to share the love of Christ with others?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How does knowing that God uses unlikely and unworthy people to accomplish His plan free us from the fear of not being qualified to share His message?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, item #10 can be used during group time. Item #10 contains a map that will help students to visually grasp the landscape and journeys of many of the characters they are learning about.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- Leader Training Videos
- One Conversations
- Midweek Studies
- Circular Timeline Poster
- App (for both leader and student)



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at
GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit
MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject