

SESSION 4

Count the Stars

Abram, the Three Promises, and the God Who Walks Between the Pieces

TAKE-HOME SHEET

WHAT WE FOUND

Out of the wreckage of Babel, God called one childless old man and made him three promises that map the rest of the Bible: a great nation, a great name, and blessing for "all the families of the earth" (Genesis 12:1 to 3). Keep your written list of the three; this study will watch each one grow up into a sworn covenant.

When Abram asked, "How am I to know?", God answered with the ancient world's most serious ritual: animals cut in two and a corridor of blood between the halves. Jeremiah 34:18 to 20 gave us the decoder: God declares that those who broke his covenant will be made like the calf they cut in two and passed between. To walk the corridor of blood was to enact a self-curse: in effect, may I become like these animals if I break this oath. And then the detail that changes everything: Abram was in a deep sleep, and a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch, God's own fiery signature, passed down the corridor alone. By the ceremony's own logic, only the one who walks the corridor swears the oath, and Abram, in a deep sleep, never walked. God alone bound himself. Many Christian interpreters, reading this scene in light of the cross, have seen God here taking upon himself even the human side of the covenant, a claim we will keep testing as the story unfolds. Hebrews 6 says he "swore by himself" because there was no one greater, "two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God should prove false."

We tested the claim that the promises were merely earthly acreage, and Scripture itself widened them: Paul says Abraham was promised "the world" (Romans 4:13), and Hebrews says he was looking through the land toward "a better country, that is, a heavenly one." The land was real, the way an engagement ring is real: a true gift, and the pledge of something greater. And a question was left deliberately open on the table, so carry it with you: if the human side breaks this covenant, what happens to the God who swore?

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on Genesis*

Preaching on God's dealings with Abram, St. John Chrysostom marveled at the divine condescension: the Lord of all stoops to human covenant customs, accommodating our weakness the way a father lisps with his child, so that Abram could have certainty in a form he could grasp. God does not merely make promises; he makes them in our language, with our rituals, sworn on his own life.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ambrose of Milan *On Abraham*

St. Ambrose held up Abram's departure from Ur as the pattern of every soul's conversion: to leave country, kindred, and father's house is to leave the familiar securities that compete with God, trusting a promise you cannot yet see. Faith, for Ambrose, is not the absence of questions (Abram asks them freely) but the willingness to walk while the questions are still open.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine *City of God, Book 16*

Working through the Abraham narratives, St. Augustine insisted that the promises were spoken to Abraham but aimed at us: the patriarch's story is prophecy in the form of biography. In the fire passing between the divided animals he saw God signifying, in advance and in mystery, the judgment and deliverance that would come through Abraham's promised seed.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- One clear night this week, physically go outside and look at the stars for five minutes. Pray one line: "Lord, you kept your word to Abram; I trust you to keep it to me."
- Write your hardest honest question to God on a card and put it in your Bible at Genesis 15. Ask it in prayer once a day this week; Abram shows that covenant faith asks.
- Before next session, read Genesis 17:1 to 14 and Genesis 22:1 to 19. In chapter 17, watch for a sentence in which God says what he will be to Abraham's family. In chapter 22, note every detail about the wood, the mountain, and who carries what.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"And he believed the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness."

Genesis 15:6 (RSV2CE)

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Catechism References: CCC 59 to 60, 705 to 706, 762, 2570 to 2571