

SESSION 5

The Lord Will Provide

The Covenant Formula, Circumcision, and the Mountain of the Aqedah

LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants witness the first full statement of the covenant formula ("to be God to you and to your descendants"), discover circumcision as the covenant sign in the flesh, and climb Moriah with Abraham and Isaac, where faith is tested to the edge of death and God provides the lamb.

Catholic Touchstone. Abraham fulfills the definition of faith in Hebrews 11: he obeyed, he offered his only son, and he considered that God was able to raise the dead. The Church holds him up as the father of all who believe (CCC 145 to 146, 2572).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Genesis 17 opens twenty four years after the call of Genesis 12. Abram is ninety nine, Sarai is barren still, and God appears with new names and a new sign. But before either, God speaks the sentence this whole study is named for, and tonight it must land as an event: "I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you" (Genesis 17:7). There it is: the covenant formula, the vow at the heart of every covenant to come. From tonight forward the group hunts this sentence through Scripture; it will resurface at the exodus, through the prophets, and it resounds one final, climactic time in the last book of the Bible. Do not reveal the destinations; just make sure they know the sentence when they hear it.

The new names carry the promise: Abram ("exalted father") becomes Abraham ("father of a multitude"), and Sarai becomes Sarah, "princess," for "kings of peoples shall come from her" (17:16). Royal vocabulary is entering the Abrahamic line for the first time; file it, because promise two of Genesis 12 (the great name) is beginning to stir. The covenant sign is circumcision (17:10 to 14), and its logic deserves adult attention: the sign is cut into the organ of generation, marking the truth that the promised future will not be manufactured by human potency but received as gift. It is also given to infants on the eighth day (17:12), which means membership in God's covenant people was never merit based or adult only; a child who can contribute nothing is claimed entirely. Colossians 2:11 to 12 will later connect this sign to baptism, but let that discovery wait for the group to make.

Genesis 22 is the summit of Abraham's story and one of the summits of the Old Testament; the Jewish tradition calls it the *Aqedah*, the "binding" of Isaac. Read it with the group slowly and let the details do their work. The location: "the land of Moriah" (22:2), a name Scripture uses in only one other place: 2 Chronicles 3:1, which calls the temple mount in Jerusalem "Mount Moriah," the identification Jewish and Christian tradition has drawn ever since. The cast: "your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love" (22:2), the Old Testament's first use of the word love, spoken of a father and his beloved son. The staging: "Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it on Isaac his son" (22:6), the son carrying the wood of his own sacrifice up the hill. The son's question and the father's answer: "God will provide himself the lamb" (22:8). And the resolution: a ram caught in a thicket, and a name for the place, "The LORD will provide," with the narrator's note that "on the mount of the LORD it shall be provided" (22:14), future tense, as if the mountain were still waiting.

Isaac's role is easy to miss and essential. He is no toddler; he carries enough wood for a holocaust up a mountain, which means he could have resisted an elderly father, and the text records no resistance. Genesis

does not state Isaac's consent outright, but it stages a scene in which the binding is far easier to imagine if the son permits it, and Jewish tradition itself honored Isaac's willing self offering, and the Fathers saw in the obedient son who carries the wood a figure whose fulfillment the group can be trusted to sense without the leader forcing it. Restraint here is power: name the details, let the room go quiet, move on.

Finally, Genesis 22 ends with something new: an oath. "By myself I have sworn, says the LORD... because you have obeyed my voice" (22:16 to 18), and the third promise of Genesis 12 is repeated under oath: "by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves" (22:18; the underlying Hebrew word for descendants, *zera'*, "seed," is a grammatically singular collective noun, the thread Paul will press in Galatians 3:16; leader only). Hebrews 6:13 to 18 points at this exact moment: God swore by himself. The promise of Genesis 12 became a covenant in Genesis 15 and is sealed by oath in Genesis 22, on the mountain of provision, over a beloved son who carried the wood and was received back, as Hebrews says, "figuratively speaking," from the dead (Hebrews 11:19).

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

The New Testament reads this material as its own foundation. Paul argues from Abraham's two states, believing before circumcision (Genesis 15) and sealed after (Genesis 17), that Abraham is father of both the uncircumcised and the circumcised who believe (Romans 4:9 to 12). Colossians 2:11 to 12 speaks of a "circumcision made without hands," locating its fulfillment in baptism, where God claims a person, infant or adult, before and beneath all merit. And the Aqedah supplies the New Testament's deepest grammar for the Father's own act: "He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all" (Romans 8:32) is Genesis 22:16 ("you have not withheld your son, your only son") turned inside out, with God now the Father who does not withhold.

James 2:21 to 23 makes the connection this session has been saving since Genesis 15: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? ... and the scripture was fulfilled which says, Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." James says Moriah fulfilled Genesis 15:6. The faith reckoned as righteousness under the stars was not a completed transaction but a living root, and on Moriah it flowered into obedience. The steelman chain tonight takes this head on, fairly and at full strength.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Augustine *City of God, Book 16, Chapter 32*

St. Augustine read the Aqedah with the Church's eyes: Isaac carrying the wood to the place of sacrifice is a figure of Christ carrying his own cross, and the ram caught by its horns in the thicket signifies the sacrifice that God himself provides. For Augustine, Abraham never doubted God's promise; he reasoned that the God who gave Isaac from a dead womb could give him back from a dead body.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on Genesis*

St. John Chrysostom dwelt on the three day journey to Moriah: God did not ask for a moment's impulse but for three days of walking beside the son he was commanded to surrender. The test, Chrysostom taught, was aimed not at informing God, who knows all hearts, but at revealing Abraham's faith to Abraham and to every generation after him, so that the father of believers would have children who knew what their father was made of.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ephrem the Syrian *Commentary on Genesis*

St. Ephrem, the great deacon poet of the Syriac church and a Doctor of the Church, saw mercy hidden inside the test: God, who never desired the death of the boy, desired the revelation of the father's love, and provided the ram so that Isaac would go free. In Ephrem's reading, the mountain teaches that God asks for everything precisely in order to give back more than he asked.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 145 to 146. Abraham is the model of the obedience of faith: he obeyed the call to go out, he lived in the promised land as a stranger, and he did not hesitate at the sacrifice of his only son. Abraham thus fulfills the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1: faith is the assurance of things hoped for.

CCC 1150. The chosen people received from God distinctive signs and symbols that marked its liturgical life; among them, circumcision, which is a sign of the covenant, prefiguring what would be given fully in the sacraments of the New Covenant.

CCC 2572. As a final stage in the purification of his faith, Abraham, the father of believers, is asked to sacrifice the son God had given him. His faith does not weaken, for he considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; and so the father of believers is conformed to the likeness of the Father who will not spare his own Son but will deliver him up for us all.

CCC 706. Against all human hope, God promises descendants to Abraham. In Abraham's progeny all the nations of the earth will be blessed; this progeny will be Christ himself, in whom the outpouring of the Holy Spirit will gather the scattered children of God.

THREAD WATCH

Leader only. Do not reveal. These threads are planted and developed quietly; participants discover them.

- The covenant formula arrives tonight: Genesis 17:7, "to be God to you and to your descendants after you." Treat it as the event it is; slow the room down. From now on the group hunts the sentence. It resurfaces next session at the exodus (do not preview), personalizes onto a king in Session 8, aches through the prophets in Session 9, and is spoken from the throne in Session 12.
- Thread A, the widening family: tribe still, but royal vocabulary enters ("kings of peoples shall come from her," 17:16). The kingdom widening comes in Session 8; say nothing yet.
- Thread B, blood and oath: circumcision is covenant blood borne in the body, and Genesis 22 fuses the whole thread: a beloved son, wood, a mountain, a substitute, and an oath sworn by God on himself. Do not connect it forward; let the images accumulate weight.
- Thread C, the mountain: Moriah is the study's third named summit, and 2 Chronicles 3:1 names the temple mount in Jerusalem "Moriah," where tradition has long placed Abraham's mountain. "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided" is future tense. The group should feel that the verse is still waiting; do not resolve it.
- The singular seed thread (Genesis 3:15, Session 2) recurs at 22:18. Galatians 3:16 stays leader only until the study's final movement.
- Sealed guesses stay sealed. Session 10 opens them.

SESSION GOALS

1. Participants recognize the covenant formula of Genesis 17:7 as the study's title sentence and know they are now hunting it through Scripture.
2. Participants can explain the logic of circumcision as covenant sign: gift over potency, infants claimed before merit.
3. Participants have walked the details of Genesis 22 slowly: Moriah, the beloved son, the wood carried, "God will provide himself the lamb," the ram, the oath.
4. Participants have engaged the faith and works question at full Reformation strength and can articulate how Genesis 15:6, James 2, and Paul cohere.
5. Participants have connected Genesis 22:16 to Romans 8:32 and glimpsed the Father's side of the Aqedah.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

Ninety minutes. Opening prayer and Win, 15 minutes. Build, 55 minutes: give the Genesis 17:7 formula moment 10 unhurried minutes, then protect 25 for the Aqedah walk through and 15 for the faith and works steelman. Send, Live It, memory verse, and closing prayer, 20 minutes.

- If running long: Compress Q2 (the new names) into leader commentary delivered while introducing Genesis 17.
- If running long: Assign the Dig Deeper box on infant circumcision and baptism for home reading; it will resurface naturally in Session 11.

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DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

Father, tonight you speak the sentence you have been waiting to say since Eden: I will be your God. Say it over us again. Give us Abraham's ears to hear the promise, Abraham's legs for the three day walk, and Abraham's trust on the mountain where you provide. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN | OPENING QUESTIONS

W1. Has anyone ever changed your name, a nickname, a title, a new family name, in a way that changed how you saw yourself? What is the power of being renamed?

W2. What is the hardest thing you have ever had to hand over to God, or refused to hand over so far? No details required; just the shape of it.

BUILD | INTO THE WORD

1. Read Genesis 17:1 to 8 aloud, and when you reach verse 7, stop and read it twice. This study is named after a sentence in this passage. Find it. What exactly does God promise to be, and to whom, and for how long?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"To be God to you and to your descendants after you," an "everlasting covenant," "throughout their generations." This is the covenant formula, the vow at the center of every covenant in Scripture, and its fuller form, "I will be your God and you shall be my people," will now begin echoing through the whole Bible. Tell the group plainly: you now know the sentence. Watch for it. When you hear it, you are standing at a covenant.

2. In the same passage God renames both spouses: Abram becomes Abraham, "father of a multitude," and in verses 15 to 16 Sarai becomes Sarah, "princess," because "kings of peoples shall come from her." A ninety nine year old childless man is named crowd father, and his barren wife is named royalty. What is God doing with these names, and what new kind of vocabulary has just entered the story?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The names are promises worn in public; every introduction Abraham makes for the rest of his life is an act of faith or humiliation, and he must choose which. And the vocabulary is new: kings. Royal language has entered the Abrahamic line for the first time. Remember the second promise of Genesis 12, the great name; something monarchical has begun to stir, and the study will meet it again.

3. Read Genesis 17:9 to 14. The covenant sign is circumcision: cut into the flesh, into the organ of generation, and given to infants on the eighth day. Work out the logic. Why that organ, and why infants who cannot understand or consent?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The sign marks the organ of generation because the promise will not be produced by human potency; Abraham's own body is "as good as dead" (Romans 4:19), and the future comes as gift, not achievement. And it marks infants because covenant membership was never earned by understanding or merit: an eight day old is claimed entirely, contributing nothing but existence. God's family has never been adults only, and belonging has never been wage based. Hold that thought; it returns when this study reaches the sacraments.

DIG DEEPER A Circumcision Made Without Hands

Colossians 2:11 to 12 says the baptized were "circumcised with a circumcision made without hands... and you were buried with him in baptism." Paul connects the old covenant sign to the new one directly, and the logic carries over: the eighth day infant claimed before merit becomes the infant at the font, claimed by grace before achievement. Moses himself had already pushed the sign inward: "circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart" (Deuteronomy 10:16). The exterior sign always aimed at an interior surgery, and the study will watch the prophets sharpen that point.

4. Now Genesis 22. Read verses 1 to 8 aloud, slowly. Gather the details as a group and list them: what is the place called, how is Isaac described in verse 2, who carries what in verse 6, and what exactly does Abraham answer in verse 8?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The land of Moriah, which tradition, following 2 Chronicles 3:1, identifies with the mount where Solomon built the temple, the hill country of Jerusalem. Isaac is "your son, your only son... whom you love," the first occurrence of the word love in the Bible, a father for his son. The son carries the wood of his own sacrifice up the hill while the father carries the fire and the knife. And Abraham's answer is one of the most loaded sentences in Scripture: "God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." List the details, let them hang in the air, and resist the urge to explain them. The room will feel where this is pointing; trust the text.

5. Isaac carried enough wood up a mountain for a whole burnt offering, which means he was no small child, and Abraham was well over a hundred. Read verse 9 again: Abraham binds him and lays him on the altar. What does that tell us about Isaac's part in this scene?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The text records no resistance, and the physics of the scene speak: a young man strong enough to haul the wood could have overpowered an aged father, so the binding is far easier to imagine if the son permits it. Genesis leaves the consent unstated; the tradition, Jewish and Christian alike, has read willing self offering here, and the scene has invited that reading from the beginning. On the traditional reading, the Aqedah is not only the father's surrender but the son's free obedience. The Old Testament's first beloved son goes to the altar freely, carrying the wood.

LIVE DISCOVERY *(let the group find it)*

6. Abraham said "God will provide himself the lamb." Read Genesis 22:13 to 14. What animal does God actually provide, and what does Abraham name the place? Then look closely at the narrator's comment in verse 14: what tense is it in, and what might that mean?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

A ram, not a lamb; caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham names the place "The LORD will provide," and the narrator adds, "as it is said to this day, On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided." Future tense, still open, as if the mountain itself were waiting for the lamb that was promised but has not yet appeared. The verse leaves a vacancy on Moriah. Leave it vacant tonight; the study will come back for it.

Build, Then Press | "Abraham Was Justified by Faith Alone"

Present the Reformation reading at its full strength, because it is built from real texts and driven by a real pastoral fire. Genesis 15:6: Abraham "believed the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness," before circumcision, before Moriah, before any work at all. Paul seizes exactly this sequence: "to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness" (Romans 4:5), and "we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law" (Romans 3:28). On this reading, Moriah added nothing to Abraham's standing before God; it merely evidenced a justification already complete under the stars. The concern is noble: salvation must be God's gift, not human wages, or grace is destroyed.

7. Honor the concern, because the Church shares it: the Council of Trent itself teaches that nothing before justification, neither faith nor works, merits the grace of justification. Now press the texts. Read James 2:21 to 24. What event does James point to when he asks whether Abraham was justified by works? Which verse does James say was fulfilled in that event? And what is the one thing the New Testament says faith cannot be (2:17, 2:24)?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

James points to Moriah: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar?" And he says that in that act "the scripture was fulfilled which says, Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," Genesis 15:6, the steelman's own proof text, which James reads not as a closed transaction but as a living root that flowered into obedience decades later. Faith "apart from works is dead" (2:26), and "a man is justified by works and not by faith alone" (2:24), the only place in Scripture where the words faith alone appear together. The resolution is not that Paul and James disagree but that they fight different enemies with different vocabularies: Paul's "works of law" are the badge keeping of the old covenant, which never merited grace; James's "works" are the obedience of living faith, "faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6), which Paul demands just as loudly. The Catholic teaching holds both: initial justification is sheer unmerited gift (Trent and the Catechism say so as plainly as any Reformer), and the faith that receives it is a living seed that must flower into love and obedience; as James warns, faith can die if it is severed from works (James 2:26). Genesis 15 is the planting; Moriah is the flower; and the same Abraham, still trusting the same God, is righteous in both.

8. Read Genesis 22:15 to 18, and then Hebrews 6:13 to 18. What does God do at the end of the Aqedah that he has not done before in Abraham's story, and what does Hebrews say it gives us?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God swears: "By myself I have sworn... by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves." The third promise of Genesis 12, the worldwide one, is now under divine oath, and the Hebrew word for descendants, "seed," is again a singular collective, echoing Genesis 3:15, a thread Paul later draws out in

Galatians 3:16 (leader only). Hebrews says God swore by himself because there was no one greater, giving us "two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God should prove false," so that we who hope might have "strong encouragement," an anchor of the soul. The promise walked the corridor of blood in Genesis 15; on Moriah it is notarized in heaven.

9. Last connection of the night. Genesis 22:16: "because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son." Now read Romans 8:32. What has Paul done with the Aqedah?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?" Paul has turned the Aqedah around: on Moriah God stopped the father's hand and provided a substitute; in the fullness of time, the Father himself does not withhold his own beloved Son, and no ram interrupts. What God asked of Abraham for one morning, and then asked no more, God asked of himself in full. Let the group sit with that, and close.

SEND | TAKING IT OUT

S1. God renamed Abram before there was any evidence: father of a multitude, still childless. What is God calling you that the evidence does not yet support, and can you wear the name in faith this week?

S2. Abraham walked three days beside what he was surrendering. What is your version of the three day walk right now, the long obedience with the outcome not yet visible, and who is walking it beside you?

Live It This Week

- Once this week, pray Genesis 17:7 back to God in the first person: "You are my God, and the God of my children after me." If you have children or godchildren, pray it over them by name.
- Identify one "Isaac," something good that has quietly become ultimate, and hand it to God explicitly in prayer this week. Not because he will always ask for it, but because he must be free to.
- Before next session, read Exodus 3:1 to 15, Exodus 12:1 to 14, and Exodus 24:1 to 11. Watch for a family word God uses for Israel, and watch what is done with blood.

Closing Prayer

Father, on the mountain you stopped Abraham's hand and spared the son, and when the fullness of time had come, you did not spare your own. You have sworn by yourself, and your oath is our anchor. Take our bound up Isaacs, our fears, and our futures, and teach us to say with our father Abraham: the LORD will provide. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

"God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."

Genesis 22:8 (RSV2CE)

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LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in this session, in order of use. Mark these in your Bible before the group arrives.

Core Passages (in order of use)

- Genesis 17:1 to 8, the covenant formula spoken (verse 7, the study's title sentence)
- Genesis 17:15 to 16, Sarah the princess; kings of peoples
- Genesis 17:9 to 14, circumcision, the sign in the flesh, the eighth day
- Genesis 22:1 to 8, Moriah, the beloved son, the wood, "God will provide himself the lamb"
- Genesis 22:9, the binding, the son's consent
- Genesis 22:13 to 14, the ram; "on the mount of the LORD it shall be provided" (live discovery)
- James 2:21 to 24 with Romans 3:28 and 4:5, the steelman chain
- Genesis 22:15 to 18 with Hebrews 6:13 to 18, the oath sworn by God on himself
- Romans 8:32, the Father who did not spare his own Son

Supporting Passages

- 2 Chronicles 3:1, Moriah is the temple mount
- Romans 4:9 to 12 and 4:19, faith before circumcision; a body as good as dead
- Colossians 2:11 to 12 and Deuteronomy 10:16, circumcision without hands (Dig Deeper)
- Hebrews 11:17 to 19, he considered God able to raise the dead
- Galatians 5:6, faith working through love
- Genesis 3:15 and 22:18, the singular seed (thread; Galatians 3:16 leader only)