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We Are
Abraham's
Seed

The Family *of* Promise

We are Abraham's Seed

**A Study on the life of Abraham in relation to the current day
Christian**

Class 5 Ishmael and Circumcision

Genesis 16-17

Where we have been

- Gen 1-11 is the prologue to the rest of Scripture
 - The promise of a seed
 - The result of rebellions
 - God's mishpat (justice) and His tzedakah (righteousness) are working together
- Abram is called to be a blessing
 - Called to leave land, kin, home
 - God will give him nationhood, blessing, a great name
 - Yet we see failure in the trip to Egypt
- Abram retraces his steps to the beginning
 - He and Lot separate
 - The promise is restated
 - Power through conquest is refused and we encounter Melchizedek
- God's promise clarified for the heir
 - Trust (Faith) counted as tzedakah
 - Covenant ceremony
 - Prophecy of exile and return

Class 5 – Where are we going

- **Hagar & Ishmael**
- **God Seals the Covenant**
- **The Covenant sign - Circumcision**
- **The Promised Heir identified**

What to look for

- Where does **mishpat** collapse—how is power misused?
- Where is **tzedakah** needed—whose dignity is diminished?
- Where is **hesed** tested—who is at risk of being discarded?
- Where is **shalom/promise** threatened—and how does God preserve it?

Gen 16 - A Seed Solution?

16:1 Now Sarai, Avram's wife

Had not borne him children.

She had an **Egyptian slave-girl**

Her **name** was Hagar

² Sarai said to Avram:

Now here

YHWH has obstructed (*restrained*) me from bearing;

Pray come to my **slave-girl**,

Perhaps I may be built up with sons through her!

Avram **hearkened (*shema*) to Sarai's voice:**

³ Sarai, Avram's **wife (*isha*)**

Took Hagar the **Egyptian woman**

Her **slave-girl**

(At the end of ten years of Avram's being settled

In the land of Canaan),

And gave her to her husband Avram

As a wife (*isha*) for him.

Solution turned into Anti-Shalom

⁴ He came in to Hagar and she became pregnant.

But when she saw that she was pregnant

Her mistress became of light worth in her eyes.

⁵ Sarai said to Avram:

The wrong done (*hamas*) me is upon you!

I gave my **slave-girl** into your embrace,

But now that she sees that she is pregnant,

I have become of light worth in her eyes.

May YHWH judge what is done between me and you!

⁶ Avram said to Sarai:

Here, your **slave-girl** is **in your hand**

Deal with her however seems good (*tov*) in your eyes.

Sarai afflicted her

So that she had to escape from her.

Through the lens of the triangle:

- **Mishpat:** names people and restrains power—“I will not harm you.”
- **Tzedakah:** restores dignity—“You are not reducible to your status.”
- **Chesed:** holds the vulnerable in loyalty—“You are safe with me.”

God's Tzedakah - He Hears

⁷ But YHWH's messenger found **her by a spring of water**

In the wilderness

By the spring on the way to Shur.

⁸ He said:

Hagar, Sarai's slavegirl

Where do you come

Where are you going?

She said:

I am fleeing from Sarai my mistress.

⁹ YHWH's messenger said to her:

Return to your mistress and

Let yourself be afflicted under her hand!

¹⁰ and YHWH's messenger said to her:

I will make **your seed** many, yes, many,

It will be too many to count!

¹¹ And YHWH's messenger said to her:

Here, you are pregnant,

You will bear a son;

Call his name Yishmael (God hearkens - *shema*)

For God has hearkened to your being afflicted

The God Who Sees

¹² **He shall be a wild-ass of a man,**

His hand

Against all

Hand of all

Against him,

He will encamp in despite of (over against) all his kin.

¹³ Now she called the name of YHWH,

The one who was speaking to her

You are the God of Seeing! (*El Roi*)

For she said:

Have I actually gone on **seeing** here

After his **seeing** me?

¹⁴ Therefore the well was called:

Well of the Living One **Who Sees Me.**

Here it is between Kadesh and Bered.

¹⁵ Hagar bore Avram a son

And Avram called the name of the son whom Hagar bore:

Yishmael.

¹⁶ Avram was eighty years and six years old

When Hagar bore Yishmael to Avram.

The God of creation has given life and dignity to a runaway slave. Human beings devalue and turn a deaf ear. The Lord has heard. Human beings can lower their eyes to not look upon her. But God sees. (D Hawk, "The God Who Sees" ATJ, 2009)

Tree of Knowledge

1. A divine directive/promise given
2. Delay or tension
3. Human anxiety about vulnerability
4. A grasping act to secure what God promised
5. Knowledge gained through self-assertion
6. Consequences that complicate, not cancel, God's purposes
7. God remains faithful but redirects the story

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Tree of Knowledge

1. A divine directive/promise given - God had promised Abram seed
2. Delay or tension - Sarai remains barren
3. Human anxiety about vulnerability - YHWH restrained me, the covenant cannot proceed
4. A grasping act to secure what God promised - I shall be built up by her
5. Knowledge gained through self-assertion - When she saw she had conceived, light in her eyes (their eyes were opened)
6. Consequences that complicate, not cancel, God's purposes - Conflict, affliction, pain multiplied
7. God remains faithful but redirects the story - sees Hagar, names Ishmael, sends Hagar back

Abram and Sarai are not acting in rebellion but incomplete revelation

Trying to secure the promise through natural means

Covenant

A covenant is a pledged relationship—an “I am yours / you are mine” bond—carrying promises, loyalty, and responsibilities.

- Marriage - pledged loyalty and exclusivity
- Adoption - family name, not earned, given future and inheritance

Contract - conditional exchange

Covenant - pledged relationship

How covenant fits into the Triangle

- Chesed - Covenant produces loyal love, even if costly
- Mishpat - Covenant orders power, to produce justice, protection and accountability
- Tzedakah - Covenant restores dignity, people are lifted up
- Shalom - Covenant aims at durable and lasting wholeness where life can flourish

The Covenant Reaffirmed

17:1 Now when Avram was ninety years and nine years old

YHWH was seen by Avram and said to him:

I am God Shaddai.

Walk before me!

And be wholehearted!

² I set my **covenant** between me and you,
I will make you exceedingly, exceedingly many.

³ Avram fell upon his face.

God spoke with him saying:

⁴ As for me,

Here, my **covenant** is with you,

So that you will become the father of a throng of nations.

⁵ No longer shall your name be called Avram, (**Exalted Father**)

Rather shall your name be Avraham,

For I will make you *Av Hamon Goyim* (**Father of a Throng of Nations**)

Ex 6:3 I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as **God Shaddai**, but by my name **YHWH** I was not known to them.

The patriarchs knew me as a promise maker, they did not yet know me as a promise fulfiller through liberation

Walk...

17:1 Now when Avram was ninety years and nine years old

YHWH was seen by Avram and said to him:

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Walk before me!

And be wholehearted!

Eph 4:1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord,
implore you to **walk in a manner worthy** of
the calling with which you have been called,
² with all humility and gentleness, with
patience, showing tolerance for one another
in love,

Col 1:10 ... so that you will **walk in a manner worthy**
of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing
fruit in every good work and increasing in the
knowledge of God; ...

Gal 5:16 But I say, **walk by the Spirit,**
and you will not carry out the desire
of the flesh.

A Covenant for the Ages

⁶ **I will** cause you to bear fruit exceedingly, exceedingly,

I will make nations of you,

Yes kings will go out from you!

⁷ **I will** establish my **covenant** between me and you and your **seed** after you

Throughout their generations as a **covenant** for the ages (*'olam*).

To be God to you and to your **seed** after you.

⁸ **I will** give to you and to your **seed** after you

The land of your sojournings

All the land of Canaan as a holding for the ages (*'olam*),

And

I will be God to them.

Is the Land Permanent?

Lev 20:22 You shall therefore keep all My statutes and all My judgments and do them, **so that the land** to which I am bringing you to inhabit **will not vomit you out.**

I Kings 9:6 But if indeed you or your sons **turn away from following Me** and do not keep the commandments and statutes I have set before you, and if you go off to serve and worship other gods, ⁷ then **I will cut off Israel from the land** that I have given them, and I will banish from My presence this temple I have sanctified for My Name. Then Israel will become an object of scorn and ridicule among all peoples.

Lev 22:23 The land must not be sold permanently, **because it is Mine**, and you are but foreigners and residents with Me. ²⁴ Thus for every piece of property you possess, you must provide for the redemption of the land.

Circumcision and Covenant

⁹ God said to Avraham:

As for you

You are **to keep (*samar*)** my **covenant**,

You and your **seed** after you, throughout generations.

¹⁰ This is my **covenant** which you are **to keep (*samar*)**

Between me and you and your **seed** after you

Every male among you shall be circumcised.

¹¹ You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin,

So that it may serve as **a sign of the covenant**

Between me and you

¹² at eight days old, every male among you shall be circumcised,

Throughout your generations

Whether house-born or bought with money from any foreigner

Who is not your **seed**.

¹³ Circumcised, yes, circumcised shall be your

House born and your money bought

So that my **covenant** may be in your flesh

As a **covenant** for the ages

¹⁴ but a foreskinned male,

Who does not have the foreskin of his flesh circumcised

That person shall be cut off from his kinspeople

He has violated my **covenant**!

Now the Heir is Identified

¹⁵ God said to Avraham:

As for Sarai your wife

You shall not call her name Sarai (My princess),

For Sara (Princess) is her name!

¹⁶ **I will bless her** and

I will give you a son from her,

I will bless her

So that **she becomes nations,**

Kings of peoples shall come from her!

¹⁷ but Avraham flung himself on his face and **laughed,**

He said in his heart

To a hundred year old man shall there be children born

Or shall ninety year old Sara give birth?

But what about Ishmael

¹⁸ Avraham said to God

If only Yishmael might live in your favor!

¹⁹ God said:

Nevertheless,

Sara your wife is to bear a son

You shall call his name Yitzhak (He laughs)

I will establish my **covenant** with him

As a **covenant** for the ages

For his **seed** after him.

²⁰ and as for Yishmael (God hears),

I hearken (*shema*) to you:

Here,

I will make him blessed

I will make him bear fruit

I will make him many, exceedingly, exceedingly

He will beget twelve leaders and

I will make a great nation of him.

Finally the Covenant Pieces are in Place

- ²¹ But my **covenant** I will establish with Yitzhak
Whom **Sara will bear** to you at this set time
Another year hence.
- ²² When he had finished speaking with Avraham
God ascended from Avraham
- ²³ Avraham took Yishmael his son
And all those born in his house
And all those bought with his money,
And circumcised the flesh of their foreskins
On that same day as God had spoken to him.
- ²⁴ Avraham was ninety nine years old when he had the flesh of
His foreskin circumcised.
- ²⁶ On that same day
Were circumcised Avraham and Yishmael his son,
- ²⁷ and all his household people
Whether house born or purchased with silver from the foreigners
Were circumcised with him.

Gen 17 as a Chiasm

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Rather shall your name be Abraham.

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... as it relates to Baptism

Col 2:11-12 In him you were circumcised—a circumcision not made by hands—in the stripping off of the body of flesh, in the circumcision that belongs to the Messiah. And you were buried with him in baptism, in which also you were raised with him, through faith in the working of God—the One who raised him from the dead.

- **Identity marker:** both publicly mark who belongs to God's covenant people.
- **Embodiment:** both insist covenant belonging is lived and visible, not merely internal.
- **Boundary/entry function:** both function as initiation markers into the covenant community (in their respective covenant administrations).

Paul is arguing against Gentile circumcision, as others were trying to include it for household membership

Living within the Triangle

Circumcision as a formation marker (Torah narrative)

- Chesed: you belong to a covenant household; you are claimed and carried by a promise you didn't author.
- Mishpat: you are under a just order—God's claim includes accountability; the sign confronts "I am my own."
- Tzedakah: you are given a dignified identity and a vocation: to become a blessing, protect the vulnerable, practice righteousness/justice in public life.
- Shalom: the sign is meant to produce a durable communal wholeness (not a private spiritual badge).

Baptism as a formation marker (New Covenant reality)

- Chesed: received into a new family, "in Christ," gift before performance.
- Mishpat: renunciation of the old powers, old identity, old "flesh" way; allegiance transfer; the community now practices justice and truth.
- Tzedakah: raised into a restored identity with agency—new life that bears fruit in concrete righteousness.
- Shalom: not merely "inner peace," but durable peace that shows up in reconciled relationships and a just community.

What can we do this week?

- **Name your fear:** what are you trying to secure by control?
- **Refuse the shortcut** that treats people as tools (**mishpat**).
- **Restore dignity** where you've diminished someone (**tzedakah**).
- **Practice covenant chesed:** keep showing up in loyal love.
- **Offer an embodied “yes”** to God—obedience as trust, not payment.

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Class 5 — Ishmael and Circumcision (Genesis 16–17)

Where we are in the story

Genesis 1–11 shows a world unraveling (Eden → Flood → Babel). God does not abandon the nations. Instead, He begins restoring blessing through one family—Abram's.

Last week (Genesis 15) God gave covenant assurance: the promise rests on God's faithfulness, even as Abram is formed into trusting loyalty.

Where we are going today

- Genesis 16 — Hagar & Ishmael: a “seed solution” that turns into anti-shalom.
- Genesis 17 — God reaffirms and seals the covenant: Shaddai, new names, the promised heir clarified.
- The covenant sign: circumcision as an embodied marker of covenant identity.

What to look for (triangle diagnostics)

- How does Abram (and Sarai) misuse power (mishpat)?
- How is the promise threatened by fear and grasping (shalom)?
- How does God respond to the oppressed and unseen (tzedakah + hesed)?
- Where do we see “faithful trust made visible,” not merit or performance?

Genesis 16 — When fear tries to secure the promise

Sarai names her barrenness as something YHWH has “restrained” and proposes a shortcut through Hagar. The language echoes Eden: “he listened... she took... she gave.” What begins as a plan for the promise becomes a fracture of relationships.

Watch the anti-shalom spiral

- A person becomes a label: Hagar → “the slave-girl.”
- Control language replaces care: “in your hand.”
- Self-justifying permission replaces mishpat: “do what is good in your eyes.”
- The outcome is affliction and flight.

Genesis 16 — God sees (El Roi)

God meets Hagar in the wilderness, names her, and promises a future. The story's shock is not only that God keeps the promise moving, but that God also restores dignity to the one most easily discarded.

“You are the God who sees me.” (Gen 16:13)

Outcry and affliction are not invisible to YHWH.

A recurring Genesis pattern (Eden-shaped grasping)

- Promise given → tension/delay → fear of vulnerability → grasping shortcut → consequences.
- God remains faithful, but redirects the story back toward His way.

Genesis 17 — Covenant reaffirmed and clarified

After the Ishmael chapter, God appears as El Shaddai and calls Abram to “walk before me” and be wholehearted (tamim)—integrity/undivided loyalty, not sinless perfection.

“Walk before me and be wholehearted.” (Gen 17:1)

God’s commitments (promise)

- Seed: a people and a future beyond human capacity.
- Place: land as inheritance and training ground for covenant life.
- Mission: blessing that reaches the nations.

Abraham’s commitments (response)

- Faithful trust (Gen 15:6 lived out as loyal walking).
- Guard the way of YHWH by mishpat and tzedakah (Gen 18:19).
- Keep the covenant sign (Gen 17): an embodied ‘yes,’ not a payment.

Circumcision (Gen 17:9–14) — sign and covenant boundary

Circumcision is called the “sign of the covenant.” It marks covenant identity in the body and guards the community’s boundaries. Refusal is described as covenant violation and results in being “cut off” from covenant participation.

Key idea: the identity is established before the behavior is realized—God marks a people for His promise, then forms them to walk His way.

What can we do this week?

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- Refuse the shortcut that treats people as tools (mishpat).
- Restore dignity where you’ve diminished someone (tzedakah).
- Practice covenant hesed: keep showing up in loyal love.
- Offer an embodied “yes” to God—obedience as trust, not payment.

Discussion starter

Where are you tempted to grasp for control instead of trusting God’s timing—and who might be affected by that grasping?