

**Lesson Focus:**

We can depend on God's eternal promises.

Lesson Scripture:

Genesis 8:20-22; 9:8-17

Lesson Path



1 *Life Connection:*
Know that God makes promises and keeps them.

2 *Bible Exploration:*
Consider why and how God makes promises.

Suggested material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit:*
Poster and reproducible sheet—
Signs of God's Covenants

3 *Bible Interaction:*
Think about the dependability of God's promises.

Suggested material:

■ Bibles, pens or pencils

4 *Life Response:*
Learn to depend on God and His promises.

Suggested material:

■ Index cards, pens

Teacher's Devotional

Remembering God's Promises

If you're anything like me, your memory is not quite what it used to be. I need reminders. I have to look at my calendar each day to see what appointments I have, what responsibilities I have; in fact, even to know what day it is! I have to set my timer so I won't forget to go hang up the clothes before they get wrinkled. I have to set an alarm to remind myself to get to a meeting on time, or to take pills. I am so forgetful.

And we, as a people, are so forgetful. How quickly we forget that God is Creator of all, and Giver of all good gifts, and the Author of our Salvation. He knew we would need reminders so we would not forget Him or His goodness to us.

In today's lesson, we learn that God provided a beautiful promise—and a beautiful reminder in a rainbow—so people could easily remember His promise. Whenever a rainbow appears in the sky, we remember that God promised to never destroy the earth again by a flood.

Later, God made an incredible promise to Abram. Today, when we see the stars in the night sky, we can be reminded of it. "He took him outside and said, 'Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be' " (Gen. 15:5).

God uses the sky as a billboard to remind us of His promises! We are a forgetful people, but there are helpful reminders everywhere. They help us remember His eternal promises.

Understanding the Bible

Genesis 6—8 records the story of the great flood God sent upon the earth, destroying all human and animal life except for Noah, and his family, and the animals on the ark.

The flood came as the result of the great wickedness and widespread violence in the pre-flood world. The extent of the evil grieved the Lord. It made Him sorry He had created mankind. Noah was the lone exception. The text says he found "favor" with the Lord (6:8). The reference to 120 years in 6:3 probably depicts the time of Noah's preaching

as well as the period in which he built the ark, most likely with help from his sons. He built the ark according to the instructions received from the Lord.

God sent the flood waters just as He warned, but spared Noah along with his sons, their wives, and many animals along with them. They spent an entire year on the large boat while the flood waters ravaged the earth. The text of this lesson covers the time after they were again on dry ground. God responded to Noah's act of worship by promising never again to send a flood to destroy the entire earth.



Step 1

Life Connection

Know that God makes promises and keeps them

As Your Students Arrive

Have your arriving class members think about where they place their trust. Have them make a list on a 3 x 5 card of the people, places, and things around them that they identify with, depend on, or value above all. Though they may list God, and God's Word, this exercise is for them to think carefully on the earthly things on which they depend (i.e. looks, health, intelligence, a relationship, their home, investments, etc.) They will use this list in Step 4.

Link to Last Week

Let your students share about any barriers they overcame this past week to reach people for Jesus.

Ask your students to read the anecdote and then form a discussion group to talk about **Questions 1, 2, and 3.**

In Question 1, have your students consider that God's promises are agreements with humanity that reveal who He is and what He is doing. God interacts with His people, and they join Him through a covenant relationship as He offers them hope and a future through His promises.

For Question 2, God's promises are long-standing, completely trustworthy, and show His continuing care and concern for us. We learn much about God's character from His promises.

For Question 3, God's promises and God's character are intimately connected. Have your class list some of God's attributes and discuss how these might affect the strength of His promises. God is eternal, faithful, consistent, constant, and true. He is also eternal. His promises are dependable and sure because He is.

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LESSON 1

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Making a Promise

The couple stands before me (the minister officiating their wedding ceremony) having already said "I do" to vows in which they've pledged their covenant to each other "in all love and honor, in all duty and service, in all faith and tenderness, to live with you and cherish you, according to the ordinance of God, in the holy bond of marriage." They've already promised to live together in the covenant of marriage through sickness and in health. They've already promised to forsake all others and to be faithful to each other as long as they both shall live.

Then, as they prepare to place a wedding ring on each other's finger, I say, "For hundreds of years, men and women have exchanged rings as a token of their wedding vows. These simple bands are not of great value in and of themselves. But what they stand for now and what they will come to mean over time is beyond price. The great circle of life itself is symbolized in these small circles you will place on each other's finger. Their circles represent form and wholeness. They mark the beginning of a long journey together filled with wonder, surprises, laughter, tears, sorrow, joy, frustration, and fulfillment. Wear them that you may know—and the world may know—you are pledged together through all these things in enduring love and commitment." And thus the couple's rings become a symbol of their vows—of their commitment to fulfill their promises to each other.

And such was the promise God made to Noah through a rainbow in the clouds. And such is the promise God makes to us now through the cross of Jesus Christ. It is His eternal pledge to sustain us throughout our long journey and to save us for all eternity.

1. *Why does God make promises?*
2. *Why is it important to know about and understand God's promises?*
3. *How dependable are God's promises?*

LESSON FOCUS: We can depend on God's eternal promises.



Step 2

Bible Exploration

Consider why and how God makes promises



From your Teacher's Resource Kit, put up the poster, "Signs of God's Covenants" and make copies of the handout that goes with it. Read the first two paragraphs on the

handout and note the photo of the rainbow in Israel on the poster.

The mention of summer and winter in verse 22 would thus be something new for Noah's family. For the first time, they would experience changes in season with hot summers and cold winters complete with snow and ice. God promised this cycle of nature would continue without the threat of another world-wide flood.

Now answer **Questions 4 and 5.**

4. What made Noah's burnt offering a costly sacrifice?

(Suggested Answer) Because of the limited

Noah Pleases God with His Offering

Read Genesis 8:20-22 and look at these points of God's character and Noah's:

- Noah's first act after leaving the ark was to worship God.
- Noah built an altar, sacrificed some of his animals, and offered them on the altar.
- God was pleased by this act of worship.
- God resolved in His heart to never again curse the ground, nor destroy all living creatures because of mankind.
- Though God understood that people's hearts and imagination are fully evil, He promised to continue the cycles of nature as long as earth remains.

* BIBLE COMMENTARY

The Change in Climate

Some commentators believe God changed the climate of the earth with the sending of the flood. Before the flood, it is possible that a heavy vapor canopy covered the earth keeping temperatures steady without the wide variation we see today. This vapor canopy produced the environment that allowed people to live well over 900 years. In this theory, rain did not occur before the flood, but a heavy dew came up at night to water all the vegetation.

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Noah Pleases God with His Offering

Genesis 8:20-22, KJV

20 And Noah built an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

21 And the LORD a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.

22 While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.

Genesis 8:20-22, NIV

²⁰Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. ²¹The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done."

²²"As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease."

After being in the ark about 53 weeks, we can only imagine the relief Noah and his family felt as they stepped out of the large boat onto dry land. They likely experienced some apprehension knowing God had just wiped out the entire human race except for them. What if the Lord became displeased with them? Would He send another flood to wipe them out as well?

As expressed by Noah's offering to the Lord, the family also felt much gratitude for their deliverance. Noah's first recorded act after the flood was to build an altar and offer some of each kind of the clean animals as a burnt sacrifice unto the Lord (vs. 20). Considering that Noah only took seven pairs of clean animals on the ark with him (Gen. 7:2), his offering represented a sizable portion of his herd of livestock at the time. The costly sacrifice showed his continuing faith as well as his dependence on the Lord for his family's survival.

The aroma of Noah's burnt offering pleased God. The prayer and gratitude of Noah, represented by the odor of the sacrifice, led the Lord to promise He would never again destroy all life with

number of clean animals available after the flood, Noah's offering represented a significant portion of his herd. He took seven pairs of each on the ark with him and even if we assume they were still all alive, his offering was very costly. Rather than hold back because of the smallness of his herd, he freely offered up some of each kind of clean animal in thanksgiving and in worship to the Lord.

5. How did the Lord respond to Noah's offering?

(Suggested Answer) God responded favorably to Noah's sacrifice. The text says the Lord smelled the "pleasing aroma" of the sacrifice and then promised He would never again destroy all living creatures with such a catastrophic flood. We know from Isaiah 1:11-20 that burnt offerings by themselves do not please the Lord apart from a true worshipful attitude of the heart. The Lord responded positively because Noah's heart reflected his humble gratitude and sincere worship. The offering set the stage for God to make His covenant with Noah, his family, and all his descendants after him.

God Establishes a Covenant with Noah

Read Genesis 9:8-11 and note the details of this covenant:

- God spoke to Noah and his sons to establish a covenant with them, their descendants, and every living creature on earth.
- God promised that never again would there be a flood that destroys all life.

* BIBLE COMMENTARY Covenants

In the Old Testament, God frequently formalized His relationship with mankind through the use of covenants. In these, God bound Himself to the promises that He made with Noah, Abraham, and later with the entire nation of Israel.

Some of these covenants were conditional, but many were unconditional binding oaths where the Lord took the sole responsibility for fulfilling all the terms of the covenant.

The covenant with Noah and his descendants was unconditional. While he gave many instructions throughout the passage, the context states that the promise would be in effect as long as the earth existed (8:32). This covenant uniquely included not only Noah and all his descendants, but the animal kingdom as well.

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a flood. The Lord's pledge in verse 21 to never again "curse the ground" did not imply a reversal of His curse of the ground after Adam sinned. This promise signified no further judgment as the result of the wickedness in the pre-flood world.

The mention of the evil "inclination" (vs. 21) of the human heart is significant. The Lord did not establish the covenant with Noah thinking men and women would behave much better as a result of His worldwide judgment. Quite the contrary, His gracious promise came in spite of the human inclination toward evil. God likely saw Jesus' future sacrifice as represented by Noah's costly offering.

4. What made Noah's burnt offering a costly sacrifice?

5. How did the Lord respond to Noah's offering?

God Establishes a Covenant with Noah

Genesis 9:8-11, KJV

8 And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying,

9 And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you;

10 And with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth.

11 And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.

Genesis 9:8-11, NIV

⁸Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: ⁹"I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you ¹⁰and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."

Genesis 9 begins with God's blessing on Noah and his sons. Before getting into the specifics of the covenant, the Lord gave



Step 2

Bible Exploration

Consider why and how God makes promises

Now discuss together the answer to **Question 6.**

6. Who did God make responsible for keeping the covenant He made with Noah and all of his descendants?

(Suggested Answer) God made an unconditional covenant with Noah and all His descendants. He did not place conditions upon Noah and his descendants nor did He state that the promise would continue as long as they obeyed. Instead, He bound Himself to the oath requiring no response from Noah or the generations to follow in order to keep it in place. He alone guaranteed the continuance of His promise.

God Provides a Sign of the Covenant

Read Gen. 9:12-17 and think about the beautiful sign of this covenant as you summarize the passage with your class:

- God announced that there will be a visible sign of this perpetual covenant He made with Noah and all living creatures.
- God set His rainbow in the clouds as a reminder of this promise.
- God repeated to Noah that the rainbow is the sign of this everlasting covenant.

* BIBLE COMMENTARY

The Rainbow

From other contexts, we see the rainbow signifies something of God's character. When Ezekiel saw his magnificent vision of God, he saw a rainbow shining around Him (Ezek. 1:26-28). The apostle John also saw a rainbow when heaven opened and he saw God sitting on His throne (Rev. 4:3). In choosing the rainbow as a sign of the covenant, the Lord chose a sacred reminder representing His magnificence and multi-faceted beauty.

More than that, the rainbow displays God's grace. Fully aware

of the inclination of men and women toward evil (8:21), He nevertheless made a covenant never to destroy all flesh with a flood. Similarly, when God now looks at believers whose sins have been washed away in the blood of the Lamb, He sees His Son and the very righteousness of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:21). Just as the rainbow reminds God of His covenant with Noah, the blood of Christ reminds the Father of the new covenant and His promise to wash away all our sins.

Finally, conclude this step discussing with

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them instructions regarding the animals as well as their diet. He instituted capital punishment to deter violence from flaring up as it did before the flood. God then established a covenant with Noah and all his descendants. Under the terms of the covenant, the Lord unconditionally promised to never again destroy all life with such a universal flood (9:8-11).

The Lord put the burden solely upon Himself for keeping the covenant; He did not list conditions for Noah and his descendants to keep. The promise for Noah and all the generations after him, including us, depends solely upon God. He made the promise and He alone will keep it.

God made the covenant with Noah to assure him and his family of their continued safety from such a worldwide catastrophe. Interestingly, God included the animals in His covenant with Noah. God's gracious promise included protection of all His created order. He would never again send such a flood upon the earth.

6. Who did God make responsible for keeping the covenant He made with Noah and all of his descendants?

God Provides a Sign of the Covenant

Genesis 9:12-17, KJV

12 And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations:

13 I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.

14 And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud:

15 And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no

Genesis 9:12-17, NIV

¹²And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come:

¹³I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. ¹⁶Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I

your class the answers to **Questions 7 and 8.**

7. How is the rainbow an appropriate sign of God's promise to never again destroy humanity with a flood?

(Suggested Answer) By connecting the sign of His promise to rain, the Lord provided a sign that reminded them of His promise at the time they would need it the most. Having just experienced such a devastating flood, Noah and his family would have been most fearful when it began to rain, when they heard thunder, or when they saw lightning. The Lord appropriately connected the sign with activity most likely to cause fear in the hearts of Noah's family, especially in the weeks and months after the flood.

8. What is the significance of all the repetition regarding God's promise and the sign of His covenant?

(Suggested Answer) With the memories of the flood so fresh in the minds of Noah and his family, the next several rainstorms would cause anxiety and fears in their hearts. The Lord thus emphatically and repeatedly makes His case throughout the text that He will never again destroy all life with a great flood. Although He knew the inclination of the human heart (8:21), His amazing grace resonates through in His promise to Noah and all generations after him, including us, that there would never again be such a flood.

* WINDOW ON THE WORD

Though the Mountains Be Shaken

The Lord recalls the circumstances and His promise to Noah many years later as He turns in compassion to His people in words recorded by the prophet Isaiah. The covenant with Noah contained the clause "as long as the earth endures" (Gen. 8:22). But God promises here that no matter what happens to the earth His love will never fail, never waiver, and His covenant of peace will never be taken away:

*"To me this is like the days of Noah,
when I swore that the waters of Noah would
never again cover the earth.
So now I have sworn not to be angry with
you,
never to rebuke you again.
Though the mountains be shaken
and the hills be removed,
yet my unfailing love for you will not be
shaken
nor my covenant of peace be removed,'
says the LORD, who has compassion on you"
(Isa. 54:9-10).*

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KJV

more become a flood to destroy all flesh.

16 And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.

17 And God said unto Noah, This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.

NIV

will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth." ¹⁷So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth."

The Lord gave the rainbow as a sign of the covenant to remind Noah and his descendants of His pledge. The sign would occur in connection with the activity Noah's family would fear the most in the coming weeks and months—rainstorms. After the rain, they would see the rainbow as a reminder of God's promise never again to flood the entire earth. The rainbow reminds us, as well, of God's covenant to never again flood the entire earth.

A scientific explanation of the rainbow does not diminish its significance. After all, who created the very processes that cause rainbows to appear? For Noah and his family, the rainbow was something new as well as a perpetual reminder of God's promise to them. Today, we still have God's beautiful reminder of His covenant with Noah.

God's repeated assurances regarding this covenant and the rainbow show His gracious concern for Noah and family. With memories of the flood so fresh on their minds, He made sure they did not miss His assurances regarding the future. The rainbow would provide a repeated and gracious reminder of God's promise never again to destroy all life with a flood.

7. How is the rainbow an appropriate sign of God's promise to never again destroy humanity with a flood?

8. What is the significance of all the repetition regarding God's promise and the sign of His covenant?



Step 3

Bible Interaction

Think about the dependability of God's promises

Let students select the activity they would like to do. Photocopy this page, cut out the boxes, and give instructions to each group.

Discussion Group

Read "The Lord Smelled the Pleasing Aroma" and answer **Questions 9, 10, 11, and 12.** God's promises come straight from His character. A careful look at this passage reveals much of God's holiness, righteousness, and kindness. The strength and complete dependability of this promise and all the promises in God's Word rest squarely on the solid shoulders of who God is. We have the opportunity to know Him a little better in this lesson and to think about our attitude toward Him and the promises He has made to us.

Covenants and Promises

Assign one of the following Scriptures to each person in your group. Have your group members read the covenant or promise silently, and then write out in their own words a summary of what the Scripture says. When they are finished, have them read the passage aloud to the group with their summary, then talk about the difference between God's covenants and His promises. *Covenants:* Genesis 9:9-11; 17:1-8; Exodus 19: 5-6; Deuteronomy 7:6-12; Hebrews 9:14-15
Promises: 1 Chronicles 17:11-14; Acts 1:4-5, 8; 1:10-11

Promises Quotation

Read this quotation from Thomas Brooks, then discuss what we learn about God's promises from it: "Satan promises the best, but pays with the worst; he promises honor, and pays with disgrace; he promises pleasure, and pays with pain; he promises profit, and pays with loss; he promises life, and pays with death. But God pays as He promises; all His payments are made in pure gold."

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The Lord Smelled the Pleasing Aroma

We learn a lot about the Lord in these passages of the flood. We are told that He regrets, grieves, sees, speaks, smells, is pleased, thinks to Himself, and remembers. He interacts with Noah and his sons. He makes a binding agreement with them. Though we know that God is not a man, great truth is shown about Him here.

God is personal and involved. He is paying attention. With eyes that see into places where light does not penetrate, He perceives the inclinations of human hearts. He "breathes in" with pleasure Noah's worship and devotion. He "walks" with those who stay close. He speaks with words that do not fade away but have substance and life in themselves. He makes promises and pledges to a small family and to the animals. His power, holiness, and almighty "otherness" are revealed here, and so are His tender personal care, gracious interaction, and comforting promises.

How do we then respond to Him?

We can learn a few things from Noah. The one who found favor with God before the flood had walked with Him for a long time. Noah worshiped God in a way that touched God because he knew that God alone had saved him and his family. There was only one appropriate thing to do—build an altar and offer back to God something precious, some of the last life that was left on earth. Noah did not hold back. This is not obedience, but is the type of faith that trusts completely in the God who provides, and the type of love that is poured out.

We know from later passages that Noah was no perfect man. But he models for us someone who stayed close to God and trusted Him. Noah worshiped from a heart that was full. He and his family had been saved from utter destruction by God's grace alone, and so have we. We are in the exact same boat as Noah.

9. What do you learn about God from this account?

10. What do you learn from Noah?

11. How does Noah's act of worship make you look at your own worship of God?

12. Do you think that God is dependable? Do you think that God will change His mind? Do you have trouble trusting in God's provision? Why?



Step 4

Life Response

Learn to depend on God and His promises

Noah was trusting in God's promise before and throughout the flood. God told him, "Everything on earth will perish. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives...and of every kind of creature...will come to you to be kept alive" (Gen. 6:17b-18, 20b). Noah obeyed, trusting completely in God's promise through epic circumstances. God expanded this promise after the flood, and made more promises to human-kind after that. These are exceedingly great and precious promises. It is wise to be familiar with them, and wise to know that, "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" (Num. 23:19).

Have your students read "Build an Altar" and do the exercise that follows. They may write on the back of a card their honest response. You might share yours. They may keep the cards and prayerfully think about what they wrote this coming week. Those items that make them the most nervous to let go of are most likely the ones that are their greatest hindrance.

As you close in prayer for your students you might ask God to write His Word upon their hearts, that they would come to know Him more intimately each day, and that "his very great and precious promises" (2 Pet. 1:4) would become more and more real to them. You might say, "Help us, Lord, to depend completely on You, and to worship You in ways that please You. Teach us to walk with You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen."



As the class members are leaving, hand out copies of this week's *Power for Living*. Take copies of *Lesson Leaflet* to those who were not able to meet with you today.

* PREPARING FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Read Genesis 17:1-14 and ask your students to think about the word *inheritance* and the kinds of things that are inherited, both physical and non physical.

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Build an Altar

Noah was able to worship in a God-pleasing manner in part because he had learned to give back to God what was His and to trust God with all provision. Noah understood his complete dependence on God. We are much like Noah. We have been rescued and delivered to a safe shore through Christ. All that is needed has been provided. All that God has promised comes true. God is sufficient. We can depend completely on Him.

► *Imagine that you are Noah and have survived an epic disaster. Build an altar in your mind. Put on it things that you are clinging to like a piece of floating driftwood in the sea rather than trusting in God's promises. You can write here or on a 3 x 5 card some of the things you are putting on that altar.*

KEY VERSE

And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth. —Genesis 9:11, KJV

"I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth." —Genesis 9:11, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(See *The Quiet Hour* for devotionals on these passages.)

September 4 through September 10

Mon. Acts 7:1-8—Circumcision Event Remembered.

Tues. Romans 4:13-25—God's Promise Realized through Faith.

Wed. Hebrews 8:1-8—Jesus, Mediator of a Better Covenant.

Thurs. Genesis 17:1-14—God's Covenant with Abraham Reaffirmed.

Fri. Genesis 17:15-17—Sarai (Sarah), Mother of Many Nations.

Sat. Genesis 17:20-22—Ishmael, Father of a Nation.

Sun. Genesis 17:23-27—All Males of Abraham's Household Circumcised.