



BRIDGES

Connecting God's Word to Life

Adult Leader's Guide

Using BRIDGES

Whether you consider yourself a “teacher” or a “leader” or all the members of your group share the responsibility for your weekly meetings, each session of BRIDGES Curriculum has steps that are easy to follow as you encounter and are impacted by the truth of the Scriptures:

1. **CONNECT**—The session will begin with a discussion or activity to connect group members with one another and with the day’s topic.
2. **STUDY**—Next, you will read and study the Bible Passage, with background and commentary to provide insight and take you deep in the Word and also questions to get group members talking.
3. **APPLY**—The session will then move on to another discussion or activity to help group members consider how the things you have studied apply to their own context and situations.
4. **LIVE**—You will wrap things up with a final discussion or activity to prepare group members to live out the things you have discussed and learned.

Your Bibles, your books, and pencils or pens will be the only things needed, but from time to time we will suggest optional supplies that might be incorporated.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

Here are some additional resources to enhance your experience with BRIDGES Curriculum:

- ***Pathways: Moments with God***—A daily devotional guide, published quarterly and following the Bible Readings in BRIDGES.
- **Resource Kit**—Color posters illustrating the quarter’s lessons.
- ***Bible Backgrounds***—A compilation of Dr. Merle Strege’s Bible Background material published in BRIDGES over the years.
- ***Standard Lesson Commentary***—Includes detailed lesson backgrounds, verse-by-verse commentary, and extra discussion questions for the entire curriculum year (Fall through Summer).

Each of these resources can be purchased through Warner Press at **1-800-741-7721** or **warnerpress.org**.

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ADULT TEACHER

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This quarter considers the major covenants God made with people on behalf of the earth and the human community. Beginning with Noah, God promised benevolence toward creation. Similar commitments were made with Abram, Phinehas, and Ezekiel. Ultimately, God's covenant formed the foundation for the coming Messiah and salvation for the world.

Unit I

"Signs of God's Covenants" is a four-lesson study drawn from Genesis and Ezekiel and celebrating four signs of God's covenant. Promising to renew the cycle of seasons, God created the rainbow as a permanent reminder of the covenant with every living thing. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant with Abram, and the Sabbath was the sign of the covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. The last sign was the Spirit-filled heart.

Unit II

"Called into Covenant with God" has five lessons drawn from Genesis, Exodus, 2 Samuel, and Nehemiah, illustrating God's partnership with people who respond and agree to obey his voice. God entered into covenant with Abraham, Moses, and David to work through history, establishing a kingdom that would ultimately bring forth the Messiah. Based on the covenant with God, Israel was chosen as God's special people.

Unit III

"An Everlasting Covenant" includes four lessons drawn from Numbers, 1 Samuel, Jeremiah, Hebrews, and 1 Corinthians, examining the components of the covenant God made with Phinehas the priest and the divine promise to Israel through the prophet Jeremiah. The unconditional divine promises were to maintain a perpetual priesthood, forgive the unfaithful, and establish a new covenant with God's people. The Lord sealed the covenant of pure grace through Christ as mediator and by writing the law on the hearts of God's people.

Signs of God's Covenants

Covenants are often established with “signs”—visual reminders of the promises that have been made. Some of God’s covenants may seem complex to us, but their accompanying signs can be understood by children, and the principles of these covenants can be grasped and applied by people of various levels of faith.

Week 1 studies God’s use of the rainbow to assure Noah that neither humankind nor the earth would ever again be destroyed by water. The rainbow should still remind us of God’s faithfulness and of the physical security of the world he has given us to live in.

Week 2 explores God’s use of circumcision to ratify an everlasting covenant between the Lord and Abram to make him and his descendants prosperous if they would walk with God and live blameless lives. The people originally marked by circumcision would become the nation through which Christ the Messiah was born.

Week 3 examines God’s command to Moses and the Israelites to rest on the Sabbath and keep it holy as a sign of their reverence to God. Whatever time period we have to rest each week, we do well to honor the principle of setting time aside to recharge ourselves and to honor the Lord.

Week 4 looks at God’s promise to give his people new hearts and put a new spirit inside of them. This spirit is the very Spirit of God, and it enables us to follow the decrees and laws of the Lord “from the heart.”

Writing contributors for Unit I:

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The Rainbow

What Is Our Study about Today?

After tragedy strikes, there are possibilities for people to seek renewed hope and strength to rebuild their lives. God used the rainbow to assure Noah that neither humankind nor the earth would ever again be destroyed by water.

Goals of the Session

1. To comprehend the significance of the rainbow as an assurance of God's grace.
2. To appreciate God's ability and willingness to renew our lives following difficult times.
3. To worship God gratefully in light of God's continued promises of mercy and grace.

Bible Passages: Genesis 8:20–22; 9:8–17

What Topics Will Be Discussed? Covenant, God's faithfulness, security.

Optional Supplies

1. **Connect:** Driver's license, ballgame or concert ticket, diploma, credit card, marriage certificate
2. **Study:** Resource Kit: poster, "Under Construction"

BIBLE BACKGROUND

The idea of covenant figures prominently in today's biblical text. English and American Puritans noted the importance of covenant as the means for ordering the relationship between God and humanity and among human beings as well. The "covenant of grace," as Puritans termed it, ultimately rested on a "covenant of redemption" made between God the Father and God the Son from all eternity.

Long before there were Puritans, the idea that God entered into covenants with human beings profoundly shaped the faith of Israel. The Hebrew word for covenant is *berith*. Likely this word originated in the Akkadian term *biritu*, which means "to bind" or "to fetter." In the ancient world—within Israel but also without—covenants were extremely important means of regulating behavior by formally stating the relationship between two parties and also making promises based on each party's fulfillment of covenant obligations. Thus God covenanted with Noah, which is to say that God made promises. As we find it in today's lesson, this covenant was unilateral; the promises were all on God's side. In that sense, this covenant was absolute because Noah was not given conditions that he had to meet to keep it in force. Everything depended on the word of the promising God.

Familiarity with the idea of covenant should not obscure the wonder that the Lord God of the universe would bind himself to human beings. That God would voluntarily enter into a binding agreement with creatures of his own making is an expression of divine grace and goodness. There was nothing from Noah's side that could compel God to act in that way. Noah had nothing to bring to the table, yet God still promised and declared his intention to enter into covenant.

It might be tempting to describe a covenant as a form of contract, but this would miss the mark. Covenant in the Old Testament connotes neither insurance nor contractual obligations. The covenant is intended to assure, not insure. Thus the great preacher of the ancient church, John Chrysostom, wrote: "God's purpose, therefore, was to eliminate all apprehension from Noah's thinking and for him to be quite assured that this [a general life-destroying flood] would not happen again."¹

1. Quoted in Andrew Louth, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament, I, Genesis 1–11* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 154.

Steps to Achieving Goals

1 CONNECT

Open the session by inviting students to read about and respond to the covenants listed in the **Connect** activity. Ask, **Which of these have you entered into? Which are most important to you right now?** If possible, you might pass around such items as a driver's license, a ballgame or concert ticket, a diploma, a credit card, a marriage certificate, and a Bible. Ask, **What do all of these items have in common?** They all seem to be making promises. They stand for agreements. For example, when you present your ticket for a concert, the promise to admit you to the program will be fulfilled. In the case of a driver's license, a government body has promised you the right to drive an automobile on public roads as long as you drive safely and keep the traffic laws. These examples are designed to suggest to the class how surrounded we are in daily life by agreements.

Say, **One special word that suggests the idea that there are ties between people involving promises is *covenant*.**

Notes:

CONNECT

Covenants are generally understood to be agreements between two parties, usually for the benefit of both. In a covenant, one party usually promises to do something for the other in return for an appropriate response. Here is a list of items that might be called covenants. Check those you have personally experienced. Circle the four that you think are the most important.

- a. ____ A home mortgage
- b. ____ A marriage certificate
- c. ____ A ticket for a concert
- d. ____ A driver's license
- e. ____ The New Testament
- f. ____ A promise to teach a Sunday school class
- g. ____ A vacuum cleaner warranty
- h. ____ A note from an old sweetheart
- i. ____ A graduation certificate
- j. ____ A credit or debit card
- k. ____ Raising children to adulthood
- l. ____ Citizenship in your country



Notes:

2 STUDY

Read together Genesis 8:20–22 and 9:8–17, using the Bible Commentary in the *Study* activity to provide insight and context and facilitate discussion. Following are some points and questions you may wish to incorporate:

STUDY

I. Genesis 8:20–22, No More Curse

KJV

Genesis 8:20 And Noah builded 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 smelled 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.

NIV

Genesis 8:20 Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it.

21 The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human 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.”

20 In gratitude for surviving the flood, **Noah built and altar to the Lord and...sacrificed burnt offerings on it.** When entering the ark, God had Noah take extra of those animals that would have been acceptable for eating and also for sacrifice (Gen 7:2). It must have been a great feeling to stand on dry land again after so many months.

21–22 The sacrifice “reminded” God of his care for his creation, and it elicited a promise. In spite of the **inclination of humans to do evil**, the Lord would not **destroy all living creatures** as he had done through the flood. **As long as the earth** lasts, the seasons and even **day and night will** continue.

We no longer sacrifice animals to God since Jesus became the “once-for-all” sacrifice for sin (Heb 10:1–18). Paul said we should offer ourselves as “living sacrifices” to God (Rom 12:1–2).

Wicked attitudes and actions are nothing new. We should be thankful for God’s patience in waiting for people to come to salvation (2 Pet 3:9).

We don’t offer burnt offerings to the Lord, so what things constitute an “acceptable sacrifice” for us?

Notes:

How do you think the wickedness in today’s world compares to that in Noah’s time? Explain.

The “remembering” referred to in Genesis 9:15 is not so focused on God remembering to keep a promise as on emphasizing *why* he made the promise: God cares for us. God remains in gracious commitment to us. God is not preoccupied with himself; he is focused on his covenant partners, the creatures he has made.

In what ways have God’s “living creatures” been a blessing to you personally?

II. Genesis 9:8–10, A Covenant with the Creatures

KJV	NIV
9:8 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.	9:8 Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: 9 “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you 10 and 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.

Noah and his family needed encouragement after the devastation that wiped out the rest of humanity. God encouraged them to repopulate the decimated land (Gen 9:1). A family and numerous descendants were considered to be signs of God’s favor. That is what God wanted for Noah and Noah’s sons. The Lord proclaimed that he was going to make a promise, an agreement, a covenant with **Noah** that would extend to Noah’s **sons** and all of their descendants and would cover **every living creature**. God’s promise was inclusive; he cares for each of his creatures, and each has a place in the ongoing plan.

III. Genesis 9:11–15, No More Flood

KJV	NIV
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. 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	11 I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.” 12 And 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:

Notes:

KJV continued

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 more become a flood to destroy all flesh.

NIV continued

13 I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

14 Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds,

15 I 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.

11 God's **covenant** was stated in terms of a promise related to the **flood**, but it had the broader purpose of granting a sense of security to God's people. It was given without strings. God was simply making a promise and not demanding any specific behavior in response. As with all biblical covenants, it was a statement of dependable relationship between God and his people.

12–15 Like other covenants forged by God, this one had a symbol that accompanied it. The **rainbow** that came with **the clouds** of a storm would remind both God and his people of the promise made. No unlimited flood would ever again **destroy all life** on earth. God would always be concerned about the security of his people and the rest of his creation. Some people have supposed that God created the rainbow at this time in order to be a symbol of the covenant that was being set in place, but nothing in the text makes that a necessary conclusion. In fact, the Bible is full of instances in which God gave new meaning to something that was already in existence. For example, the Lord's Supper, instituted by Jesus, utilized elements that had been in use for generations as part of the Jewish observance of Passover. The Jewish observance of Pentecost, which was connected to the giving of the Mosaic Law, took on new meaning for the New Testament church on the day the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles and other followers of Christ.

God works through nature, through people, and directly in order to accomplish his will. God often works in ways we don't understand or are not aware of.

If God has perfect knowledge, in what sense does he “remember” his covenant when he sees a rainbow?

Does it make any difference whether the rainbow existed before God made this covenant? Why or why not?

Notes:

Jesus said that God cares for even the sparrows (Matt 10:29–31). The creatures of this world are here for us to enjoy—not irresponsibly or carelessly but with the same concern God shows.

In what ways does God demonstrate care for all life on the earth? In response, how should we care for all life on earth?

If it is available, display this week's Resource Kit poster, "Under Construction."

IV. Genesis 9:16–17, The Rainbow Reminder

KJV

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

16 Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."

17 So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth."

As tenuous as life seems to those of us who live in the twenty-first century, it is easy for us to forget how vulnerable and precarious life must have seemed to those who lived in earlier times. We understand that tremors in the earth come in varying degrees of intensity. There are earthquakes that can bring widespread destruction, and others that do little more than rattle the dishes. There are rains that cause floods covering mile upon mile of the countryside, and some that provide gentle moisture for the dry and thirsty ground. But imagine what it would be like for those with primitive understandings of earth's weather patterns or the movements of geological plates. For people who had seen a flood that snuffed out most of the planet's life, gathering rain clouds could have caused rising dread and panic. For that reason, God assured Noah and his family—and the family of humankind—through the **rainbow**, that he would **remember** his **everlasting covenant** and never again send such a devastating flood.

Notes:

APPLY

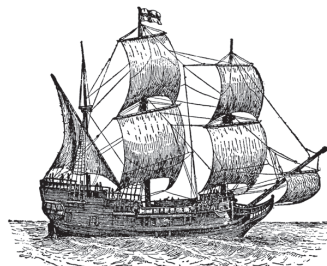
Covenants abound in the history of humankind. One of the earliest in the Judeo-Christian tradition was the covenant God gave to Noah after the flood. Another covenant was the Mayflower Compact, signed aboard the Mayflower sailing ship off Cape Cod, along the coastline of the United States, on November 11, 1620:

In the name of God, Amen. We, whose names are underwritten, the loyal subjects of our dread Sovereign Lord King James, by the Grace of God, of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, King, defender of the faith, etc.

Having undertaken, for the glory of God, and advancements of the Christian faith, and honor of our King and Country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the Northern parts of Virginia, do by these presents, solemnly and mutually, in the presence of God, and one another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic; for our better ordering, and preservation and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute, and frame, such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions, and offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the colony; unto which we promise all due submission and obedience.

In witness whereof we have hereunder subscribed our names at Cape Cod the 11th of November, in the year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord King James, of England, France, and Ireland, the eighteenth, and of Scotland the fifty-fourth.

Anno Domine 1620.



ADULT STUDENT 9

3 APPLY

Read together the *Apply* activity, then ask, **How was God's covenant with Noah different from other covenants such as this?** Here are some points of comparison and possible answers:

Authority: The covenant with Noah was issued by God under his authority. The Mayflower Compact acknowledged that the signers were subjects of King James. It resulted in an agreement whereby authority in the colony was to be shared in a government established by the signers, who would submit to the laws of the colony.

Purpose: The covenant with Noah showed God's continued care for his people. God promised them security and extended that care to future generations. The Mayflower document was planned for the general good of the colony. It pledged the signers to live for the glory of God, advance the Christian faith, and honor king and country.

Symbols: The symbol for God's continuing faithfulness was the rainbow. The symbol of the Mayflower document was a government for the Plymouth Colony with its laws, concern for justice, and struggles for democracy and freedom.

Agreements: In the Noah covenant, God alone made the promises. The Mayflower Compact called for mutual response, agreement, and obedience to any resulting laws by those who signed it. Its provisions would carry on into the life of the Plymouth Colony.

Say, **God's covenant with Noah speaks to God's continuing care for us and this world. Seeing a rainbow should remind us of this.**

ADULT TEACHER 11

4 LIVE

Covenant is a multilayered word that stirs up a lot of related thought. Look together at the **Live** activity and allow time for students to respond. Discuss additional terms that describe the idea of a covenant between us and God. Ask, **How has your understanding of covenant—particularly God's covenant with Noah—changed in light of our study today?** Invite students to respond.

As you wrap up the session, ask group members to share about times when they have experienced the faithfulness of God. Then read each of the following statements, with students reflecting how the statements reflect their own experiences:

- **I believe my life is in the hands of a mighty and loving God.**
- **I see God standing protectively beside me, not as a muscled sentinel or a guardian soldier but as an ever-present friend to give me strength.**
- **I am reminded by the rainbow, by the daily rising and setting of the sun, and by the steady flow of the seasons that a faithful God watches over his universe and over me.**
- **I feel that I am always in communication with God in a way that allows me to call on him for help 24/7.**
- **I feel God's love coming to me through his son Jesus, through his people, and through my personal relationship with the Almighty.**

Close in prayer.

Notes:

LIVE

Which of the words listed here seem to fit in best with the idea of covenant, particularly a covenant between God and us? How might some of the other words fit in more indirectly? What words can you add?

- C** Caring, Cooperating, _____
- O** Owing, Obeying, _____
- V** Verifying, Volunteering, Voicing, _____
- E** Energizing, Emphasizing, _____
- N** Noticing, Notifying, _____
- A** Anointing, Announcing, Awaking, _____
- N** Naming, Negotiating, _____
- T** Thinking, Teaching, Telling, _____

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

M	August 28	Genesis 6:1–8	Noah's Favor
T	August 29	Genesis 7:1–10	Entering the Ark
W	August 20	Genesis 8:13–19	Leaving the Ark
T	August 31	Genesis 9:1–7	Be Fruitful and Multiply
F	September 1	Matthew 24:36–44	Nobody Knows When
S	September 2	Revelation 10:1–7	The Angel Speaks
S	September 3	Genesis 8:20–22; 9:8–17	The Rainbow

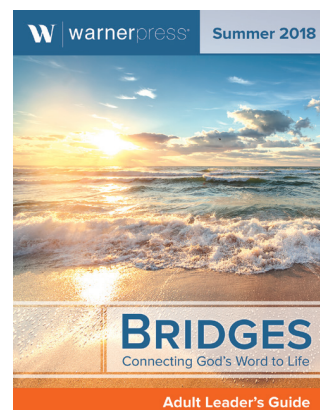
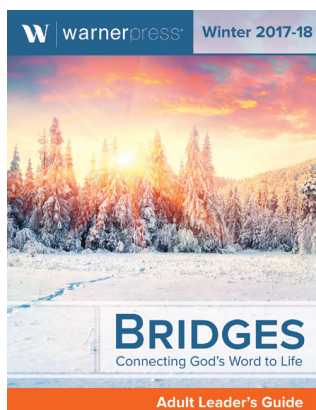
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Connect

Begin the study with discussion or activities to connect group members with one another and the day's topic.



Study

Read and study the Bible passage. Background and commentary are available to provide insights. Group questions spur discussion.



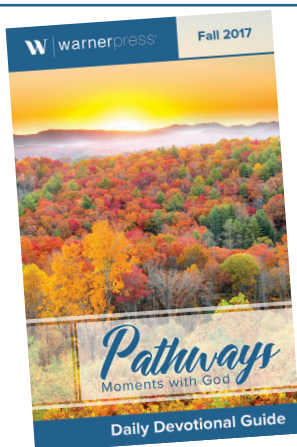
Apply

See examples of how scripture has been applied in different situations by others.



Live Out

Prepare to live out what you have discussed in your own life.



Pathways

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