

ABRAHAM: The Father of All who Believe the One True God

- ◆ Trusting in God's promises
- ◆ The destruction of Sodom
- ◆ The circumcision of males
- ◆ Origins of Jews and Arabs
- ◆ Making the right choice
- ◆ The origins of Jews and Arabs
- ◆ God's final test for Abraham
- ◆ Sacrifices for God

THIS BOOK tells us how God called Abraham to be a true believer. He promised Abraham many things. Abraham had faith in God's word and waited a long time before he saw these promises begin to come true. Through Abraham's family, Jesus Christ came into the world to save all people. This is why we say that Abraham is the father of all people who have faith in Yahweh the one true God.

MANNA PUBLICATIONS supply Bible commentaries written by Fred Morris (USA). For many years Fred, and his wife Lorna, travelled round the world teaching and preaching. When they returned home they wrote these notes for printing and selling wherever there was a need for basic Christian teaching.

THIS REVISED UK edition is written in easy-to-read Worldwide English which will add understanding and also speed up translation into other languages. It gives basic teaching for all readers plus additional notes for Bible students, teachers and pastors.

THESE BOOKS are to use on your own or to study in a group. They will teach you God's truth. They will help you to know God's Son, Jesus Christ. They will help you to talk about your faith in God. They will stop you from going the wrong way in life. They will tell you what is right and what is wrong. They will help to lead you closer to Christ. They provide food for life..

WE PRAY that you may have a new peace and purpose in life as you read the Bible and use these commentaries.

Manna Publications

FOUNDATIONAL BIBLE COMMENTARIES

"The secret of God's Kingdom has been given to you" (Mark 4:11)

ABRAHAM

The Father of All who Believe the One True God

A Bible Commentary in easy-to-read Worldwide English for personal or group study

by Fred Morris



Genesis Part 2: Chapters 11 to 22

To the reader or leader

These Bible commentaries explain the truth about God's Word in a way which is easy to read and understand. You can use these books to study the Bible on your own or with others in a group. In a group study, each person should have his or her own book and a Bible if possible. There is a lot of information in this book. Please study it slowly and thoughtfully. Ask God to help you apply the things you learn into your own life and situation.



Where you see this sign, it means you or your group leader should always read the Bible passage first before reading the words in this book.



Talk about. Where you see this sign, it gives questions that can be used in a group study. They also help the reader to understand the Bible verses. Use the questions as a test.



Where you see this sign, the question requires more time and meditation.



Multiple choice questions. Where you see this sign there are questions with three possible answers; some are right answers, some are wrong answers. These questions help you think carefully about what you are reading. The answers to these questions are given at the back of the book.



Where you see this sign inside ruled boxes, the information is mainly for Bible students, teachers and preachers.

Extra Bible readings are included to give you important information. God will use them to speak to you. This is why you should check all readings now or later and use them for study at home. Some readings are from the New Testament (NT), the part of the Bible written after Jesus Christ lived on this earth. These link with the Old Testament (OT) which begins with the book of Genesis.

These Bible commentaries give the truth of God as a foundation for all believers. The people leading the study should add applications and experiences from their own Christian life and culture.

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ANSWERS

Genesis 11 to 14

1 a and b; 2. a and b; 3. c; 4. a;
5. b; 6. c; 7. a; 8. c.

Genesis 15 to 18

1. b; 2. a; 3. b; 4. c;
5. a; 6. a and c; 7. b; 8. a.

Genesis 19 to 22

1. c; 2. b; 3. a and b; 4. b;
5. a; 6. b; 7. a; 8. a and b and c;
9. a and b and c.

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9. God looked after Isaac –

- a) and promised that a nation would come from him;
- b) and saved him from the hatred of his half-brother;
- c) and saved him from death on an altar.

CONCLUSION

Abraham lived in the Promised Land but he was a stranger there. He did not own the land. But he began to occupy it for his future families. This was part of God's salvation plan for the world. Abraham was God's starting point for a new tribe who worshipped only Yahweh, the one true and everlasting Almighty God. He was 100 years old before his promised child was born. We shall see in the next Bible Commentary that the promises that God made to Abraham, He made also to his son Isaac and to his grandson Jacob (who was later called Israel). God repeated His agreement to the chosen one in each generation of these great men of faith (patriarchs). In this way, God watched over the family line of the true believers right down to the time when Christ was born to Mary. Abraham was the father of all people who have faith in the one true God. Through his family, God brought salvation to the whole world so that all who believe that Jesus is the Son of God may be saved.

Abraham gave up everything to obey God and to fulfil His promises. He had times of weakness but he had a close fellowship with God. He had a natural son, Ishmael, and a supernatural son, Isaac.

Now read what St. Paul said about the faith of Abraham and the faith of those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ in Romans 4:17–25.

Do you believe in this way?

We long for the time when people of all beliefs and non-belief shall be changed and welcome Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. But like Abraham, many have to wait a long time. And others will not choose the salvation of God.

Job once asked: 'Why do believers not see the victory that is God's?' (Job 24:1). Job already knew the answer to his question, and so should we: '*I know that my Saviour lives and shall reign on earth in the last days*' (Job 19:25). Job believed, like Abraham, that God's salvation would come to the whole world.

As we await the return of Jesus, do you understand the origin and purpose of life? Do you understand what it means to live by faith? Are you a child of faith? Are you a child of Abraham?

In our Genesis Part 1 Bible commentary we told you about God's plans for the creation of the world. In this Bible commentary, Genesis Part 2, we told you about God's plans for the creation of God's special people, the Jews. In Genesis Parts 3 and 4 we tell you about the progress of Abraham's family, especially Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Judah, and what this means for Jews and Christians today.

[Genesis Part 2 4th Ed English Feb 2010

INTRODUCTION

Dear Readers.

In our first Bible Commentary (Genesis 1–11) we told you how God made the beginning of the world and everything that was in it. It was good and perfect. He left Adam and Eve to look after things, but they disobeyed Him. Through them, sin came into the world.

It was then that God made His first agreement (or covenant) with the people that He had created. He told Adam and Eve that, because of their sin, they would have many troubles. But if they did well and worked hard, then He would provide for them. 'By hard work and a lot of sweat you will produce the food that you eat' (Genesis 3:19).

When they grew up, most of Adam and Eve's family did not obey God. However, Enoch obeyed God and he went to heaven. (Enoch was the great-great-great-great-grandson of Adam). Noah obeyed God, too. (He was the great-great-great-grandson of Enoch). One day, God made a new agreement (covenant) with Noah.

This is what God did: He told Noah to build a 500ft (150m.) boat or ark. Then He destroyed all the bad people by sending rain and floods. He saved Noah's family and some of the animals. He kept them safe in the ark for a whole year.

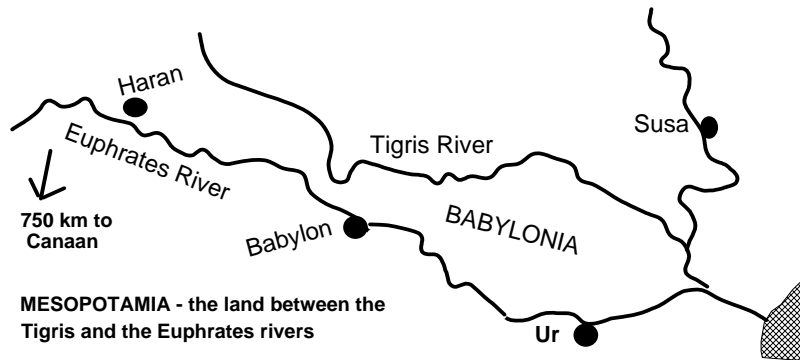
In this way, God punished the world because of sin and He made a new beginning. God told Noah's family that they must start new families and He promised that He would never flood the world in this way again. This was God's new agreement for the world that He made and loved. God also told Noah that they could eat the animals and plants and fish. The rainbow would remind them of the Great Flood and the promise that God would never do it again (Genesis 9:1–17). This was God's new agreement or covenant.

After Adam sinned God's world was no longer perfect. The people knew both good and evil. After the Flood many people forgot God again. They chose to do evil, but God remembered His promise and He did not flood the world again. He wanted the people to trust and obey Him. But they had big ideas of their own and they made big plans together at Babel. This made God sad and



The unity of mankind

- God destroyed the unity of mankind at Babel (Genesis 11:8). This happened when people worked together against God's plans.
- Unity is restored when all believers in the One True God around the world trust in Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.
- Jesus prayed for the unity of His followers (John 17:9–11, 20–21).



He punished them by giving them many different languages. They could not understand each other so they could not work together (Genesis 11:4–9).

ABRAHAM – THE FATHER OF GOD’S PEOPLE

Soon after Noah’s Flood, God spoke to Abraham (who was first called Abram). God loved Abraham. This is the story of Abraham and God’s new way to save the people of the world. This was the beginning of yet another new agreement



A wonderful picture of God

Genesis 1–11 provides us with a wonderful picture of our God Yahweh:

- Our God is the only god.
- Our God is the only creator and the origin of life.
- Our God’s creation is perfect and good.
- Creation shows God’s love and purpose.
- Creation shows God’s nature, beauty and kindness – His glory.

But the story of life is that men and women disobey God and choose evil instead of good. Genesis 1–11 tells us about the works of God and about the sin of mankind. The rest of the Bible tells us about God’s answer to sins: His salvation plan for mankind, and His punishment for those who disobey.

To keep us from sinning, God has provided:

- His Bible as our guide (to do what is right).
- His Holy Spirit as our guide to encourage us to obey and to work hard).
- Our conscience as our guide (against doing wrong).

To save us from sin, God has provided Jesus as our Saviour (there is no other way, or person, to bring us back to God).

The first Adam brought sin into the world. Jesus brought salvation into the world. When we read our Bibles and accept Jesus as our Saviour, then God sends His Holy Spirit into our lives to help us. We begin a new life with Jesus as our Lord and friend.



Talk about:

1. Describe in your own words points 1 to 4 above.
2. Discuss these words by C.T. Studd: ‘If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.’



Are you prepared to sacrifice everything to God including the position, ministry and provision he has given to you?



QUESTIONS ON GENESIS 19 to 22

(Answers are given at the end)

Choose the right answers. Sometimes only one is right, but sometimes two or even all three.

1. The two angels spent the night in Lot’s house because –
 - a) they wanted to speak to the people of Sodom;
 - b) they did not want to sleep in the square;
 - c) Lot persuaded them.
2. The men of Sodom who wanted to harm the angels –
 - a) were given Lot’s daughters;
 - b) were made blind;
 - c) broke down the door.
3. The angels told Lot to go away from Sodom because –
 - a) it was evil;
 - b) they were going to destroy it;
 - c) they wanted him to move back to Zoar.
4. Lot left with –
 - a) his wife, future sons-in-law and daughters;
 - b) his daughters and wife
 - c) all his family and possessions
5. Lot’s daughters –
 - a) had children by their father in order to provide a family line;
 - b) got drunk before having sex with their father;
 - c) went to bed with their father because it was the people’s custom.
6. Abimelech was afraid because –
 - a) of Abraham and his men;
 - b) of a dream from God;
 - c) nobody could have children.
7. Hagar and Ishmael went away because –
 - a) God told Abraham what to do;
 - b) Abraham did not like the boy;
 - c) Sarah said they would have no inheritance.
8. God looked after Ishmael –
 - a) and promised that a nation would come from him;
 - b) and he married an Egyptian lady;
 - c) and he lived in the desert and became an archer.

fulfilled. It is a big test to surrender to God our hopes, dreams and even the promises God has given us.

- Isaac was not a child, he was a young man walking beside an old man. He could resist. Instead he submitted to being tied down. We may be tied down by circumstances we cannot escape – a situation that we think is hopeless. It is a big test for us. Can we submit and trust God to help us in His time?
- The sacrifice of Isaac was a picture of Christ as the Lamb of God (John 1:29). Abraham said ‘God himself will provide the lamb’ (Gen 22:8) He did not know how God would provide but while Abraham was climbing one side of the mountain the ram was climbing the other side. When he got to the place God wanted him to be, ram or the lamb was there waiting. When we come to the place God wants us to be, we find His answer waiting. He goes before us. He provides an answer through Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away our sin. His sacrifice saves us. His resurrection promises us hope of everlasting life. His gift of the Holy Spirit guides us and drives us on to do great things in His name.
- Golgotha, where they crucified Jesus, was near Mount Moriah, the place where God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice for man in that place at that time means we will never need another sacrifice to take away our sins. The hope and faith of all Christians everywhere is based on what Jesus did on the cross for us all. This gives victory over sin and everlasting life with Him! Through God’s grace and mercy, the sacrifice of Jesus saves all who believe that He is God’s Son. He saves all who confess their sins to Him.



Abraham is the father of all who believe God.

Romans 4:17–25; 5:1 The holy writings say, ‘I have made you the father of many nations.’ Abraham was made the father of many nations by God. He believed God. He believed that God could make dead people live. He believed God when he said that things were true even though they had not happened yet. Abraham believed and hoped, though there was nothing to give him hope. He believed that he would become the father of many nations. God had told him this would happen. He did not stop believing when he thought about his own body. It was almost dead. He was about one hundred years old. He did not stop believing when he thought about Sarah, even though she had never given birth to any children. He did not stop believing God’s promise. He believed God very much. He did not praise God for his own faith, but for God’s promise. He was sure that God was able to do what he had promised to do. He was put right with God because he believed the promise. The holy writings do not say that for Abraham only. They say it for us too. God will say we are put right if we believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from death. He was killed because we did wrong things. He was raised from death in order that we might be made right with God.

We are made good people and put right with God when we believe in Jesus Christ. So now we have peace with God because of what our Lord Jesus Christ did. Because we believe, Christ has brought us to the place where God can do us good. We are in that place now. (TJB)

or covenant from God for the people He made and loved.

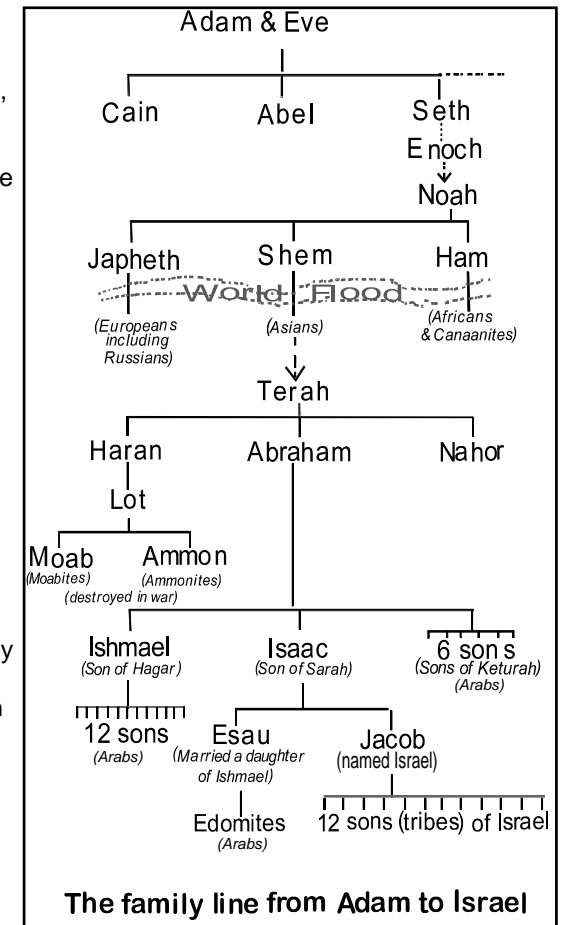
After Adam and Eve sinned, God promised to send a Saviour or Redeemer. Several thousand years ago, He told the serpent (Satan), ‘Eve’s son will crush your head’ (Genesis 3:15). God made this promise: that a baby would be born who would defeat Satan. This promise came true with Jesus. (We talk about this in our Mark’s Gospel Bible Commentary.) Jesus was born to defeat sin – the work of Satan.

Nearly two thousand years before Jesus was born, God told part of His plan to Abraham. He knew Abraham would have great faith and obey him like Enoch and Noah had done. (Look for these names in our family line from Adam.) In this **new agreement**, God promised to make the family of Abraham into a great nation to bless all people. God called Abraham’s family ‘My people’. Bible writers first called them ‘Hebrews’. They were also called ‘the children of Israel’ (Israelites). Later they were called ‘Jews’ (after Judah, the great-grandson of Abraham). So God passed this Old Testament



Great men who obeyed God – the Patriarchs

- Abraham:** Genesis 11:27 to 25:11
- Isaac:** Genesis 21:1 to 35:28
- Jacob** (renamed Israel): Genesis 25:20 to 49:33
- Joseph:** Genesis 37:2 to 50:26



The family line from Adam to Israel

agreement to Abraham’s son, Isaac, then to Jacob (Israel) then to Judah and then later to other men of Abraham’s family. Much of the Bible story in Genesis is about the lives of Abraham’s family. He is called ‘patriarch’, which means ancestor or leader of a family or tribe. The history of Abraham is the history of how God showed His truth to one man who trusted Him. Then after Abraham, there were others who truly believed God. Abraham is the father of everyone who believes in the one true God (Romans 4:11).

So this makes Abraham the father of all Jews and also Christians who trust and obey God through Christ. In this way God's new agreement with Abraham was a blessing to all people through Christ. The early Arabs also believed the one true God, but today many Arabs follow Islam and worship Allah instead. They believe in the creator but not in His Son.



Genesis 11:10–32

THE CALLING OUT OF ABRAHAM

Ur (11:27) was a large town in Mesopotamia (Iraq). This is where Abraham lived. Abraham was called Abram when he lived here. Ur was full of business and entertainment, but it was a city without God. People lived to make money and enjoy themselves, and few people in that city believed in God. Sir Leonard Woolley (1922–1934) dug up the old city of Ur and he found the ruins of great buildings and a large ziggurat (stepped pyramid), used to worship a sun god or moon god.

Ur was built on the banks of the great River Euphrates. Abraham's father, Terah, left Ur to go up river with his family to Haran in the north of Mesopotamia (11:31). Terah stayed in Haran and died there.

The Bible tells us that 'Sarai was barren and she had no children' (11:30). Sarai was Abraham's wife. Abraham needed a son to continue his family line and to be his heir.

Sir Leonard Woolley found that in Ur each family lived together in one group of buildings. He discovered many rooms were built around a central courtyard. But Terah left Ur with Abraham and Abraham's wife Sarai, Abraham's brother Nahor and Lot, his nephew, and all their servants and set off for Haran. They lived in tents. In this way God sent them on a journey toward the land of



God's calling for one man

God's calling was for Abraham and his wife Sarai. God used Abraham's father Terah to get him out of the city of Ur. Terah moved his family to Haran which is halfway to the land of Canaan. God then planned to move Abraham and Sarai out of Mesopotamia alone, away from his family (12:1). But Abraham took Lot's family with him (12:5). Later, God separated Abraham from Lot. Later still, Lot's tribe was killed in war.



Things to learn about in the life of Abraham

1. God called Abraham to leave Mesopotamia (Iraq) and follow Him to an unknown place.
2. God gave Abraham the agreement (covenant) of faith by promising him land, family and a blessing to pass on to other believers.
3. God gave the law of circumcision as a mark and as a sign for the Jews.
4. Abraham's great test was agreeing to sacrifice his only son from Sarai (Isaac), believing that God would provide a way out.
5. Through Abraham's family, the Messiah (Jesus Christ) came into the world to save people from their sins (Matthew 1:1–17).

and trusted. He knew that God had promised him Isaac and he knew that God was faithful. He knew that God had promised that a large family would come from Isaac (we call them Jews) and Ishmael (we call them Arabs).



Talk about:

1. How do we know that Abraham believed that God would protect Isaac (22:5)?



What do we mean when we say 'If you have faith you must be willing to give up everything'?

THE LAMB OF GOD

Isaac asked Abraham, 'Father? The fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?' Abraham answered, 'God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering...' (22:7–8). Both Abraham and Isaac knew that God expected them to sacrifice the blood of an innocent lamb as a right form of worship. But Abraham also knew that he was being tested by God to sacrifice his 'only son' at this time.

When they reached the high place that God had told him about, Abraham built an altar and laid the wood on it. He tied his son Isaac and laid him on top of the wood on the altar. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. At that moment the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, 'Abraham! Abraham! Do not lay a hand on the boy... Now I know that you fear God, because you have not held back your son, your only son' (22:11–12).

Then God provided a ram — a male sheep or lamb — for the burnt offering and did not let the boy die. Abraham saw it and sacrificed it on the altar in place of Isaac. Abraham called that place 'The Lord will provide'. Father and son worshipped God there on the mountain. Abraham was willing to give his one and only true son as a sacrifice to God, but God gave Isaac back to him.

Many years later, God sacrificed His only Son, Jesus. This sacrifice was for our sins. This is why we call Jesus the 'Lamb of God' (John 1:29).

Bible students say that father Abraham was a type of Father God and his 'only son' Isaac was a type of Christ because Jesus was God's only Son. Abraham believed that God was able to bring Isaac back from the dead. But God had a better plan. It was a plan of putting something in Isaac's place — a lamb. This is called substitution: putting one thing in place of another. And to save us from our sins Jesus took our place. He died on the cross instead of us. He died for us. He was our Substitute Lamb. Jesus died because of God's love for us.

THE TEST OF FAITH FOR US ALL

As Abraham surrenders Isaac, we see that this is a big test for him:

1. He had already prepared himself to give Isaac back to God (Hebrews 11:17). This is a big test because Isaac had been given to Abraham after a long wait. Isaac was the one through whom the promises of God would be

to Mount Moriah and sacrifice him as a burnt offering there (22:2). This was something that the heathen tribes did. However, Abraham did not question God's instruction. Notice that God said, 'Take your son, your only son, the one you love' (22:2). God meant Abraham's only son by his wife Sarah. Isaac was the son of God's promise to Abraham and Sarah. It was through this son that the nation of Israel would come.

Abraham and Isaac set out for Mount Moriah. They had two servants with them and wood for a burnt offering (22:3). The Canaanite people sacrificed their children to a heathen god, Molech, on the hills of Moriah and Abraham and Isaac knew this very well. They also knew that God hated this evil and horrible worship of Molech. It was murder. When God gave later His Ten Commandments, one of them was 'You must not kill (murder)' (Exodus 20:13).

When they came to the foot of Mount Moriah, Abraham left his servants with the donkey. He trusted God that they would return safely. So he said, 'Stay here while I and the boy go over there. We will worship *and then we will come back to you*' (22:5). Abraham gave his doubts and fears to Almighty God. Abraham's faith was in God. All faith must include surrender. In a way, he had already 'given up' Isaac. He did not know what God would do, but he obeyed



God of the Resurrection

The God of Abraham is the God of the resurrection. He is the only One who can bring new life out of death. God worked a miracle in the bodies of Abraham and Sarah to produce the baby Isaac. Then God told Abraham to sacrifice the life of his precious Isaac. But God provided a lamb or ram in his place. Later, God provided His own Son, Jesus, as a sacrifice, so that no more sacrifices for sin are necessary. Jesus was the final sacrifice. Jesus is the precious Son, the sacrificial lamb and the final offering. Then God brought Him back to life. So Jesus is the resurrection, too. Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies...' (John 11:25).

Today, if we do not believe in the crucifixion and the resurrection then our faith is not worth anything (1 Corinthians 15:17–19). We follow a Saviour who wants us to have faith in Him and His sacrifice and His resurrection life. Then we become true sons of Abraham, the father of all people who have faith in God.

In Abraham, we see true faith in God:

- Abraham came out of the city of Ur, leaving behind his comfortable life style.
- He did not try to get rich from kings or from cities in the Promised Land.
- He separated himself from Lot and from Ishmael even though they were his own blood family.
- He was ready to sacrifice His true son, the promised son, in order to obey God.
- He had hope in a resurrection life for his only son.
- He believed God would give him a large family through Isaac, the family of God, through whom the Messiah would come.
- He believed that all the nations of the world would be blessed through his family.

Canaan. God brought Abraham and his relatives out of the comfortable city of Ur (11:31; 15:7).

The people and their animals headed north-west from Ur. They travelled up the valley of the great River Euphrates where the first men and women lived after the Flood. Abraham left his city, his culture, his work and the land he would have inherited. He did this to go to a land that he knew nothing about. His faith in God made him want to live in a new 'city' where God reigned as King. He looked forward to (hoped for) what Christians know as 'the Kingdom of God'. A new life with God.

Like Noah, God called him to leave his old life. He began a new life with God. Abraham trusted God and followed Him when He called. Ever since that time, there have been many, many people who have followed God with the same trust that Abraham had.



Genesis 12:1–9

GOD'S GRACE AND MERCY TOWARDS ABRAHAM

When all the world seemed to be forgetting the one true God, Abraham heard God speaking to him (12:1). He heard God say, 'Abraham, leave your country and your people. Leave your father's family and go to the land that I will show you.' God spoke to Abraham while he was living in a country which worshipped false gods. This is one of the great miracles of God's grace – His kindness and mercy to sinful people.

There was very little in Abraham that made him better than other people at that time. No one deserves God's grace, but God is pleased to call some and save those who obey Him. God promised Abraham that:

- His future family would become a great nation (12:2)
- Abraham would be famous throughout history (12:2)
- Abraham would be a blessing to other people (12:2)
- God would bless him and his family (12:3)
- God would bring a blessing on those who were kind to him and his family (12:3)
- He would bring curses on those who were not kind to him and his family (12:3)
- All the people of the earth could share in God's blessing to Abraham (12:3 and 18:18).



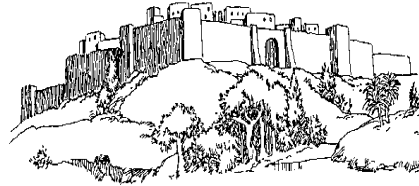
Talk about:

- What do we know about the place where Abraham lived?
- Put into your own words the promises that God made to Abraham.
- What do these promises mean to us today?

ABRAHAM LEARNS TO WALK IN FAITH

From the beginning of time, God spoke words to create the earth. God also spoke the words to create every living creature. But He also spoke through Jesus, whom John calls 'The Word' (John 1:1). Jesus was with God at the very beginning. God also spoke to people directly. God spoke to Adam and God spoke to Noah and God spoke to Cain. And God spoke to Abraham.

When God spoke to Abraham, Abraham did not doubt. He believed God's promises. He held on to God's promises and made them his very own. The promises of God became the most important thing in Abraham's life, not only for himself but also for all his family. Yet for Abraham many of God's promises were not fulfilled in his lifetime (Hebrews 11:39). He lived in the sure and certain hope of their fulfilment in God's timing. He learned how to 'walk in faith'.



Abraham knew that men who believed God were on a 'journey of life'. Through the years, God's promises were given to Abraham and to Abraham's sons and daughters of faith. These were men and women, like Abraham, who trusted in God (Romans 9:6–8). Over the years, they had the same faith as their ancestor Abraham. Their faith was also in God's promise of a Saviour (Jesus) who would save men and women from their sin. In God's plan He calls each of us to trust Him. God called Abraham. Abraham chose to believe God. God did not force him to believe. Abraham and others like him were free to believe God's promise or not to believe it.

God chose Abraham and all of his family who followed his example of faith. Later God sent Jesus to die for all sinners so salvation is available to all people who believe in the Son of God and who have the same faith as Abraham. Jesus said to Zacchaeus, the corrupt and sinful tax collector, 'Today salvation has come to your house. You are a member of Abraham's family' (Luke 19:9). Jesus saw that Zacchaeus had faith in God just like Abraham's faith. His sins did not hold him back from believing in God. Jesus promised forgiveness and salvation to Zacchaeus because he was 'walking in faith'.



Talk about:

1. Do all men have an equal chance to hear God's voice (Psalm 1:14; Mark 16:16)?
2. Did God choose you? Why?
3. What does He expect from His chosen children (Genesis 12:4)?
4. What agreement did God make with Abraham?

ABRAHAM MOVES ON

Abraham and Sarai and their servants packed their tents and moved from Haran. They took many animals with them. His nephew, Lot, also went with them and his wife and family and servants and animals. From now on, the Bible story in Genesis is mainly about Abraham and his family.

The birth of Isaac to Sarah was a miracle of God. The birth of Jesus to Mary was a miracle of God. This is one of the reasons why Isaac is known as a type or picture of Christ. The seed in Sarah was from Abraham. The seed in Mary was from God's Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18).

SARAH REALISES THAT ISHMAEL BECOMES A THREAT TO ISAAC

Ishmael was 13 years old when Isaac was born. We know little about Isaac's childhood, but one day Sarah saw Ishmael mocking or teasing young Isaac. She was angry and spoke to Abraham about Ishmael (21:10). Sarah's words were given a prophetic meaning in the New Testament. Paul wrote, 'The slave woman's son will never share the family's property with the free woman's son' (Galatians 4:30). God passed His special agreement to Isaac, the son of His promise who was born to Sarah, the 'free woman'.

'Get rid of that slave woman and her son!' Sarah screamed. But Abraham did not want to do this. Then God said to him, 'Do not be so upset about the boy... Listen to what Sarah tells you' (21:12). God promised that Abraham's many descendants would come through Isaac's line (21:12; Romans 9:7). But God promised also to make Ishmael's family into a great nation as well as Isaac's family (17:19,20; 21:13,18).

Next morning, Abraham got up and obeyed God. He gave Hagar food and water, then he sent her away (21:14). In obeying God, Abraham acted against his own love for Ishmael and against the custom of the day. But God loved Hagar and Ishmael too. He heard Hagar's cry from the desert road and supplied water for her and her son (21:19). Later, Ishmael married an Egyptian (21:21) and lived in the desert of Paran. He had 12 sons whose grandfather was Abraham. Their families were later known as Arabs.

God provided for Abraham in practical ways (21:22–33). Abraham grew in wealth and was at peace with his neighbours. He lived in the land of the Canaanites and the Philistines, but he worshipped Yahweh, the one true Almighty God 'who lives forever' (21:33). Abraham remembered God and God remembered Abraham.



Talk about:

1. How old was Ishmael when Isaac was born (16:16; 21:5)?
2. Why is Isaac known as a type of Christ?
3. Why was Sarah angry with Ishmael (21:9)?
4. What did she want Abraham to do to Ishmael (21:10)?
5. What did God promise to do for Ishmael (21:13,18)?



Genesis 22:1–24

GOD TESTS ABRAHAM'S FAITH

Some time later, God tested Abraham in a big way. God told him to take Isaac

thought that he was going to be killed because of his wife's beauty (look back to Genesis 12:10 –20). He was afraid because the Philistines did not believe in God (20:11). His faith in God was weak at this time.

Abimelech was the Philistine king and he took Sarah to his palace. But God said to him, 'You are as if you were dead because of the woman you have taken; she is already married' (20:3–4). Abimelech pleaded, 'Lord... I had no idea I was doing anything wrong. I'm not guilty' (20:5). God accepted Abimelech's excuse, but warned him: 'Give back the man's wife, for he is a prophet (20:7).'

If we are on a wrong path because we do not know the right one, this does not excuse us. God has given us a conscience that helps us to know right from wrong. We know what is right through our conscience because it gives us God's peace within us. The king quickly gave Sarah back to Abraham but told Abraham that he was to blame. He said that Abraham had brought guilt on him and his kingdom. The king gave Sarah a large gift. He gave Abraham gifts also, and offered Abraham more land for his flocks.

Abraham gave a poor excuse for his lack of faith: 'I thought to myself, there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife. Besides, she really is my sister...' (20:11,12). Sarah was Abraham's half-sister. Abraham did not judge fairly, and unfair judgement leads to trouble. God had said, 'Walk before Me and be blameless' (17:1) but Abraham's faith was weak. We all fail or 'fall down' at times because our faith is weak. But we must get up, and go on; and so did Abraham. It's not our strength but God's grace that saves us, all the way through life. Abraham was not worthy, he was not perfect, but he learnt to trust in God and grow in faith.

God allowed this to happen so that the Philistines would fear God (20:8) and respect Abraham as a prophet of God (20:17). God strengthened the weak faith of Abraham and also helped him to see how precious Sarah was to God.



Talk about:

1. Why did Abraham say that Sarah was his sister a second time?
2. What do you know about the king called Abimelech?
3. How did God use Abraham's lack of faith?
4. Why was Sarah precious to God?



Genesis 21:1–33

THE MIRACLE BIRTH OF ISAAC

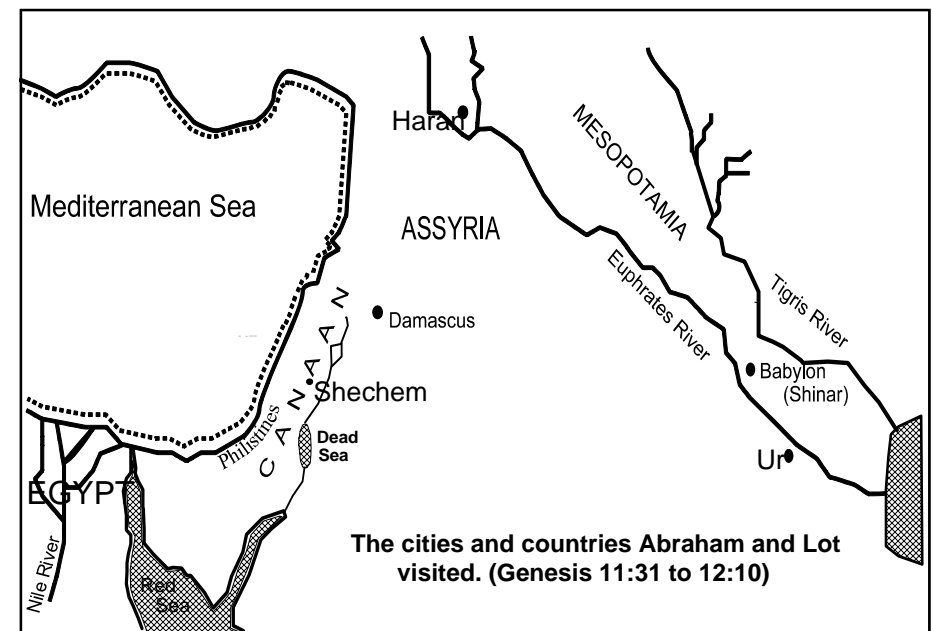
At last a son was born to Sarah and Abraham and they named him Isaac ('he laughs'). God did what He had promised. He is never early, never late, never changing in His purpose and promises. Indeed, nothing is too hard for Him (18:14). God keeps every promise that He makes. As Abraham and Sarah waited for God's promise of a son so, later, the prophets waited and looked for the promised Messiah, Son of God (Isaiah 7:14).

Abraham moved on to a place that God showed him, called Canaan. Abraham and Sarai did not have any children at this time, but God promised Abraham, 'I will make you into a great nation' (12.2). God also said that all nations would hear of the great faith of Abraham and 'will be blessed because of you'. God continued to look ahead to the time when His Son, Jesus, would be born into Abraham's family. God planned that through Jesus everyone should have the chance to receive God's salvation.



At this time, Abraham was 75 years old (12:4) and the greatest thing about Abraham was his faith in God. His faith helped him to see when there was nothing to see and to walk where there was no path, to a place where there was no city. God calls each one of us to have this kind of faith or trust in Him (2 Corinthians 5:7). Faith in God grows by hearing God's command and obeying Him (Romans 10:10).

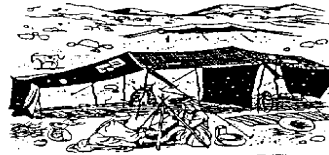
If we do not hear and obey God's words, other people may ask, 'Does that person have faith?' and if we don't obey God, we will not find the path that God has planned for us in this world. Sometimes, it is difficult for us to have faith in God. If we believe God as Abraham believed God, then God will make our own faith strong. God will remind us of his goodness and His plan for us. Later on, God reminded Abraham: 'I am the Lord. I brought you out of Ur. I want to give you this land as your very



own' (15:7). However, there were many years when God did not speak to Abraham. God wanted Abraham to trust Him at all times.

Today, God calls men and women by His gospel, which is the Good News of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, 'The Kingdom of Heaven is near. Turn away from your wrong ways and believe the Good News!' (Mark 1:15). The Good News is 'that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. Whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save it' (John 3:16,17).

When we hear the gospel, it causes us to choose. We can answer, 'Yes, I am sorry for my sins' or 'No, I am not sorry'. When we turn away from our sins and confess our sins before God, we 'step out' of our old ways, as Abraham did, and follow God's teaching.



It was a big step of faith for Abraham to leave his old life and begin a new life with God. God made his faith strong along the way. God made Abraham wait a long time for His promises to come true. He waited and trusted and grew in faith. Do you have the faith of Abraham?



Talk about:

1. What makes faith in God grow?
2. Did Abraham find a city that he was looking for? What vision has God given you to follow in life? Will you always remember it?
3. Abraham fixed his eyes on God's promises and had faith in God until the end of his life.



Read Hebrews 11:8–10.

GOD WENT FIRST, ABRAHAM FOLLOWED

After many months, Abraham and Lot arrived in Canaan with all their servants, tents and animals. When Abraham came to the great trees of Moreh near Shechem, he stopped. At that time, the Canaanites were living in the land. The Canaanites included 10 family tribes who lived in that part of the world. They were evil people who were cursed by Noah (Genesis 9:25). God promised Abraham that this land would belong to his family (15:18–21). Shechem is 60 km. north of Jerusalem but Abraham knew nothing of God's special plans for that place.

The great trees of Moreh near Shechem (12:6) were famous trees. It was here that God told Abraham, 'I will give this land to your children after you.' Abraham believed that God would give him a land that was not his own and children that he did not yet have. Abraham built an altar to honour and worship the Lord God. As in Noah's day, the altar was a place to offer animals to God. It was made of earth or rough stone.

surrounded the house (19:4–6). The wicked men of Sodom rushed to have sex with the visitors.

Lot's sons-in-law were unbelieving people. The messengers or angels warned Lot what was going to happen to the city, but his sons-in-law laughed at the warning (19:14).

The story is very simple but very sad. People refuse to listen to God's warnings. Lot begged his sons-in-law to listen to the warning and run for their lives, but they did not. The angels said to Lot, 'Hurry! Hurry!... Get out of this place!' (19:15). When Lot and his family hesitated, the angels grabbed their hands and took them out of the city, for the Lord was merciful to them. 'Run for your lives!' the angels told them. 'Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the valley!' As they ran Lot's wife looked back. She could not bear to leave her home and friends. She died and became covered in salt!

'I can't run to the mountains,' Lot complained, so he asked to stop in the little town of Zoar where he used to live. God did not destroy Zoar because Lot and his daughters sheltered there. Zoar was not destroyed because of Lot, while at least four other towns were destroyed (19:25; Deuteronomy 29:23). But Lot was afraid to stay in Zoar. He and his two daughters moved into a cave in the mountains and stayed there. After some time had passed, the two girls tricked their father into giving them sons, for they thought that there were no other men to marry in that region (19:31,32). They did this in order to carry on Lot's family line. The two sons had families and produced the tribes of the Moabites and Ammonites. Later on these tribes were destroyed in war against the Israelites (Ezekiel 25:10,11). The story of Lot is not a happy one.



Talk about:

1. Why could God 'do nothing' until Lot was safely out of Sodom (19:21)?
2. What lessons can we learn from the prayers of Abraham for Lot?
3. What lessons can we learn from the fears experienced by Lot?
4. Was Lot right to follow Abraham to live in Canaan (12:4)?



Who did Lot trust? Abraham, God or himself? Who do we trust?



Genesis 20:1–17

ABRAHAM IN THE LAND OF THE PHILISTINES

The story in Chapter 20 may be from an earlier time. Abraham is in 'the land of the Philistines' (see map on page 8). Abraham moved from the north-west Negev desert region to Gerar, a city on the trade route to Egypt, a land ruled by king Abimelech. Why did he move closer to trade routes? Again (v.2), Abraham



- b) Ishmael would be a good friend to his brother;
 - c) she would give birth to a daughter.
6. God told Abraham —
- a) to change his name from Abram to Abraham;
 - b) that his descendants would live in Canaan forever;
 - c) To circumcise all the males in his household.
7. When Sarah heard the three godly visitors say she would have a child, she laughed because —
- a) she was happy;
 - b) she did not believe them;
 - c) she knew it was true.
8. The Lord planned to destroy Sodom because —
- a) the peoples' sin was so bad;
 - b) he wanted to give the land to Abraham;
 - c) Abraham could not find ten righteous people living there.



Genesis 19:1–38

GOD ANSWERS ABRAHAM'S PRAYER

Two angels arrived at Sodom and found Lot 'sitting in the city gate', for he was a member of the city council. This was the place where people met to talk business. Lot greeted the two visitors as 'my lords' as Abraham had done at first (19:2). Living in the wicked city of Sodom, Lot was slow to recognise the things of God. Lot took the visitors home and offered to wash their feet. Evil



A message for today from the story of Lot

When God came to judge the wicked city of Sodom, He sent his angels to rescue Lot. And He has promised that He will send His angels to rescue His own people before His final judgement on this earth (Matthew 24:31).

Lot was saved from Sodom, but he had a sad end to his life. He had faith in God and he followed Abraham, but he did not trust God as Abraham did, with all his heart. He chose to live near Sodom because the land was fertile. He did not ask God what was best for him and his family. He made friends with the king and people of Sodom. But they were enemies of God and so he was caught up in God's judgement. Sin pays hard wages. God rescued him from Sodom because Abraham knew he believed God and prayed for him but later he did not obey God, nor trust Him.

Lot was fearful. He lived in a cave. He lost everything, his wife, his home, his possessions. And because he turned away from God, his family turned further away from God. They became enemies of Israel.

We must have the faith and obedience of Abraham, and like Abraham, we must pray for our families and friends, even if they turn away from God. The answers to our prayers are in God's hands. But through His grace and mercy we can play an important part in their salvation. However they must choose for themselves to follow God.

The great trees of Moreh gave Abraham, his relatives and servants welcome shade. They unpacked their things and fed their animals. No one told them, 'You can't do that'. But Abraham did not build the city of God that he was searching for. Oh no! His tents showed that he was ready to move on any time that God said. At this time, God did not allow Abraham to settle here, even though it was the Promised Land. For a long time, he moved around to find food for his animals (12:8,9). He lived in a tent.

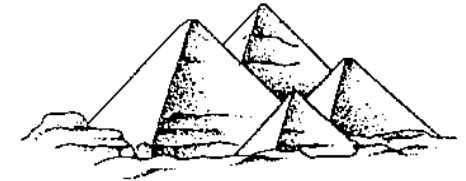


Genesis 12:10–20

ABRAHAM GOES DOWN TO EGYPT

There was no rain for a long time and everything dried up. There was no grass for the animals and Abraham had no crops to eat and no water for his herds and flocks.

Then Abraham did something without waiting to hear from God. He did not ask the Lord God what he should do or wait for directions. He thought that he knew what to do!



Abraham was not perfect. When he travelled out of the land of God's promise, famine came into his own life. He moved away from God and that brought 'famine' in his own life and trouble for his wife. He moved down to Egypt (12:10) and nearly lost his wife (12:14). Sarai was important to God because of His promise to give Abraham a family through her.

Bad choices can bring suffering, because we are not 'walking' in God's Spirit. We must learn to live and walk by the guidance of His Spirit (Galatians 5:25). We may think, 'God can't bless me here in this place, so I'll move on.' It is easy to get afraid in times of need (famine) and to begin to look to strangers or government or family to save us. Christians may move into bad situations or into bad jobs or bad friendships, even bad marriages, but God's grace is still sufficient for them.

ABRAHAM SAW TROUBLE AHEAD

On the way to Egypt, Abraham thought of a problem. Sarai was a very beautiful woman. What if the king of Egypt (called Pharaoh) saw her and wanted to take her as one of his wives? The king might then kill Abraham! (12:12)

Sarai was Abraham's half-sister, the daughter of his father by another woman. So Abraham told Sarai not to say that she was his wife, but his sister. This was a 'half-truth', not the whole truth, so it was really a lie!

Pharaoh heard of Sarai's beauty and took her for his wife. But the Lord brought a sickness on Pharaoh's family because of Sarai. Pharaoh was angry and said to Abraham, 'Why didn't you tell me she was your wife?' (12:18). By

saving Abraham and Sarai from the king of Egypt, God proved that He is faithful even when we wander away from Him. And God kept Sarai safe to bear the son that He had promised to Abraham.

So Abraham packed his tents again and went back to Canaan (13:1) with all his possessions. He and Sarai and Lot left Egypt and went back towards the land that God had promised him. Canaan was God's Promised Land for Abraham and his future family. God blessed Abraham in Canaan (13:2).



Talk about:

1. What punishment came on the King's family (12:17)?
2. Why was Pharaoh angry with Abraham (12:18)?
3. Why was it so important that God should protect Sarai (12:7)?



How do we make the right choice where to go in life?



Genesis 13:1–18

LOT LEAVES ABRAHAM

Abraham's nephew Lot went with him back to Canaan (13:1-3). Lot had faith in God, but it was not a strong faith. His story shows what happens to those people who do not put God first in their lives. They make wrong choices and end up in wrong places. Lot's life shows the part of man's nature that is selfish and greedy. Lot worked to own things, to make himself richer and to be somebody important in the world. If we stop trusting God, this can lead to wrong choices and trouble.

In life, many of us end up making poor choices. If we are living by faith and trusting in God, we choose God's will each time and obey His voice. This is always the best choice.

Abraham and Lot went on to Bethel and they found the place near Shechem where Abraham had first built an altar. There he rebuilt the altar and worshipped the Lord (13:4).

Lot owned a great number of cattle and sheep and they soon had no more grass to eat. His workmen grumbled that Abraham's animals ate all the best grass (13:7). 'Let's not have any quarrelling,' Abraham said to his nephew, 'for we are from the same family. You go one way and I'll go the other way.'

Lot looked at the green grass along the south shores of the Dead Sea. It was 'like the garden of the Lord' (13:10), maybe like the garden in Eden (2:10). It was not like the desert we see there today. So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of Jordan ... and the two men went different ways (13:11).

Abraham wanted to have peace, so he trusted in God, and took his herds to the hills near Hebron, where it was much harder to find grass.



- d) Abraham prayed for all people who love God. The 'good seed' gets mixed in with the 'weeds' in this world and men cannot tell one from the other (Matthew 13: 24–30; 36–43). But this did not make him give up praying for Lot and others.
- e) God did not stop answering Abraham's prayers until Abraham stopped asking. Abraham stopped asking at ten good people (18:32). In the Bible the number ten often means 'complete'. So Abraham's prayer of intercession for the believers in Sodom was complete. He was satisfied and went home (18:33).
- f) God postponed His judgement of fire until He brought the righteous Lot and his family out of Sodom. In the same way God saved eight people who trusted Him from the flood by telling Noah to build the ark. Peter tells us how God saves righteous people today (1 Peter 3:20,21).



Talk about:

1. Little by little Lot had moved away from God. How had this happened?
2. God always warns people of judgement that is coming: True or False?
3. Abraham prayed for Lot until he knew God would answer his prayer. Do you pray in faith?
4. Do you trust God to answer your prayers His way?



QUESTIONS ON GENESIS 15 to 18

(Answers are given at the end)

Choose the right answers. Sometimes there is only one or sometimes two or even all three.

1. God told Abraham to look up at the heavens because —
 - a) God had made them;
 - b) Abraham would have as many descendants as stars in the sky;
 - c) Abraham would possess all the land under the heavens.
2. In God's covenant with Abraham he said that —
 - a) Abraham's descendants would have a lot of land;
 - b) His descendants would never be slaves;
 - c) Abraham would have a lot of land.
3. Sarai —
 - a) did not want any children;
 - b) wanted her maidservant to have children for her;
 - c) said that Abraham would not give her any children.
4. Sarai —
 - a) sent Hagar away;
 - b) was pleased when Hagar was pregnant;
 - c) was upset because Hagar despised her.
5. God promised Hagar that —
 - a) she would have many descendants;

GOD'S JUDGEMENT AND MERCY

After meeting Abraham and Sarah, the Lord planned to visit the city of Sodom. That is where Lot lived. He tells Abraham what He is going to do (18:20). He explains to Abraham how bad the city has become. Hundreds of years before this, He told Noah that He would punish the world with a flood (6:13). Later, He sent Jonah to tell the people of Nineveh that He would punish their city if they did not repent of their evil ways (Jonah 1). God always warns people of judgement and punishments that are coming – and He still warns men and women today. 'The Lord never does anything without telling His prophets about it' (Amos 3:7).

The Lord told Abraham: 'The cries against Sodom and Gomorrah are very great and their sin is so bad that I will go down and see ... then I will know' (18:20–21). God hated the fact that Sodom was full of wickedness and sin (Ezekiel 16:49,50). Wrong sexual acts of all kinds ruin men and women, especially men having sex with men. Their uncontrolled desire for sex make them slaves to these sins. God hates the sins that people do against their own bodies. We may call them 'another way of living', or 'a different sexual behaviour' but God calls them sin and He will judge all sinners. These men of Sodom chose to do what was wrong. Even worse, the men of Sodom rushed to rape and have sex with every traveller who came to their city (19:4–5). They forced others to do what was wrong. Still, God made a way for the people of Sodom to repent of their sins.

God judges and punishes sin but He shows mercy. He hates sin but loves the sinners.

ABRAHAM PRAYS FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD

The Lord's words troubled Abraham. He knew that God 'the Judge of all the earth' was just (18:25). God had the right to destroy these wicked cities of the fertile valley. Abraham also knew that God was 'tender and kind and gracious [full of grace] ... slow to anger, faithful and full of love, (Exodus 34:6). God does not want anyone to die and be lost. He wants all people to turn away from their sins (2 Peter 3:9). So Abraham came to God to ask Him to save Lot and any other people in Sodom who obeyed God. He may have prayed for Sodom for many years. Like Abraham, we must hate the sin in our wicked cities, but we must love the people who live in them. We should pray for them – and keep praying.

- Abraham came near to God 'with an honest and a true heart ... with a faith that is sure and strong' (Hebrews 10:22). Abraham was sure that God would hear and answer his prayer. He knew that God was right to judge these cities. Abraham was sure that God, who is the Great Judge, knew what was in the hearts of all the people of Sodom.
- Abraham repeated his prayer over and over again. He did not stop after asking just one time.
- Abraham prayed for the people who truly obeyed God from their hearts. The Bible speaks of Lot as a 'just man' who hated the sin and wickedness of the people around him (2 Peter 2:7).

Then God said to Abraham, 'Look north and south, east and west... all the land that you see I will give to you and to your children forever' (13:14,15). By allowing Lot to have the first choice of land, Abraham showed faith in God's provision. God was pleased with Abraham and promised him these blessings. God repeated the promises He made earlier (12:1–3) and added the promise that his family would become very, very large (13:16).

Lot moved his tent near to Sodom. Sodom was one of the five wicked cities that the Lord later destroyed. We don't know how near Lot was to Sodom, but near enough to be part of the business of the city. Later, Lot moved right into the city and 'sat in the gate' as a city councillor. A wicked king named Bera ruled over the city. Lot came to know Bera quite well. Not long after this, an enemy army captured Lot. Lot and his family became prisoners.

The lesson for us is this: If you make friends with godless people, they may lead you into doing things that are wrong. It happens all the time and it happens to Christians too! (1 Timothy 6:6–10,17). So we must stay very near to God. Meanwhile, God encouraged Abraham to be bold and walk amongst the tribes of the Promised Land – north, south, east and west (13:14,17). In this way Abraham's faith in God grew and his desire to worship God grew (13:18). Abraham moved to Hebron which is 30 km. south of Jerusalem, but Abraham still did not know God's special plans for that place.

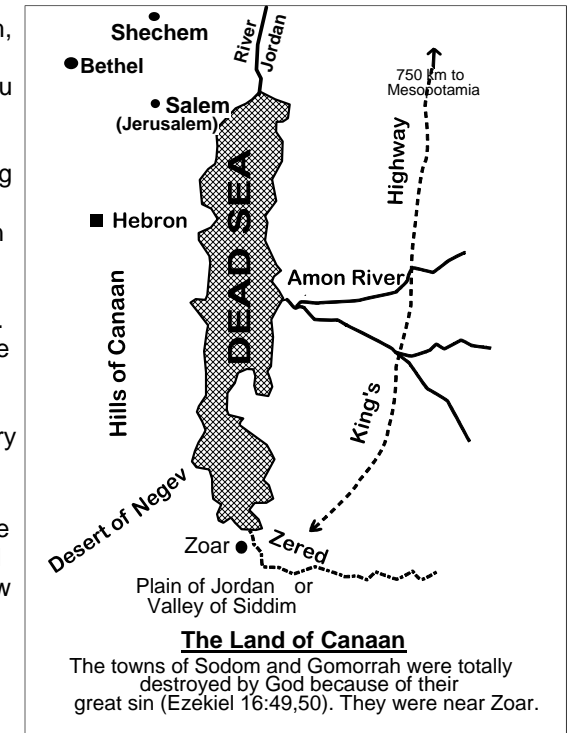


Talk about:

- What made Lot leave his uncle Abraham?
- When a quarrel started what did Abraham do (13:9)?
- What happened when Abraham allowed Lot to have the first choice (13:11–17)?
- What was good and what was bad about Lot's choice?



How can we help our faith in God to grow (13:4,9,12,14–18)?



POSSESSING THE PROMISED LAND

The Canaanites and Perizzites built their cities in the Promised Land of Canaan (13:7). But God told Abraham to 'walk through the land and see how long and wide it is, for I give it to you' (13:17). God tells Abraham to 'possess' the land – for himself and for his children after him forever (13:15). It took great faith to 'take the land' and to live in it because he still did not have any children and the other tribes lived there (Romans 4:16–22). Therefore Abraham lived in the land that was promised for his family.

For the Christian, 'possessing the land' means believing God's promises in the same way as Abraham. It means having the faith to receive His blessings. 'Possessing the land' always makes us struggle but it helps our faith to grow. It sometimes means waiting a long time for God's promises to happen. Abraham believed God but did not possess or own the land for his family. It was Joshua, 500 years later, who possessed the land and owned it for the people of Israel (Joshua 1:6).

Abraham moved to Hebron and set up his tents there. Many years later it belonged to the priests of Israel (Levites) and to King David. Abraham built an altar, in faith, to the Lord and worshipped the living God near the great trees of Mamre in Hebron. Abraham, in faith, claimed this place for God and for his future family. He did this in faith and obedience, not knowing about the future plans of God.



Talk about:

1. How much did Abraham know about God's plan for the land of Canaan?
2. What did Abraham do to 'possess' the land (13:17,18)?
3. How much do you know about God's plan for your life?
4. What do you do to receive God's promises?



Genesis 14:1–24

LOT BECOMES A PRISONER

Lot turned away from the hard places to live. First he moved to Zoar, then to Sodom which was nearby. Abraham trusted God and looked for the 'city of God' while Lot chose the 'city of this world'. Lot liked the easy path of pleasure. He was upset by the wickedness of Sodom, but he could do nothing to change it. The sad thing is that he let all his family grow up in a city full of sin.

Kings of Mesopotamia came down the King's Highway through the Plain of Jordan. (See map.) They came to the Valley of Siddim which we believe was at the south end of the Dead Sea. They fought against the kings in that place forcing them to serve them.

Abraham was living on the hills to the west of the Dead Sea. He heard that the five kings had attacked Sodom and carried away his nephew Lot, Lot's family and all his possessions (14:11,12).

we need to know. We must obey what He tells us, each step of the way through life, a little at a time. He teaches us what we need to know at the time and gives us more faith to meet that need. Later He teaches us more things.

Abraham lived close to God. For this reason Abraham is called 'the friend of God' (Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23). God said, 'I have chosen him' and 'I have known him'. Those people who live trusting in God and who obey Him will know God's plans more than other people. Those people who live in fellowship with God understand better the meaning of life (Psalm 107:43; Hosea 14:9), and what will happen in the future. God said of Abraham, 'For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him' (18:19). Because of God's agreement with him, Abraham gathered his household to teach them and lead them in the worship of God who is All-Sufficient or All Mighty (Hebrew: El-Shaddai). This meant Abraham taught his workers too.



Talk about:

1. Why did these men come to Abraham?
2. How did they know all about God's promises to Abraham and Sarah?
3. What message did they bring to Abraham and Sarah (18:10)?
4. Why did Sarah laugh at the Lord's promise but then was afraid?
5. What more did God tell Abraham (18:19)?



Have you obeyed God in the little things He has shown you? Will God show you greater things if you do not obey the little things?



The choices made by the people of Sodom

From the early days in Canaan, Abraham cared for his nephew Lot. Both had the same opportunity to worship and serve the living God. Abraham let God use the hard things in his life to keep him humble and trusting. Lot looked for the easy way and made a comfortable life for himself in a fertile valley. His choice took him to the wicked city of Sodom. First he put his tent at Zoar near Sodom, then he moved into the city. He became friendly with the city leaders and the king, Bera. Before long, he accepted a seat on the city council and 'sat in the gate'. (All the city business was done at the city gate in those days.) Lot believed in God and wanted to do what was right. But he also wanted an easy life. He did not put God first in his life. He lived with evil men. This weakened his faith in God and his witness to men. The choice that Lot made nearly cost him his life. The choice that the men of Sodom made DID cost them their lives. Selfish pleasure and sin hurt many people.

God is not pleased when men look for wrong sex. God did not create men for this purpose. He did not create the desire for sex for this purpose. He created the desire for sex to produce children. When a man makes love with his wife, it is a wonderful thing, God made it wonderful for this purpose. Men should choose God's way.

Jesus warned that when He returns to earth it will be like 'the days of Lot' (Luke 17:28–30). We are now living in those days (the 'end times') when Jesus will return.



Talk about:

1. Why did Abraham ask God to bless Ishmael?
2. What was God's answer?
3. What was the sign to show God's agreement?

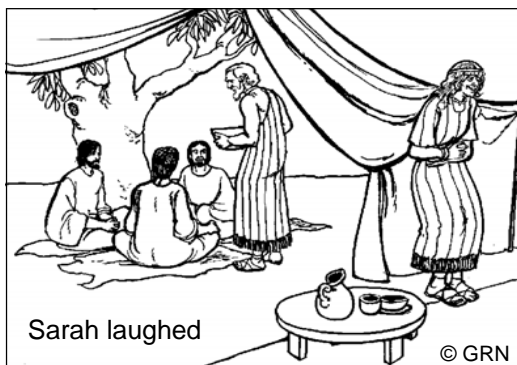


Genesis 18:1–33

ABRAHAM HAS THREE GODLY VISITORS

Several days later, three visitors came to the door of Abraham's tent. They came like three old friends to someone they had known for a long time. Abraham sat in the doorway of his tent. The day was very hot and he was resting. The visitors did not enter Abraham's tent but waited for him to offer them hospitality. Abraham ran over to where the men stood and bowed low to the ground (18:2). 'If you are pleased with me, my lord,' he said, 'do not pass me by.'

'My lord' in this verse is just a polite greeting, but in verse 13 the word is 'Yahweh', the Hebrew name for Lord, the Almighty God. 'Lord, how can I serve you?' Abraham asked the visitors. He offered to bring water and to wash their feet. (It was the custom to wash visitors' feet to refresh them.) Abraham also told Sarah to make bread and he asked his servants to kill a calf and cook it (18:4).



IT WAS THE WORD OF THE LORD

The Lord said, 'I will return to you this time next year and Sarah your wife will have a son' (18:10). Sarah was in the women's part of the tent and she heard what He said, and she laughed to herself (18:12). 'Why did Sarah laugh?' the Lord asked Abraham. Then He gave Abraham and Sarah a true picture of God's power. 'Is anything too hard for Me?' (18:14). Then Sarah was afraid!

Then the visitor showed to Abraham that He truly is God for He tells Abraham everything about the promises given before. He reminds Abraham that his family will become a great nation and all nations will be blessed because of him (18:18). This means the nations who believe in Israel's Messiah who is our Lord Jesus Christ and Saviour.

ABRAHAM GROWS IN FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE

Then the Lord told Abraham more about how he must live (18:19). Have you noticed that each time God speaks to Abraham, He adds a little more information? God does not tell us everything there is to know – He tells us what

ABRAHAM AND HIS MEN RESCUE LOT

When Abraham heard the news, he gathered 318 trained men of his household and chased after the kings and their armies to rescue Lot (14:14–16). His nephew was in trouble and no effort was too great to rescue him. What Abraham did was more than 'occupy the land'. He went into the enemy's kingdom to take back the people that the enemy had carried away.

Let this be an example to all of us! It is not enough to sit at home and feel sorry for family or friends who have been captured by Satan! We must fight the enemy in prayer and do all we can to take back what he has stolen. God wants to rescue people and He is waiting to help us to help them.

Abraham did not have a quick victory. He fought many battles and chased the enemy north of Damascus in Syria (14:15). At Hobah, Abraham and his men defeated the kings and rescued Lot and his family. They came home very tired, carrying all Lot's possessions. On the way home, important people came out of their cities to meet Abraham the great man of war.

MELCHIZEDEK BLESSES ABRAHAM

Often local kings took some of the treasure won from battles. Near Salem a king, who was also a priest of God, came out to meet the hero Abraham. His name was Melchizedek. He came out of his city to honour Abraham but did not ask for any of the treasure. Bera, King of Sodom, also came out to meet Abraham. He said to Abraham, 'Give me the prisoners and keep the treasure for yourself' (14:21). Abraham refused to take the treasure because if he had done that it would have put him under Bera's power. He accepted nothing so that Bera could not say, 'I have made Abraham rich' (14:23). It was God who provided everything in Abraham's life.



Melchizedek brought out food and wine for Abraham's men (Gen. 14:18). He came from Salem (now called Jerusalem) and he blessed Abraham in the name of God Most High. The greater, (in this case, the king) always blesses the servant, the one who is lower in power.

When Melchizedek blessed Abraham it showed that Melchizedek did not worship the heathen gods of Canaan. He blessed Abraham by God Most High, 'creator of heaven and earth'. We read the same words in Psalm 110 and Hebrews 7. Melchizedek knew Abraham's God, the Lord of all the earth. After Melchizedek had blessed him, Abraham gave Melchizedek one tenth of the possessions from the war, which was the right share for a king (1 Samuel 8:15,17). Many Christians follow this example and give one tenth of what they earn to the Lord and to the work of His church.

We do not know much about Melchizedek the king-priest. 'Melchizedek' means 'King of Righteousness'. The name of the king of Sodom, Bera, means

'in evil'. Abraham is a picture of a person of faith. Melchizedek is a picture of Jesus Christ, our Lord and great King-Priest, who blesses His people.

When Abraham chased Lot's enemies, he showed that he cared about his family. We must show that we care when our family members go away from God or are taken away by Satan. We cry out to God and claim the power of Jesus' Name to get them back. God may answer our prayer and rescue those people whom we pray for. And we know that it is not by our own power, but only through His grace and by the power of the Holy Spirit that they are set free.

If people ask 'about the hope you have, be ready to give the reason for it. But do it gently and with respect' (1 Peter 3:15).



Talk about:

1. Who came out of Sodom to meet Abraham after he defeated the kings (14:17)? What did he say to Abraham (14:21)?
2. Who came out of Salem (Jerusalem) to meet Abraham (14:18)? What did he say to Abraham?
3. What do we know about Melchizedek? Who is he like?
4. What do we know about the King of Sodom? Who is he like?
5. Why did Abraham refuse to keep treasures won from the war?



QUESTIONS ON GENESIS 11 to 14

(Answers are given at the end)

Choose the right answers. Sometimes there is only one correct answer, or sometimes two or even all three.

1. Haran –
 - a) was Abraham's brother and father of Lot;
 - b) was the town where Abraham's father died;
 - c) was the father of Terah.
2. Terah –
 - a) started to go to Canaan but only got as far as Haran;
 - b) was the grandfather of Lot;
 - c) wanted to stay in Ur with his family.
3. The Lord said to Abraham –
 - a) 'Leave all your possessions and go to the Promised Land.'
 - b) 'Leave and go to live in Canaan.'
 - c) 'Leave your people and country and go to a land I will show you.'
4. Abraham arrived in Canaan and –
 - a) built an altar by the great tree of Moreh at Shechem;
 - b) the land was empty of people;
 - c) the Lord appeared to him.

CIRCUMCISION AND BAPTISM

God then commanded Abraham to circumcise himself and all the males in his family (17:9–14). Circumcision is called 'a sign and a seal' (Romans 4:11). It was not an agreement itself, but it was the sign of a man who kept an agreement. A man who was circumcised was one of God's special people and it proved that he had been made right with God. It was a sign of faith in God and obedience to Him.

For the Christian Church, the sign of faith and obedience is not circumcision but baptism. Baptism in water shows to the world that we are followers of Jesus. If we have surrendered our life to Him then we now live by the power of His Spirit in our lives. 'The waters of baptism' are a symbol of our life of sin being washed away.

Baptism is a sign. It shows that a person has been made right with God. It does not make us right with God. This is only possible because of the sacrifice of Jesus. He died on the cross for our sins. Baptism shows that we trust in what Jesus did for us, and God, by His grace, accepts our faith and forgives our sins. This is why baptism shows that we have decided to follow Jesus. Through God's grace, He accepts our faith in Jesus which saves us and makes us right with God.



Talk about:

1. What was the purpose of circumcision?
2. What is the purpose of baptism?

ABRAHAM LAUGHS AT GOD'S PROMISE

Then God said, 'You can be sure that I will give you a son by Sarah' (17:16). 'What!' Abraham laughed. 'Will a son be born to a man who is 100 years old? Will Sarah have a child at the age of 90?' (17:17). To have an heir by Sarah was now a joke so Abraham laughed! Abraham's laugh showed that his faith was no longer strong enough to believe. His next question was to ask God to bless Ishmael. It was Abraham and Sarah's plan to have a son through Hagar, the servant. But it was God's plan to give them a son through Sarah. This would require a miracle because of her great age.

Abraham wanted Ishmael to be the heir to his property, but God quickly corrected the old man's thinking. 'Your wife Sarah will have a son by you and you will call him Isaac. I will keep My agreement with him forever' (17:19). God's agreement would pass from Abraham to Isaac, not to Ishmael. 'But as for Ishmael,' God said, 'I have heard you and I will bless him too. I will make him the father of a great nation.' But His special agreement would pass to Isaac, the son born to Sarah 'by this time next year' (17:21).

God finished speaking with Abraham and Abraham got up from the ground where he had been lying face down. Then Abraham went to find the men of his household and told them what God had said. Abraham obeyed God at once. Abraham circumcised every male in his household including himself and Ishmael. This is why many Arabs as well as Jews circumcise their boys.

'I now confirm My agreement with you,' God told Abraham (17:2). God was not making a new covenant with Abraham but was going ahead with the one that was already in place. 'Confirm' here means to make something certain that has been said before. God's agreement with Abraham remained the same. He would give Abraham a son through Sarai from whom many nations would come (17:4,16). Many people would be blessed through the son of Abraham and Sarai.

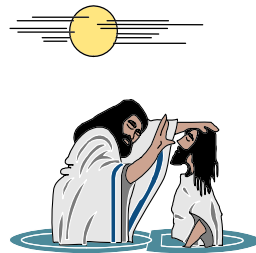


Talk about:

1. What did God ask Abraham to do (17:1)?
2. How can we be blameless before God?
3. When God spoke, Abraham fell flat on the ground (17:3). Why?

GOD CHANGES THEIR NAMES

This is the point where God changed Abraham's name from Abram to Abraham. 'Your name will be Abraham because I have made you a father of many nations' (17:5). Sarai became Sarah meaning 'princess' and God told her she would be a 'mother of nations'. This refers first to the Jewish people and later to Christians. Paul said, 'You who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed' (Galatians 3:29; Romans 4:16,18). 'You will receive what God has promised.' Christians can look back to Abraham and know that they are his spiritual children.



Baptism

Washing in water was important to the Jews and it was part of the Law of Moses (Exodus 30:17–21). It was a symbol of outward cleanliness and holiness.

John the Baptizer baptised people in the River Jordan. We call what he did 'baptism'. He did this as a sign for people who wanted to have their sins symbolically washed away. Baptism is a symbol or sign of inner cleanliness and repentance.

Jesus told His disciples to baptise everyone who was sorry for their sins and who turned away from their old ways (Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15–16). Jesus promised that this would be a sign of God's forgiveness: all who believed in the Son of God would be made clean inside. Baptism in water is the sign to show we have died to the old life and received a new life.

Jesus told His followers that they would be filled with the Holy Spirit. Baptism in the Spirit gives power to our new lives.

5. Abraham told Sarai –
 - a) to tell Pharaoh that she was Abraham's wife;
 - b) to tell Pharaoh that she was Abraham's sister;
 - c) to give Pharaoh gifts of food and animals.
6. Abraham and Lot separated because –
 - a) Lot wanted to get away from the Canaanites and Perizzites;
 - b) Abraham did not like Lot;
 - c) there was not enough land and water for their animals.
7. The kings of the land, where Lot was living, were at war and –
 - a) Lot and his family were taken away;
 - b) the kings were destroyed by fire from heaven;
 - c) Lot sent a message to Abraham asking for help.
8. Melchizedech was –
 - a) blessed by Abraham after the battle was over;
 - b) the king of Sodom who took a tenth of the spoil;
 - c) the king of Jerusalem and priest of God Most High.



Genesis 15:1–18

GOD SPEAKS TO ABRAHAM AGAIN

These verses show again God's plan for Abraham to be the father of the Jewish nation and of all people who believe. This is a very important part of the holy writings and these verses are often quoted in the New Testament (Romans 4:3,18–24; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23). The word of the Lord came to Abraham. He felt God near to him and he heard God say, 'Do not be afraid, Abraham. I am your shield and your very great reward' (15:1).

Abraham had a vision of God and God spoke to him. (A vision is something like a dream but you are awake.) Many people hear the voice of God through preachers and through reading the Bible, but they do not always repent and obey Him. Hearing God must lead to faith and faith must lead us to obey God's word (Romans 2:13). God said that Abraham was good and right because of his faith. Abraham had no goodness and righteousness of his own. He had a goodness that God gave him because he trusted God and he was right with God. 'His faith made him right with God' (15:6).

God said, 'Do not be afraid, Abraham' (15:1). Canaanites lived all around Abraham and he may have been frightened of them. He may have been afraid that the kings that he had defeated would come back again.

Yet it was the other kings who had reason to be afraid, not Abraham. 'I am like a shield to you', God said. 'I am your very great reward' (15:1). Psalm 33:20 says, 'We wait in hope for the Lord; He helps us. He is a shield that keeps us safe.'

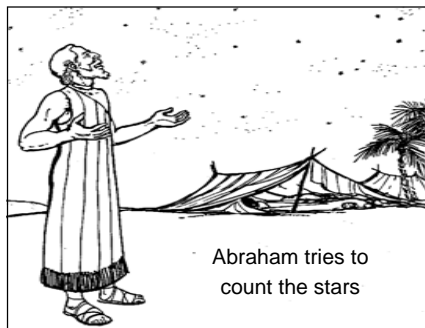
'LOOK AT THE STARS, ABRAHAM'

Abraham's answer to God was, 'I still don't have any children. My servant will get everything I own' (15:2,3). God told him to go outside. 'Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can.' Then God said to him, 'That is how many children that you will have' (15:5). Abraham looked at the night sky. It was shining with a million stars. God gave Abraham a picture and a promise of very many descendants like the stars of the heavens, too many to count.

Abraham did not know where this great multitude of people would come from. Abraham thought that Eliezer, his servant from Damascus, would inherit all his property (15:2). This was the custom of those days if there were no children. But God had a much greater plan! He told Abraham, 'This man will not get what belongs to you. A son will come from your own body' (15:4). Then Scripture says that Abraham believed in the Lord and the Lord accepted Abraham and called him righteous (= good) because he put his trust in God. Abraham's faith made him right with God (15:6; Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23).

The writer of Hebrews tells us a lot about the faith of Abraham. Read Hebrews 11:8–19.

God told Abraham that He would bless him by giving him a son (15:4), but this would not be the greatest reward of his life. Fellowship (that is, friendship) with God would be Abraham's greatest reward.



Genesis 17:1–26

GOD REPEATS HIS AGREEMENT WITH ABRAHAM

Thirteen years later, Ishmael had grown to be a strong boy. Abraham had plenty of time to think about the trouble that he caused by having a son by Hagar. He also had time to think about God's promise. An heir? Through his wife Sarai? Abraham wondered what God would do.

Suddenly, one day, Yahweh appeared to him. 'I am the Almighty God (Hebrew: El Shaddai); walk with Me and be blameless' (17:1).

Live without blame? Few people are blameless. What could that mean? For all people are sinners from birth. All people sin every day:

- We sin in the things we think and say.
- We sin in the things we do.
- We sin in the things we fail to do.

We are sinners by our thoughts, words and actions. Abraham too was a sinner. Yet God called him to give himself completely to God and His plan for him. Then God accepted Abraham's faithfulness as righteousness (Galatians 3:6). 'His faith made him right with God' (Genesis 15:6).

Christian life is a 'walk of faith'. It goes forward one step at a time. It is a journey of faith and action. Oh, how much we would like to please ourselves and enjoy ourselves, or to be treated like kings and queens! But we have both success and failure. However, when God asks us something, He gives us enough faith to do it well. But when we do it, we give up our wills to do HIS will. Only by walking with God can we live without blame. There is a difference between being blameless and being sinless. Only Jesus was sinless.



Circumcision – God's mark for the families of Abraham

1. God instructed that the end of the foreskin (outer part of the male sex organ) must be cut off (Gen 17:11).
2. A male child was circumcised when he was 8 days old. (At that time it is less painful and there is less bleeding.)
3. Children of strangers were included, if the parents had faith in God. In the case of servants, their master was responsible for their circumcision and their training in the things of God.
4. Circumcision was a symbol or a sign. It showed a change of heart from a sinful, disobedient life to a trusting, obedient life.
5. The sign of circumcision was to remind everyone of the covenant or agreement between God and His people.
6. Parents who did not circumcise their children came under judgement.
7. God gave the law of circumcision before Christ came. After Christ came, Paul taught that circumcision was not necessary: believers should show a true change of heart from inside, not by an outward sign (Romans 2:29). God's law about circumcision was only for men. Female circumcision is therefore wrong.



Talk about:

1. How did the word of the Lord come to Abraham (15:1)?
2. How did Abraham answer God (15:2)?
3. What did Abraham say to God about his family (15:3)?
4. Why did God tell Abraham to look at the stars (15:5)?
5. Why did God call Abraham righteous (15:6)?

THE PROMISES OF GOD ARE FOR US ALL

Abraham looked up at the starry sky. Those stars were a picture of the people of all ages and all nations that God had chosen for Himself. Paul said many years later, 'You who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed. You will receive what God has promised' (Galatians 3:29). God's people would receive eternal life and would be as many as the stars – 'a number which no one can count' (Revelation 7:9).

But Abraham said, 'O Lord and King, how can I know that I will take this land?' (Genesis 15:8). How could Abraham be sure of a place for all these people, his children and his descendants?

Hagar's repentance. The Angel of the Lord called Hagar 'Sarai's servant' and not 'Abraham's wife'. The Angel's words pointed to her rebellion and failure. Sarai's maid should have been in Sarai's tent, doing her work. Then the Angel told her, 'Go back to your mistress and obey her' (16:9).

God's forgiveness and provision. The Angel added a promise from the Lord: 'I will greatly increase your children. They will be too many to count' (16:10) The Angel told Hagar, 'You will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard your suffering' (16:11).

GOD'S PROMISES ABOUT ISHMAEL

In 16:12, God gave a clear picture of the nations that would come through Hagar's son. Ishmael would be a wild man and his sons would not fear anyone. They would fight many tribes including many of Abraham's family (25:18). Yet God would protect Ishmael's family through all the centuries. This shows how kind God is to all people.

Later, God told Abraham His promise about Ishmael (Gen. 17:20). God also spoke to Hagar about Ishmael in Genesis 21:17. God began to fulfil His promises about Ishmael in 25:12-18.

The Arab nations descended from Ishmael and later sons of Abraham. (See diagram of family line). That is why the Arabs look to Abraham as their father just as the Jews do. Early Christians also looked to Abraham as their father because they had the same faith in the one true God.

The fighting within Abraham's family continues to this very day. But Jesus taught His followers to love one another, even their enemies (Matthew 5:43-44). He taught this from the holy writings: 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself' (Leviticus 19:18). We should pray that all nations will come to believe that the God of the Jews and the Christians is Yahweh, the one true God who created the world (Ezekiel 38:23). His Son, Jesus, is our Saviour, the Messiah. Many Arabs believe that Jesus is the Son of God but most believe He was only a prophet. Pray that they will come to know the truth about Jesus. The truth will set them free (John 8:36). One day soon, Jesus will return to Jerusalem (Acts 1:11). The whole world will see Him and see His nail pierced hands (Revelation 1:7) and believe He is the Son of God.



Talk about:

1. What question did the Angel ask Hagar?
2. Did Hagar's troubles end when she went back home to Sarai?
3. Do you think that God knows about your troubles, where you are now?
4. Did God promise an end to troubles for Hagar and her son (16:12)?
5. What do the descendants of Ishmael believe about Jesus?



What will the world think about Jesus when He returns?

God's new agreement with Abraham is called 'the covenant of promise' or 'the covenant with promise'. It included these promises (Genesis 12:1-3), which have a special meaning for us all:

A promise of many children and also a special 'seed', which means one person (Galatians 3:16); this looked forward to his only son by Sarai (Isaac) and God's only son (Jesus).

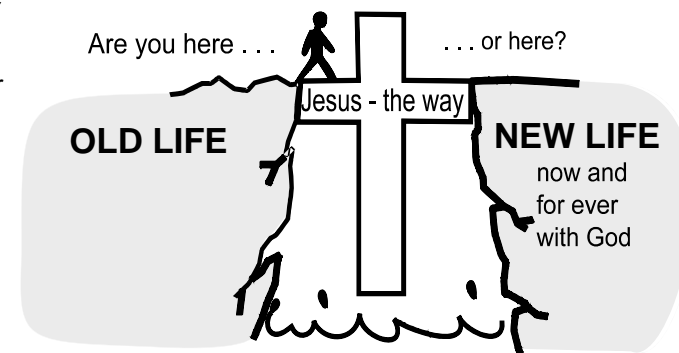
The promise of a land or inheritance, for God's special people, the Jews. The land became the home for 33 years of Jesus through whom all the nations of the world are blessed.

The promises of God to Abraham include all who believe God as Abraham did. This is why Abraham is the father of all who believe God: that includes Jewish and non-Jewish followers of Jesus Christ.

God made another covenant or agreement with Abraham and his descendants. God told Abraham to sacrifice: a young cow, a goat and a ram. 'They must be three years old. Also bring a dove and a young pigeon' (15:9). Abraham prepared the parts. He cut the animals in half and laid them out in two rows. He chased away the large birds that tried to destroy Abraham's sacrifice and his obedience to God. Then Abraham fell asleep and a 'thick and terrible darkness' covered him. God said that this was a picture of when Abraham's children would be slaves in Egypt for 400 years (15:13). Read our Bible commentary on Moses.

While Abraham slept, God's Spirit moved like fire between the two rows of animal pieces that

Abraham sacrificed. When He did this, the gap between God and man was put right. God 'bridged the gap'. God showed that He accepted Abraham and that there was no gap or wall between them. Therefore the covenant between them was strong and would last. The sacrifice was accepted.



SACRIFICE BRINGS NEW LIFE

People who trust in the Lord Jesus today have fellowship with God. There is no 'gap' or 'wall' between them and God. Jesus 'bridged the gap'. This agreement and its wonderful promises are all because of God's loving grace. Man cannot add anything: we only need to obey what God commanded (Philippians 2:12,13). In His agreement with Abraham, God Himself filled up the space that separated Him from man. The gap was filled up. In this way He showed that all

people who have faith in God and obey His word will have close fellowship with Him.

True fellowship with God had been missing ever since Adam and Eve sinned and God sent them out of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:23). Since then all people have sinned. Jesus died on the cross for sinners. For us, Jesus fills that gap between us and God. His sacrifice was complete. Faith in Jesus brings a new start in life. Then we can begin to do good things instead of bad (Titus 2:14).

The chief thing we can do for God is 'to believe in the One He has sent' — that is Jesus Christ (John 6:29).



Talk about:

1. Did God bless Abraham because he was a good man or because he was a man who believed and obeyed God?
2. Who tries to destroy our obedience to God (15:11)?
3. What separates man from God?
4. Who 'bridges the gap' between God and mankind today?
5. What does God's covenant with Abraham mean for us?

ABRAHAM THE FATHER OF ALL WHO BELIEVE GOD

Abraham was puzzled. Sarai his wife was unable to have children (11:30). Also, she was now too old to have a baby. Yet God promised him a son: 'A son will come from your own body' (15:4). God gave Abraham this promise of a son first when he lived in the city of Haran (12:2). Abraham believed God's promise in his heart through the years. Only God could bring life out of such old bodies. To give birth to a son Sarai would need a miracle! Her womb was dead. Did Abraham have faith for a miracle? It took another 25 years for the miracle to happen.



Faith that is like Abraham's

Jesus spoke about people who had great faith in God (read Matthew 8:5–13). Jesus was amazed in His day that non-Jews could have so much faith. He said that people like this would meet with 'Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in heaven!'

There are people in the streets and homes near where we live who can grow in faith if we give them a chance (Matthew 8:11). Yet many believers will fail to trust God (Matthew 8:12). Faith is being sure of what we hope for. It is being certain of what we do not see (Hebrews 11:1). The Roman who came to Jesus (in Matthew 8) had this faith. He believed that he would see God at work in his life. That is like the faith of Abraham – he knew when God was leading, and he believed and followed God. In God's wonderful plan, Abraham's faith was tested to its limit. None of us has mature or fully grown faith when we are born again into God's family. That is why sometimes we have to wait and wait and keep on waiting upon God! The Holy Spirit and the word of His promise help our faith in God to grow. As we pass through the problems of life, we trust God more and grow in faith.

'The God that Abraham believed in gives life to the dead. Abraham's God also speaks of things that do not exist as if they do exist' (Romans 4:17,18). But Abraham and Sarai had to keep on waiting. Then they understood that people have to 'live by believing, not by seeing' (2 Corinthians 5:7). It was not possible for Sarai to have a son without a miracle from God.

Through His grace we prove His promises and learn that He is faithful (1 Thessalonians 5:24). As we shall see later, in Abraham's lifetime, his forward-looking faith was tested very much. There were many difficulties for Abraham before God began to fulfil His promises – he needed even more faith at times. This is why Abraham is called the father of all who believe God.

God added more words to his promises in Genesis 15:13–21.

This time God told Abraham a great number of things. Sometimes God tells us a lot, sometimes He tells us very little. That is OK. Keep believing in God! He always listens. He is Yahweh, our creator.



Talk about:

1. How do life's problems help us to grow in faith?
2. List the extra promises God made to Abraham in 15:13–21.
3. Which country did God mean in 15:13–14?



Genesis 16:1–15

SARAI TRIES TO GIVE ABRAHAM A SON

Ten years after Abraham and Sarai left Haran, Abraham still had no son and heir. The story continues with Hagar, an Egyptian slave woman in Abraham's house. Was she one of the servants that Pharaoh gave Abraham (12:16)? Abraham and Sarai treated Hagar well but she was a slave girl to Sarai. At this time it was a common thing for slave girls to have children for their mistresses. Sarai gave Hagar to Abraham so that Hagar could have a son to give to Abraham and Sarai.

The story covers four things in Hagar's life:

Abraham's love and protection. In those days servants belonged to their master or mistress. A wife could give her servant to her husband to bear children for her. The servant's children belonged to the wife. The husband provided for them all.

Hagar's pride and rebellion. When Hagar became pregnant she laughed at Sarai. Abraham brought many problems into his home by having more than one wife and trouble filled the house. Hagar's pride caused envy, jealousy and hatred. Then Sarai treated Hagar badly (16:6). It was so bad for Hagar that she ran off into the desert.



Marriage

In the Bible, Jesus tells people to keep the original command of God. Marriage is for two people – a man and a woman – to be joined together as one (2:24; Matthew 19:5–6).