



ABRAHAM

The Father of all who believe the One True God

A Bible Teaching Commentary
for personal or group study
by Fred Morris



Genesis Part 2

Chapters 11 to 22

ABRAHAM: The Father of all who believe the One True God Genesis Part 2: Chapters 11 to 22

- **Trusting in God's promises**
- **The destruction of Sodom**
- **The origins of Jews and Arabs**

- **The circumcision of males**
- **God's final test for Abraham**
- **Our sacrifices in life 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.

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








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ABRAHAM: Genesis Part 2: Chapters 11 to 22

INTRODUCTION

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 everything, 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. Noah obeyed God, too. One day, God made a new agreement (covenant) with Noah.

This is what God did: He told Noah to build a 150m boat or ark. Then He destroyed all the bad people by sending rain and floods from the deep part of the



A wonderful picture of God

Genesis 1-11 provides us with a wonderful picture of our God, whose Hebrew name is 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 to His glory.

But the story of life is that many 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 sin: His salvation plan for mankind, and His punishment for those who disobey.

To save us from sin, God sent Jesus as our Saviour. There is no other way, or person, to bring us back to God.

To keep us from sinning, God has also 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).

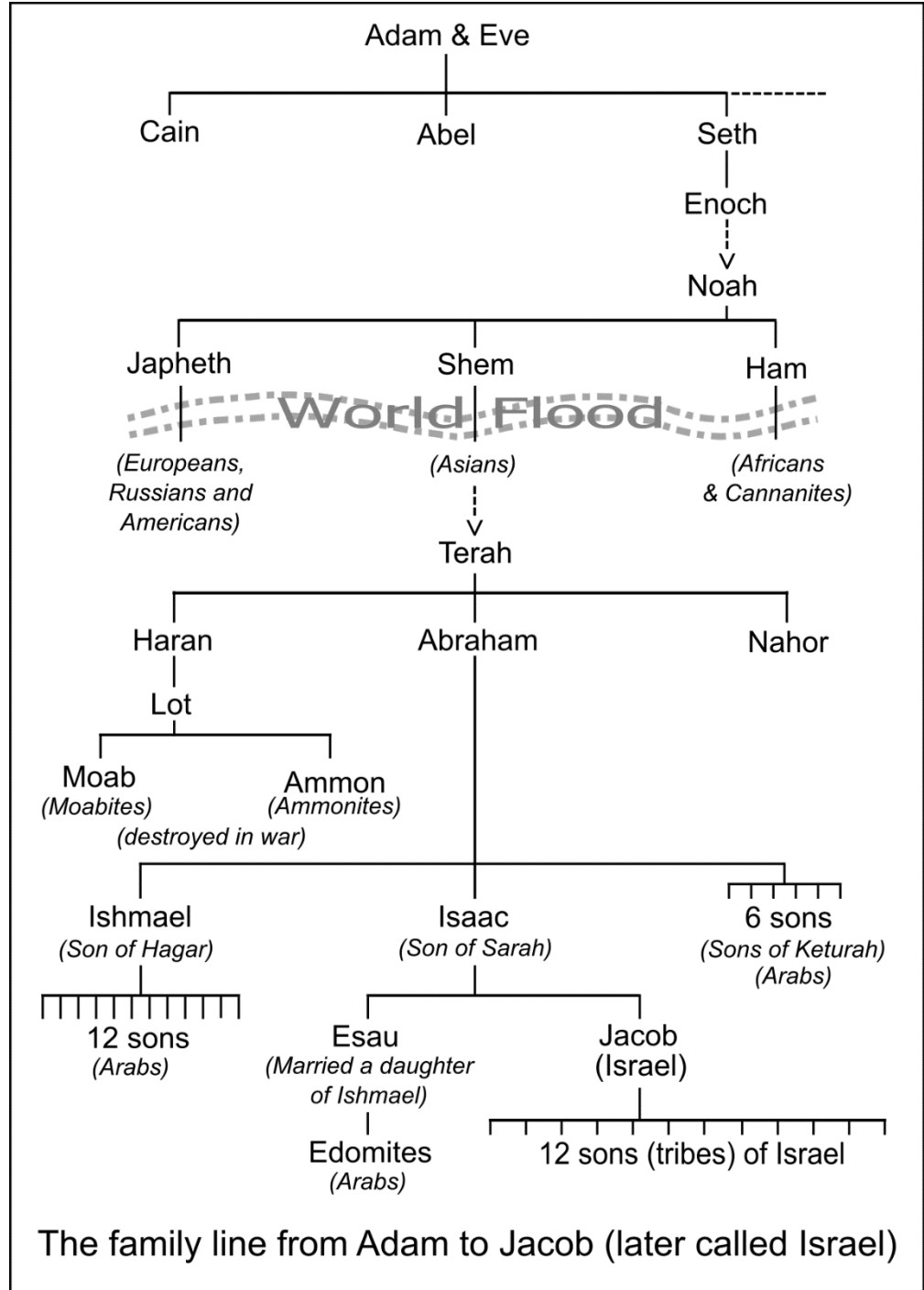
Adam brought sin into the world. Jesus brought salvation into the world. When we read our Bibles and accept Jesus as our Saviour, then God sends His Holy Spirit into our lives to help us. We begin a new life with Jesus as our Lord and friend, if we are willing.

seas. 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 many made big plans together at Babel. This made God sad and 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). They moved to new places on the Earth.

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ABRAHAM: THE FATHER OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Soon after Noah's Flood, God spoke to Abraham (who was originally called Abram). God loved Abraham but Abraham did not know God at first. 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 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 divine baby would be born who would defeat Satan. This promise came true with Jesus, the divine Son of the Virgin Mary. (We talk about this in our Mark's Gospel Bible Commentary.) Jesus was born to defeat sin which is the work of Satan.

Nearly two thousand years before Jesus was born, God repeated 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 covenant or agreement to Abraham's son, Isaac, then to Jacob (who was later called 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 then trusted Him. After Abraham, there were other patriarchs who truly believed God. This is why Abraham is known as 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 the same one true God through Christ. In this way God's new agreement with Abraham became a blessing to Jews and to all people through Christ. The Arabs at the time of Christ also believed the one true God, but today many Arabs follow Islam and worship Allah instead.



Great men who obeyed God: the Patriarchs

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



Bible reading: Genesis 11:10-32

THE CALLING OUT OF ABRAHAM

Ur (11:27) was a large town in Mesopotamia (today called Iraq). This is where Abraham lived. Abraham was called Abram when he lived there. 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. It was in the region where Babylon was built.

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

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. This meant that they lived in tents. In this way God sent them on a journey toward the land of 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 Noah's 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.

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.

Terah and his relatives, 'left together to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled down' (11:31).



God's calling for one man

God's calling was for Abraham and his wife Sarai (later called Sarah). God used Abraham's father Terah to get him out of the prosperous city of Ur in the land of Mesopotamia. Terah's family worshiped heathen gods. He moved his family to Haran which is halfway to the land of Canaan, which later became God's Promised Land for Israel. God then planned to move Abraham and Sarai out of Mesopotamia alone, away from his family (12:1). However, the family of Lot, Abraham's nephew, went with him (12:5). Later, God separated Abraham from Lot. Later still, Lot's tribe was killed in war.



Bible reading: 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). This happened nearly 4000 years ago. 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. He is kind and merciful 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:

- He would provide a land for him and his family to live in (12:1).
- 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)
- God would bring curses on those who were not kind to him and his family (12:3)
- All the people of the earth would be able to share in God's blessing to Abraham (12:3; 18:18).



Talk about this:

1. What do we know about the land where Abraham was born?
2. Put into your own words the promises that God made to Abraham (12:1-3).
3. What do these promises mean to us today, locally and worldwide?



Things to learn about in the life of Abraham

1. God called Abraham and his parents and relatives, to leave Mesopotamia (Iraq) and follow Him to an unknown place.
2. God later gave Abraham the agreement (covenant) of faith by promising him land, family and a blessing to pass on to other believers in the foreign land of Canaan.
3. Abraham's great test was agreeing to sacrifice his only son from Sarai (Isaac), believing that God would provide a way to fulfil His promise.
4. Through Abraham's family, the Messiah (Jesus Christ) came into the world to save all tribes from their sins (Matthew 1:1-17).

ABRAHAM LEARNS TO WALK IN FAITH

From the beginning of time, God spoke the words to create the Earth and the expanding Universe. 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 with the Holy Spirit. God said, "Let US make man in our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). God also spoke to people directly. God spoke to Adam and God spoke to Cain and God spoke to Noah and God spoke to Terah 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" through times of great testing.

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 future Saviour (Messiah) who would come to 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.

God chose Abraham and blessed all of his family who followed his example of faith. Later, God sent Jesus as the Messiah to die for all sinners so salvation is available to all people who believe He is the Son of God. This is for all of Abraham's family, Jews and Gentiles, if they have the same faith as Abraham.

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 (12:4-5). This Bible story in Genesis is mainly about Abraham and his family.



Talk about this:

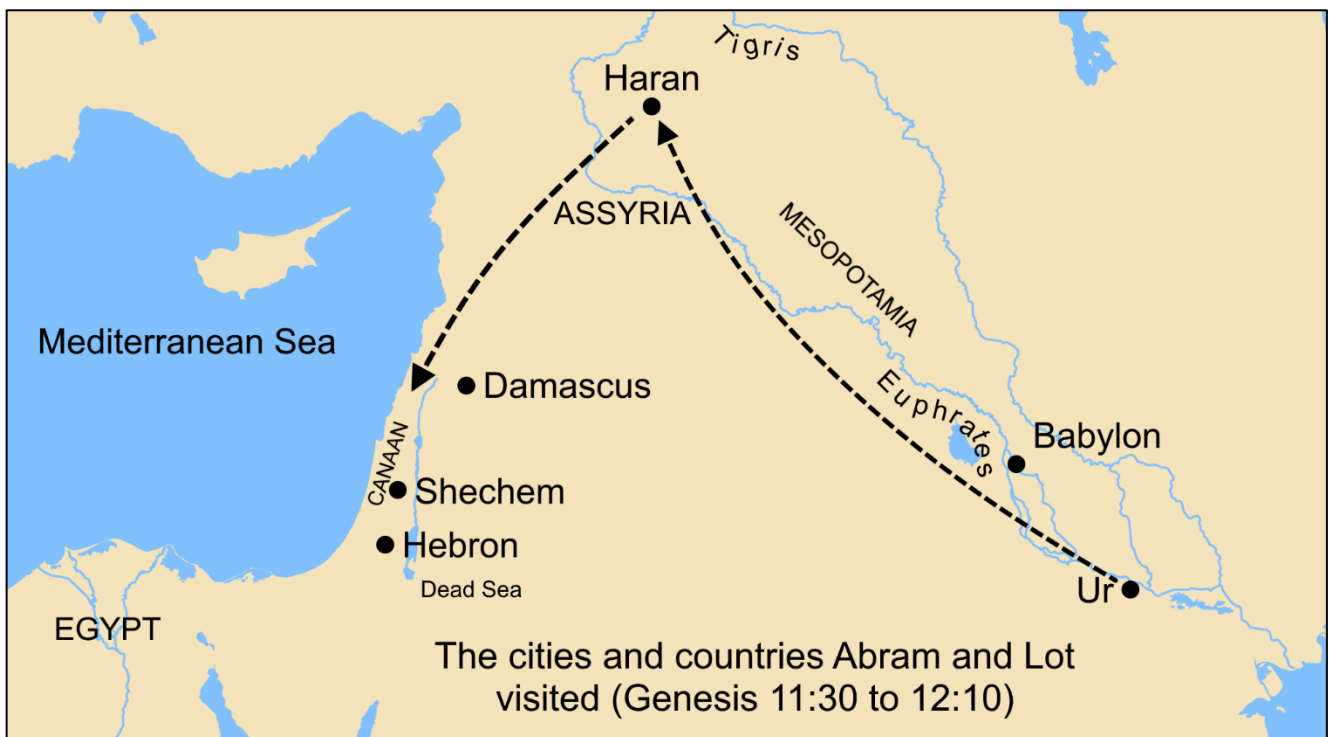
1. Do all men have an equal chance to hear God's voice (Psalm 1:14; Mark 16:16)?
2. Has God called and chosen you? Do you know why?
3. What does He expect from His chosen children (Genesis 12:4)?
4. What agreement did God make with Abraham?

ABRAHAM MOVES ON

Abraham moved on to a place that God showed him, called Canaan. Abraham and Sarai did not have any children at this time, but God had 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 within us by hearing God's command and then obeying Him (Romans 10:10).

If we do not hear and obey God's words, other people may ask, "Does that person have faith?" Also, if we do not obey God, we will not find the path that God has planned for us in this world. Then people will ask, "Has that person forgotten their calling from God?" 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 message, 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 [Jesus]. 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 or read this Gospel message, 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 the teachings and calling of God through His Spirit.

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 this:

1. What makes faith in God grow (12:1,4)?
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 made mistakes but fixed his eyes on God's promises and had faith in God until the end of his life.

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 (12:6). 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 later confirmed His promise to Abraham that this land would belong to his family (15:18-21). Shechem is 60km 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 later 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.

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 cannot do that". 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. The first place was Bethel. (12:8,9).



Bible reading: 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. There was a famine so he moved down to Egypt (12:10) and nearly lost his beautiful 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 and to begin to look to strangers or governments 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 this. 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 His will. In this way, God kept Sarai safe to bear the son that He had promised to Abraham.

So Abraham learned an important lesson from God. He 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). Abraham learned an important lesson in Egypt to trust in God.



Talk about this:

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



Think about this: How do we make the right choice where to go in life?



Bible reading: 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, which tries to control us and others. 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.

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 (13:11). 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.

Abraham's faith in God grew and his desire to worship God grew (13:18). Abraham moved back to Hebron 30km south of Jerusalem near the large trees of Mamre.

As Abraham's faith in God grew, his desire to worship God grew (13:18). Abraham, in faith, moved back to Hebron, 30km south of Jerusalem, near the large trees of Mamre. This is where he began his calling from God to settle in the land of Canaan. This was God's plan for Abraham's future family to bless all mankind.

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 still lived there (Romans 4:16-22). Therefore Abraham lived by faith in the land that was promised in the future 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" may make 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 himself. It was Joshua, 500 years later, who finally possessed the land and owned it for the people of Israel (Joshua 1:6).

Abraham set up his tents in Hebron. 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. Abraham, in faith, claimed this place for God and for his future family. Yes, he did this in faith and obedience, not knowing about the future plans of God.



Talk about this:

1. What made Lot leave his uncle Abraham (13:6)?
2. When a quarrel started what did Abraham do (13:9)?

3. What happened when Abraham allowed Lot to have the first choice (13:11-17)?
4. What was good and what was bad about Lot's choice?
5. How much did Abraham know about God's plan for the land of Canaan?
6. What did Abraham do to "possess" the land (13:17,18)? What did this mean to him?



Think about this: How much do you know about God's plan for your life? What do you do to receive God's promises? How can we help our faith to grow (13:4,9,12,14-18)?



Bible reading: Genesis 14:1-24

LOT BECOMES A PRISONER

Lot turned away from the hard places to live. First he moved to the valley of Zoar, then to city of 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. 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, including the city of Sodom.

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).

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 Yahweh, Almighty God, "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'.

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 Holy Spirit power in the name of Jesus 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 this:

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. Why did Abraham refuse to keep treasures won from the war?



Bible reading: Genesis 15:1-18

GOD SPEAKS TO ABRAHAM AGAIN

These verses show again God's plan for Abraham. He would become the father of the Jewish nation and of all people who believe in Yahweh, the one true God Almighty and Creator of the Universe. This is a very important part of the Old Testament 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 through a vision. 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).

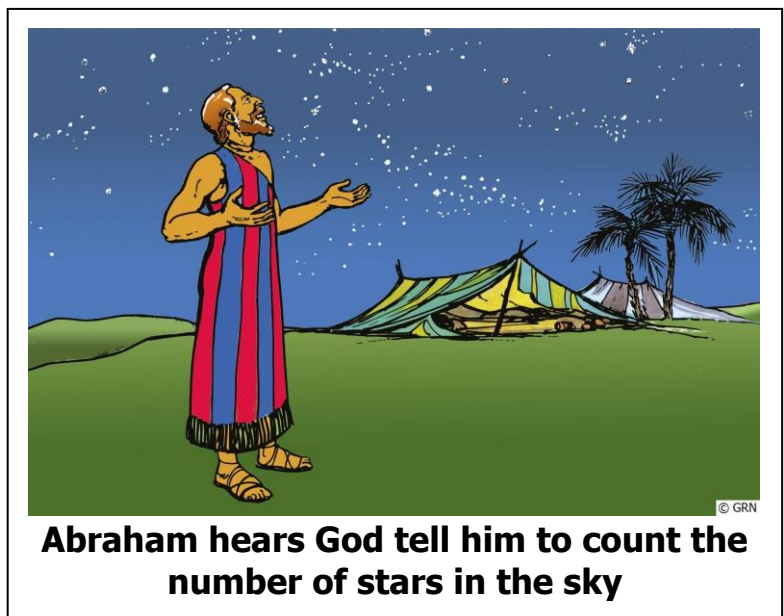
Abraham had a vision of God and God spoke to him. (A vision is something like a dream but you are awake.) Many people hear the voice of God through preachers and through reading the Bible, but they do not always repent and obey Him. Hearing God must lead to faith and faith must lead us to obey God's 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 (righteousness) that God gave him because he trusted in. "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 do not 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 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.

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?

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, Israel's Messiah.

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 the Manna 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 can 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 been born with (inherited) sin in their lives. 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). Therefore, the best thing we can do for God is "to believe in the One He has sent", Jesus Christ (John 6:29).



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 these tests of life, we trust God more and grow in faith.



Talk about this:

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)?
6. Who tries to destroy our obedience to God (15:11)?

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!

"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 a little. That is OK. Keep believing in God! He always listens. He is Yahweh, our Almighty God and creator.



Talk about this:

1. Discuss the extra promises God made to Abraham in 15:13-21.
2. Which country did God mean in 15:13-14?



Think about this: What separates man from God? Who "bridges the gap" between God and mankind today? What does God's covenant with Abraham mean for us? How do life's problems help us to grow in faith?



Marriage

In the Bible, Jesus tells people to keep the 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; Genesis 2:24).



Bible reading: 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. Abraham and Sarai treated Hagar well. 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.

This story covers four things in Hagar's life:

1. *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.
2. *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.
3. *Hagar's repentance.* An Angel of the LORD God Almighty visited her in the desert. He called Hagar "Sarai's servant" and not "Abraham's wife". The Angel's words pointed to her rebellion and failure. Sarai's maid should be in Sarai's tent,



The hatred and jealousy between Sarai and Hagar over the baby Ishmael

doing her work. Then the Angel told her, "Go back to your mistress and obey her" (16:9).

4. *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). The name 'Ishmael' means 'God hears'. He became the head of a family of Arabs who trusted in the God of Abraham.

GOD'S PROMISES ABOUT ISHMAEL

Then 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 not be friendly to their relatives (16:12). They would become a great nation (17:20). They would fight many tribes including many of Abraham's future family (25:18). Yet God would protect Ishmael's family through all the centuries. This shows the love of God to all nations, including the family of Hagar.

Later, God told Abraham His promise about Ishmael (Genesis 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 from the later sons of Abraham through his second wife Keturah. That is why the Arabs look to Abraham as their father just as the Jews do. The early Christians also looked to Abraham as their father because they all had the same faith in Yahweh, the one true God, and in Jesus the Christ, Israel's Messiah.

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 Old Testament: "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 Christ, is our Saviour, the Messiah.

Many Arabs and Jews 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). Then they will be saved by the grace of God through the blood of Jesus and care for one another in love, in peace and in compassion.

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 God's Son and Saviour of the world.



Talk about this:

1. What question did the Angel ask Hagar?
2. Did Hagar's troubles end when she went back home to Sarai?
3. Did God promise an end to troubles for Hagar and her son (16:12)?



Think about this: What will the world think about Jesus when He returns?



Bible reading: 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 [El Shaddai]; walk with Me and be blameless" (17:1).

Live without blame? Few people are blameless. What could that mean? All people are sinners from birth:

- 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. 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 or shame.

"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 future son of Abraham and Sarai.

GOD CHANGES THEIR NAMES

This is the point where God changed Abraham's original name from Abram to Abraham. "Your name will be Abraham because I have made you a father of many nations" (17:5). Also, 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.

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 by full immersion 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 confirms 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.



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 Almighty God. In the case of servants, their master was responsible for their circumcision and their training in the things of God.
4. Circumcision became 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' or 'female genital mutation' (FMG) is therefore wrong.



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 washed away. Baptism is a symbol or sign of inner cleanliness and repentance.

Jesus told His disciples to baptise everyone who confessed 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 by full immersion under water is the sign to show we have died to the old life. We then demonstrate that new life as we are lifted out of the water.

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

ABRAHAM LAUGHS AT GOD'S PROMISE

Then God said, "You can be sure that I will give you a son by Sarah" (17:16). 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, their 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 Arab descendants of Abraham and Ishmael, as well as Jews, circumcise their boys today.



Talk about this:

1. What did God ask Abraham to do (17:1)?
2. When God spoke, Abraham fell flat on the ground (17:3). Why?
3. What was the purpose of circumcision?
4. What is the purpose of baptism?



Think about this: Think about the need to witness holiness through "spiritual circumcision". Think about the need to witness faith in Christ through baptism by full immersion.



Bible reading: 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). He said, "If you are pleased with me, my lord, do not pass me by (18:3)."

"My lord" in verse 3 is just a polite greeting, but in 13 the word is "Yahweh", the Hebrew name for LORD, the Almighty God.

Abraham 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 (18:6-7).

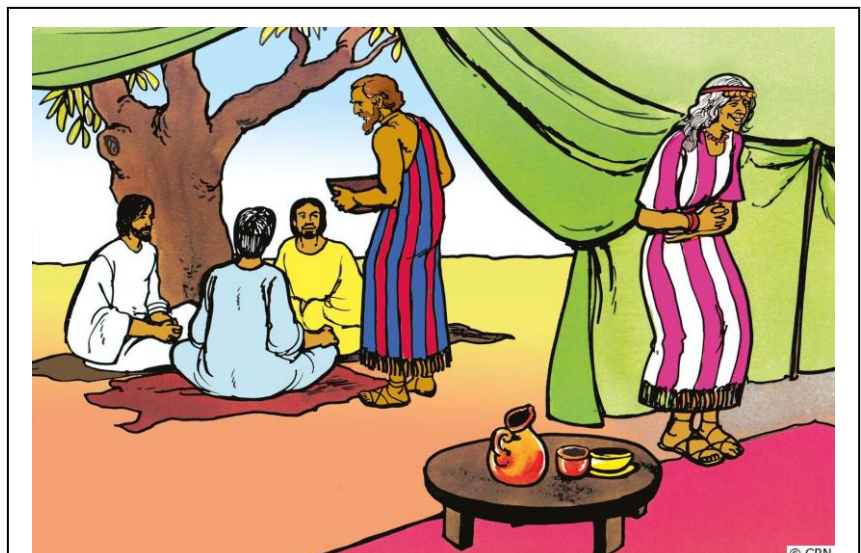
IT WAS THE WORD OF THE LORD

One of the visitors 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 was said, and she laughed to herself (18:12).

Then the LORD God Almighty asked Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh?" (18:13) 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!

As the visitors prepared to leave, God showed to



Sarah laughs at the message from God that she will have a baby boy

Abraham that He truly was God Almighty. He told Abraham everything about His promises given before (12:2-3; 18:17-19). He reminded Abraham that his family will become a great nation and all nations will be blessed because of him (18:18). This includes 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 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 even 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 family and servants to teach them and lead them in the worship of the one true God who is All-Sufficient or All-Mighty (El-Shaddai).



Talk about this:

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 became afraid?
5. What more did God tell Abraham (18:19)?



Think about this: 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?

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 1:2). God always warns people of judgement and punishments that are coming. He still warns men and women today. See Matthew 14:39. "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 made the men slaves to these sins. God hates the sins that people do against their own bodies and to others. 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 enjoy what was wrong instead of enjoying sex in marriage to a woman. The men of Sodom rushed to rape and have sex with every male traveller who came to their city (19:4-5). In doing this, they forced others to do what was wrong.

However, 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.



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 and become popular and successful. He did not put God first in his life. He lived with evil men. This weakened his faith in God and his witness to all people he met. 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 sexual sin hurt many people.

God is not pleased when men choose ways to make love outside of marriage. God did not create men for this purpose. He did not create the sexual desire for this purpose. He created the desire for making love to produce children. When a man makes love with his wife, it is a wonderful experience. God made it wonderful for this purpose and to populate the Earth. Men should choose God's way and reject any other 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. We must watch and pray and choose to live holy lives as we await the return of Christ. Then we will be saved by the grace of God.

ABRAHAM PRAYS FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD

The LORD's words troubled Abraham. He knew that God, "the Judge of all the earth", was fair (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) and live with Him forever. 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 (18:23-32). 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).
- Abraham prayed for all people who love God. The "good seed" gets mixed in with the "weeds" in this world and men sometimes 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.
- 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 "a complete number". So Abraham's prayer of intercession for the believers in Sodom was complete. He was satisfied and went home (18:33).
- 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 this:

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?



Bible reading: Genesis 19:1-38

GOD ANSWERS ABRAHAM'S PRAYER

God's 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 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 sea 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. Their 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 this:

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 and his family?



Think about this: Who did Lot trust? Abraham, God or Himself? Who do you trust?



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. God rescued him from Sodom because Abraham knew he believed God and prayed for him. Later, he still 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, especially 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.



Bible reading: Genesis 20:1-17

ABRAHAM IN THE LAND OF THE PHILISTINES

The story in Chapter 20 may be from an earlier time. Abraham was in "the land of the Philistines". 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. We wonder why he moved closer to trade routes.

Abraham thought that he might be killed because of his wife's beauty (20:2; see 12:10-20). This happened once before in Egypt (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 the Holy Spirit because He 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 at times. We all fail or "fall down" sometimes 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 this:

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?



Bible reading: Genesis 21:1-33

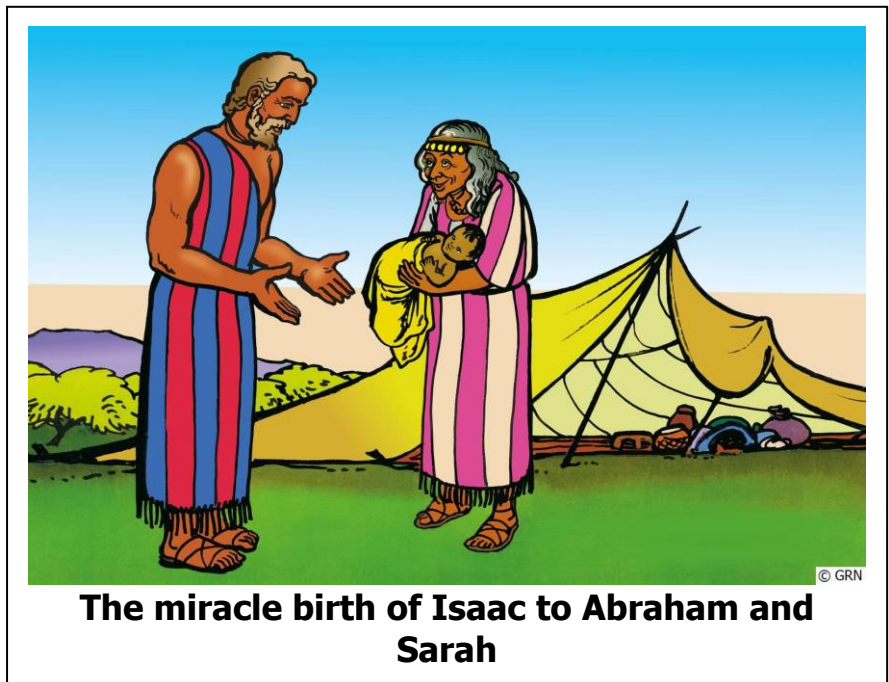
THE MIRACLE BIRTH OF ISAAC

At last a son was born to Sarah and Abraham and they named him Isaac (21:1-3).

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).

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



The miracle birth of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah

why Isaac is known as a type or picture of Christ. However, the seed in Sarah was from Abraham but the seed in Mary was from God's Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18).

SARAH REALISES THAT ISHMAEL IS 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. She knew that Ishmael would become a threat to Isaac if they live together. 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 LORD God Almighty "who lives forever" (21:33). Abraham remembered God and God remembered Abraham.



Talk about this:

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)?



Bible reading: 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 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 alone that the nation of Israel would come and be blessed. This was a big test of Abraham's faith in God's promised provision.

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

When they came to the foot of Mount Moriah, Abraham left his servants with the donkey. 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). He trusted God that they would return safely. 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 to God because he was a miracle from God. He did not know what God would do, but he obeyed and trusted. He knew that God had promised him Isaac and he knew that God was faithful. He knew that God promised a large family would come from Isaac (we call them Jews). We also know that God promised a large family would come from Ishmael (we call them Arabs). But God did not reveal His full plan for Isaac.

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 correct form of worship. But Abraham also knew that he was being tested by God to sacrifice his "only son" at this time.

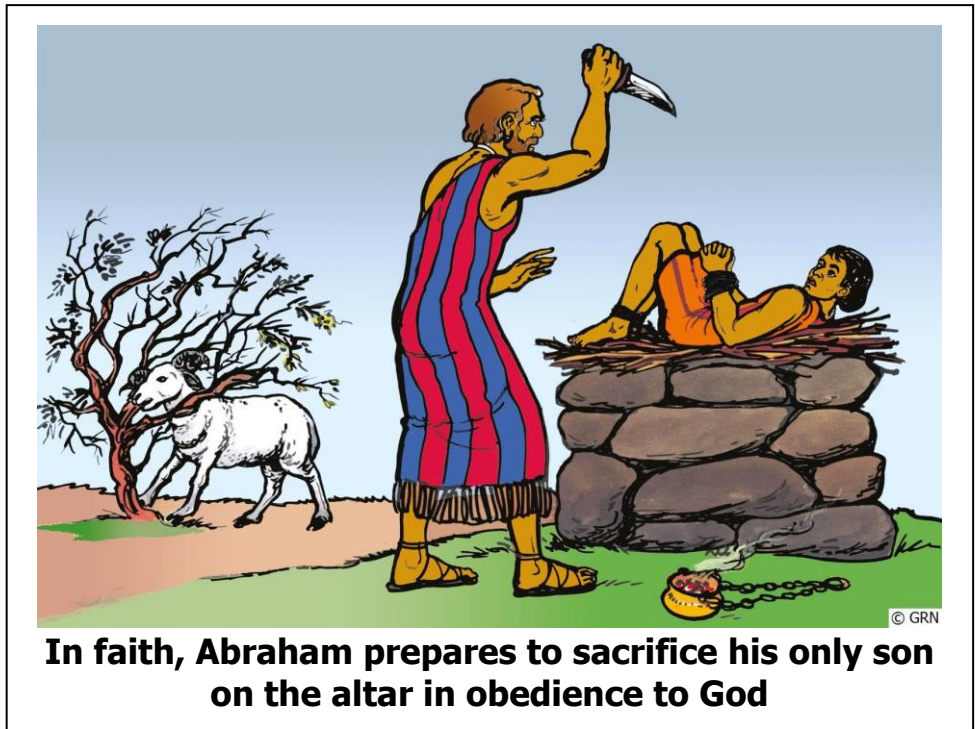
When they reached the high place that God had told him about, Abraham built an altar and laid the wood on it. He tied his son Isaac and laid him on top of the wood on the altar. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to kill and sacrifice his son. At that moment the angel of the LORD called 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, which is 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.

The angel of the LORD God Almighty then gave Abraham a message from God, "I make a promise on oath in My own name. I will bless you because of what you have done. You have not held back your son, your only son. So I will certainly bless you. I will make your children after you as many as the stars in the sky... Your children will take over the cities of their enemies. All nations on Earth will be blessed because of your children. All this will happen because you obeyed Me" (22:15-18).

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.



In faith, Abraham prepares to sacrifice his only son on the altar in obedience to God

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 a lamb in Isaac's place. 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 and is our Substitute Lamb from God. Jesus died because of God's love for us and for all His creation. Believe and receive His forgiveness, salvation and eternal life!



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 son. But God provided a male 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 but unholy life style.
- He did not try to get rich from kings or from cities in the Promised Land of Canaan.
- 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.
- He believed that all the nations of the world would be blessed through his family.

It was through the family of Abraham and Isaac that Israel and the Messiah would come.

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 fulfilled. It is a big test to be prepared to surrender to God our hopes, dreams and even the promises God has given us.
2. Isaac was not a child, he was a young man walking in faith beside an old man. He could resist. Instead he submitted to being tied down. We may be tied down by circumstances we cannot escape or 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?

3. 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 or male lamb was climbing the other side. When he got to the place God wanted him to be, the lamb was there waiting. Today, 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.



Talk about this:

1. How do we know that Abraham believed that God would protect Isaac (22:5)?
2. How do some people today worship Molech instead of Almighty God?
3. Describe in your own words the four points of faith above.
4. 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."



Think about this: What do we mean when we say, "If you have faith you must be willing to give up everything"? What is your righteous way to sacrifice everything to God? Are you prepared to sacrifice everything to God including the position, ministry and provision he has given to you?



Abraham is the father of all who believe God

Romans 4:17-25; 5:1 The Bible says, "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, even when 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 was put right with God because he believed the promise.

The Bible does 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 punished for the sins of mankind. 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 as the Son of God. 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 and use us for His purposes. We are in that place now.

CONCLUSIONS

Abraham lived in the Promised Land that we now call Israel. 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. Abraham 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 Jesus Christ was born to Mary as Israel's Messiah. Abraham was the father of all people who have faith in the one true God. Through his family, God offered salvation to the whole world so that all who believe Jesus is the Son of God will be saved. God promised this to Abraham without him knowing how it would happen.

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 received the faith to believe the One True and Almighty God. He had a natural son, Ishmael, and a supernatural son, Isaac. His faith remained strong in preparing to offer his only son to God.

You can read what the Apostle 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 will be changed and welcome Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. But like Abraham, many have to wait a long time for the promises of God. Many will not choose the salvation offered by God even when it is explained to them.

Job once asked: "Why do believers not see the victory that is God's?" (Job 24:1). Job already knew for himself the answer to his question, and so should we: "I know that my Saviour [Redeemer] lives" (Job 19:25). Job believed, like Abraham, that God's salvation would come to the whole world. He also knew he would see God after death (Job 19:26).

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 have told you about God's plans for the creation of God's special people, the Jews, through Abraham. In Genesis Parts 3 and 4 we tell you about the progress of Abraham's family, especially Isaac, Jacob (called Israel), Joseph and Judah. We also tell you what this means for God's plans for Jews and Christians worldwide as believers in Yahweh, our Almighty God.

We must remember that Abraham was righteous in the sight of God through faith alone in Him. At that time there was no Law of Moses. This came later.

Abraham left Ur believing in heathen gods and arrived in Canaan believing in the One true and Almighty God.

Abraham obeyed God and was prepared to sacrifice his only son born to the elderly and barren Sarah. This established the Jewish family of God-fearing believers. Two thousand years later, God prepared to sacrifice His only Son, born to the young Virgin Mary. This established the Jewish and Christian family of God-fearing believers across the world whose faith is in Christ alone.

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