

ABRAHAM

Genesis 12 - 25

STRUCTURE

Key-person: Abram/Abraham

Key-location: Canaan

Key-repetitions:

- Covenant (15:18; 17:2, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 19, 21).
- God promises Abraham: to bless him and to make him a blessing (12:1-4); to give him numerous descendants (15:4-5; 17:7-8, 16-21; 18:9-15; 22:17-18); to bless him (22:15-18); through his descendant, all nations would be blessed (22:15-19).
- Altar/call on the name of the Lord (12:7-8; 13:4, 18; 22:9-14).
- Son/offspring/descendants: Abram didn't have children (11:30; 15:2); God promised descendants (15:4-5; 17:7-8, 16-21; 18:9-15; 22:17-18); Ishmael (16:1-16; 21:8-21; 25:9); Isaac (21:1-7, 8; 22:1-14; 24:1-8, 52-67; 25:9).

Key-attitudes:

- Abraham's faith.
- Abraham's anguish because he did not have a son.
- Abraham's weakness to resist Sarah's suggestions.

- Positive attitude toward Abraham.
- Sarah's disgust of Hagar and Ishmael.
- Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac to God.

Initial-situation:

After the flood, God commanded Noah's descendants to multiply and scatter throughout the whole earth (Gen 9:7). Men on the plain of Shinar decided to build a city with a tower in order not to scatter (Gen 11:4). God confused the language spoken by everyone and the people dispersed. Abram, one of the descendants of Noah's son Shem, settled in Haran.

Initial-problem:

God called Abram to leave his country and his people.

Final-situation:

The angel of the Lord promised Abraham that he would make his descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore and that through his offspring all nations on earth would be blessed.

BIBLE STORY

God Calls Abram

Abram was a descendant of Noah's son Shem. His family had settled in Haran (11:31-32).

One day, the Lord said to Abram, "Leave your country, your family and your father's home. Go to the land I will show you" (12:1).

The Lord made promises to Abram:

- 1st "I will make you into a great nation;
- 2nd I will bless you;
- 3rd I will make you famous;
- 4th You will be a blessing to others;
- 5th I will bless those who bless you;
- 6th I will curse those who curse you;
- 7th All peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (12:2-3).

Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran and set out for Canaan. Lot went with him. Abram took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot and everything he owned (12:4-5).

After arriving in Canaan, the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your descendants." Abram built an altar to the Lord. He moved to Bethel, built another altar and called on the name of the Lord (12:6-9).

Time passed. There was a conflict between Lot's and Abram's herdsmen. Abram let his nephew Lot choose where he would go. Lot chose the fertile plain of Jordan and left Abram the dry hilly land (13:6-11). Lot went near Sodom (13:12-13). The Lord promised Abram that he would give his descendants all the land he could see. Abram built an altar (13:14-18).

God's Covenant with Abram

The Lord spoke to Abram in a vision, "Abram, I am your shield. Your reward will be great."

Abram prayed, "O Sovereign Lord, what good are your blessings when I have no son?"

God led Abram outside and said, "Look up and count the stars if you can. Your descendants will be like that, too many to count."

Abram believed the Lord. God considered that Abram's faith was worthy of reward. God considered Abram righteous on account of his faith. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, "I give this land to your descendants" (15:1-21).

Sarai and Abram had no children. Sarai took her Egyptian slave girl named Hagar, and told Abram to sleep with her. Sarai said, "Maybe I can get children through her." Abram agreed. He slept with Hagar; she became pregnant. Hagar gave birth to Abram's son, Ishmael. Abram was 86 years old when Ishmael was born (16:1-16).

When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; obey me and do what is right. I will confirm my covenant between us and will give you a huge family."

Abram fell flat on his face, and God said to him, "This is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham. You will be the father of nations; kings will come from you. This is a permanent covenant between me and you and your descendants. I will be your God and the God of your descendants. I will give the land of Canaan as a permanent possession to you and your descendants; and I will be their God.

"You and your descendants must honor my covenant. Circumcise every male as a sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come, every male in your household who is eight days old must be circumcised" (17:1-14).

God also told Abraham, "No longer is your wife's name Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and she will give birth to your son. Sarah will be the mother of nations; kings will come from her. Your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. As for Ishmael, I will bless him also, but I will establish my covenant with Isaac. Sarah will give birth to your son Isaac by this time next year." God left when he finished speaking with Abraham (17:15-22).

Abraham was 99 years old when he was circumcised; his son Ishmael was thirteen. Abraham, Ishmael and every male in Abraham's household were circumcised on the same day (17:23-27).

On another occasion, God appeared to Abraham while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the hottest part of the day. Abraham looked up; he saw three men standing nearby. Abraham ordered Sarah to prepare bread and he ordered a servant to butcher a calf. Abraham brought the men some water, bread, milk and roast beef. While they ate, Abraham stood near them under a tree.

The Lord said, "I will return to you next year at this time, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Sarah was listening at the tent door, just behind the Lord. Abraham and Sarah were already old. Sarah laughed to herself thinking, "My husband and I are too old to have a baby!"

Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'I am too old to have a baby?' Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you about this time next year and Sarah will have a son!"

Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh."
The Lord replied, "Yes, you did laugh" (18:1-15).

The angels of the Lord left Abraham and went to destroy the city of Sodom (18:16 - 19:29).

Abraham and His Son Isaac

The Lord did what he promised. Sarah became pregnant and gave Abraham a son at the time God had promised. Abraham named him Isaac. When Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him. Abraham was a 100 years old when Isaac was born (21:1-7).

On the day Isaac was weaned, Abraham gave a great feast. Sarah saw Ishmael, the son of Hagar, teasing Isaac. Sarah said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."

Early the next morning, Abraham took some food and a canteen of water, gave them to Hagar, and sent her off with Ishmael (21:8-13).

Many years later God tested Abraham. The Lord said, "Abraham, take your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on the mountain I will show you."

Early the next morning Abraham saddled his donkey and set out for the place designated by God. He took with him Isaac, two servants, fire and enough wood for the burnt offering. On the third day, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, "Stay with the donkey while the boy and I go over there. We'll worship; then we'll come back to you."

Isaac carried the wood for the burnt offering. Abraham carried the fire and the knife. The two of them went on together. Isaac asked Abraham, "Father, the fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

Abraham answered, "My son, God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering." The two of them went on together (22:1-8).

When they reached the place, Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood on it. He tied up his son Isaac and laid him on the altar. Abraham took his knife to sacrifice his son. But the angel of the Lord called out, "Abraham! Abraham! Do not lay a hand on the boy. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not kept from me your son, your only son" (22:9-14).

Abraham looked up and he saw a ram caught by its horns in a bush. He took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. Abraham called that place, "The Lord Will Provide."

The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time, "Because you have done this and have not refused to give me your son, your only son, I will bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Through your descendant, all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me" (22:15-19).

Sarah was 127 years old when she died. Abraham bought a cave to serve as the family cemetery and there he buried his wife Sarah (23:1-20). Abraham lived 175 years. When he died, his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave with his wife Sarah (25:1-10).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What covenant promises did God give to Abraham?
2. What family problems did Abraham face?
3. What weaknesses did Abraham have?
4. What were Abraham's strengths?
5. How did Abraham express his faith in God?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. God's promise to Abram that all people on earth would be blessed through him (12:3), and that all nations would be blessed through his descendant (22:18) are references to the future coming of Jesus Christ. Through Jesus, all people can have a personal relationship with God and be blessed. This is the second and third reference made to one who is coming in the future. The first was in Genesis 3:15.
2. A person who believes that God will do what he promises is considered righteous by God. Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness (15:6). Abram trusted God to do what appeared to be impossible, to enable him in his old age to have a son (15:5-6).
3. God is omnipotent. He had the power to give a son to Abraham and Sarah, even though both of them were advanced with age (18:14; 21:1-2).
4. God can delay the execution of his promises; however, he always fulfills them. God allowed many long years to pass from the time he promised Abraham a son, until Isaac was born (21:1-2).
5. God provided the perfect sacrifice to substitute for sinful man. God provided a ram in the place of Isaac (22:13). God made sure the ram was caught by its horns in a bush. If it had been caught by any other part of its body, it would have injured himself, trying to escape. God only accepts a perfect and healthy animal as a sacrifice. The sheep died in the place of Isaac. Abraham called the place where God provided the sheep to substitute Isaac, "The Lord will provide". The lamb that substituted Isaac is an illustration of Christ, who was offered in substitution for all who have faith in him (Heb 10:5-10).