

2 THE JOURNEY OF FAITH

Allen was a devoted fan of the rock band that was coming to town for a concert. He had all the band's albums. Their posters were plastered all over his bedroom wall. He knew most of their songs by heart. And now at last, his favorite band was coming to town for a concert. Allen was the first in line to buy tickets when the box office opened.

The concert was Friday night. Allen and a few close friends had reserved seats in the front row of the concert hall. This was to be a night to remember. Late Friday afternoon the telephone rang at Allen's home. It was Amber, a good friend with whom Allen had grown up. Allen and Amber weren't romantically involved. They were just

good friends. They had been through a lot together and had built up a good and trusting friendship.

Amber was really down and depressed. Her boyfriend had just told her he was no longer interested in her. Her parents didn't care for him anyway so they just shrugged it off as a good thing. They didn't seem to understand how hurt Amber felt. Amber told Allen she needed someone to talk to right away. "Allen, you are the only one who can understand and help me," Amber said.

"But, but . . ." stammered Allen.

What would you do if you were Allen? Would you be willing to give up something so important to you for a close and trusted friend?

3 STATEMENTS

- The journey of faith is a journey of a growing and deepening trust in God's love and care for God's people.
- God's promises to Abraham and Sarah began a new chapter in God's plan to heal the brokenness of God's creation.
- Faith in God is the willingness to offer to God what is most precious and dear to us.

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Source

THE ROAD TOWARD A DEEPER FAITH

How do you grow to trust someone as a good friend? You begin to trust someone as you share more and more

experiences and time with the other person. You learn more about them and go through some rough times together. You share with them your deepest feelings and concerns and dreams. They understand you and accept you for who you are.

Faith in God works the same way. *The journey of faith is a journey of a growing and deepening trust in God's*

love and care for God's people. Your faith in God grows as you experience more and more the gifts and love of God in your daily life. The farther along you walk with God on the journey of faith, the more your trust in God grows.

It is this growth in faith that is the theme of the biblical story of Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 12–22. We see two different kinds of faith in Abraham and Sarah. The one kind of faith is the kind that trusts in God when there is clearly some kind of visible reward for doing so. The second kind of faith is the kind that is a mature and fully grown trust in God. This faith trusts God even when it seems you must give up what you value and treasure the most.

THE PROBLEM AND THE PROMISE

Chapters 1–11 of Genesis told the story of God's creation of the whole universe and the destruction of the important relationships among all humans and all creation. These first 11 chapters of the Bible remind us that God is concerned for all people of the world and for the whole creation.

The story of God's care for creation suddenly narrows in Genesis 12. The story moves from a focus on all humanity to one specific family—the family of Abraham and Sarah. *God's promises to Abraham and Sarah began a new chapter in God's plan to heal the brokenness of God's creation.*

From Genesis 12 on, the Old Testament is the story of the people of Israel, the children of Sarah and Abraham. God does not abandon the other people of the world, but the story of God and God's people is told through the generations of this family.

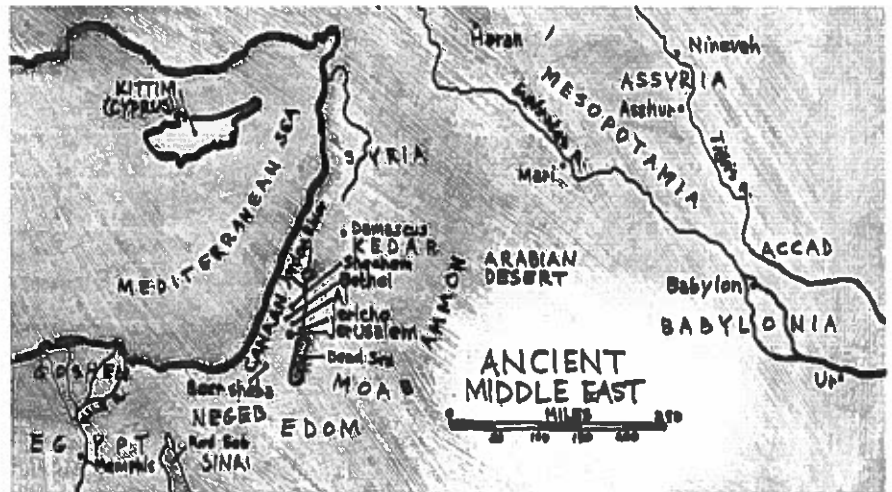
Abraham and Sarah lived around 4000 years ago in an area of the world known as Mesopotamia. We are introduced to them in the Bible in a genealogy (or family tree) that lists the members of their family (Genesis 11:10-30). When we meet them in verses 26-30, their names are Abram and Sarai. Later, God will give them their new names *Abraham* and *Sarah* to reflect the promise God gave to them

(Genesis 17:5, 15). But that is getting ahead of the story.

On a map of the ancient Middle East, trace the journey taken by the family of Terah, Abraham's father, from Ur to Haran. Using the map scale, measure the distance they traveled. Now, using a map of your own country, locate your community. Find a city in your country that is the same distance from your community as that traveled by Terah's family.

1. How long would it take your family to move that distance in a car or truck?

2. How long would it take your family to move that distance on foot?



We do not know why Terah moved his family so far. We can only imagine that it was for the same reasons people move today—economic or political reasons.

The long move was one of the difficulties this family faced in simply trying to live in a harsh world. But there was a greater problem that threatened the future of Abraham and Sarah's family. Read Genesis 11:30.

3. What was the problem for the future of Abraham and Sarah's family line?

It seems that the story must now stop. The family line of Abraham and Sarah will not have another child to carry on into the next generation.

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Will this couple have a child? Will the family line continue? The questions remain unanswered. What we are told is that Abraham and Sarah moved to a new place.

4. Abraham and Sarah's family was a family on the move. On the map of the ancient Middle East, locate the place names mentioned in each of the following verses in Genesis 12.

12:6 _____

12:8 _____

12:9 _____

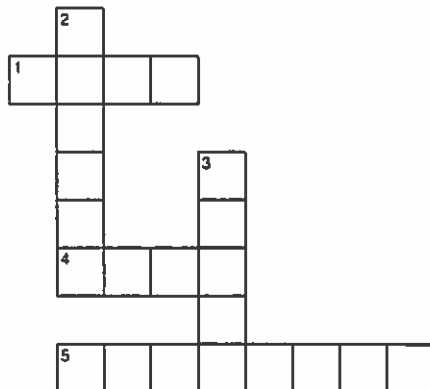
12:10 _____

These were real places in the ancient world. The movements of Abraham and Sarah reflect the typical movements of some ancient people who lived in tents and wandered from place to place with their herds of animals.

Turn to Genesis 12:1-3. This is one of the most important sections in the whole book of Genesis. It introduces themes that are important throughout the rest of the Bible. These verses are a promise made by God to Abraham and Sarah. There are five important things that God promises.

● Fill in the following crossword puzzle with the five promises from God to Abraham and Sarah.

- 1 Across The first promise.
- 2 Down The second promise.
- 3 Down The third promise.
- 4 Across The fourth promise.
- 5 Across The fifth promise.



5. Which of these five promises would be the most difficult to fulfill in

light of the problem raised in Genesis 11:30?

6. According to Genesis 12:3, who would benefit from these promises to Abraham and Sarah?

The story continues with Abraham and Sarah, who obeyed God and trusted God's promise. They left their home and family and went to the land of Canaan. This was the land God promised would be theirs. They obeyed God as they eagerly looked forward to the great rewards promised to them.

ABRAHAM, SARAH, AND A NEW BABY

While it certainly was not easy, obeying God's promise to go to the far-away land of Canaan brought rewards. Promises of a land, a whole nation of descendants, blessing, a famous name, and the chance to be a blessing to all the families of the earth all sounded very good. It was not too difficult to trust God when good things were promised.

Abraham and Sarah believed that God would fulfill the promises. But there was one they had trouble really trusting God to keep. That promise was the promise of descendants. They had no children! They were getting older and older and less and less likely to be able to have children.

Finally, Abraham turned the ripe old age of 99 and Sarah was 89 years old. It seemed that all hope of a child was gone. Had God failed to make good on the promise made in Genesis 12? Had Abraham and Sarah been wrong in trusting God's promise? Had God let them down?

1. What happened in Genesis 21:1-5?

2. The Hebrew name of Abraham and Sarah's son was *Isaac*, which means "to laugh." Read Genesis 21:6-7. Why is this an appropriate name for this child?



A DEEPER FAITH

You might expect the story of Abraham and Sarah to end with the scene of the happy old father and mother laughing out loud with their new son cuddled safely in his mother's arms. But the story took a very unexpected twist in Genesis 22:1-19. It is one of the most mysterious passages in the whole Bible. Genesis 22 teaches something that is difficult but important. *Faith in God is the willingness to offer to God what is most precious and dear to us.*

Read the story in Genesis 22:1-19. It is easily divided into three scenes with a conclusion. Read the story and act it out. Then discuss the story.

- Scene One:* God's Command to Abraham (1-3)
Scene Two: On the Way to Moriah (4-8)
Scene Three: On the Mountain (9-18)
What Abraham did (9-14)
What the Lord said (15-18)
Conclusion: (19)

Think back on your own life. When has God tested you and your faith? When did you have to choose between what God wanted you to do and what you wanted to do yourself? In the margin, draw a picture or symbol that represents what you felt or thought at the time.

Faith in God is the willingness to offer to God what is most precious and dear to us.

Shaping life

WHAT AM I WILLING TO RETURN TO GOD?

Following is a list of things that many people consider very important in their lives. In the left column rank their importance to you. Rank them from "1" for the most important to "8" for the least important. In the right column, write "Yes" by those things you would be willing to give up for God and God's work and "No" by those things you would not be willing to give up.

| | | |
|-------|-----------------|-------|
| _____ | Friendship. | _____ |
| _____ | Love of family. | _____ |
| _____ | Popularity. | _____ |
| _____ | Money. | _____ |
| _____ | Good grades. | _____ |
| _____ | My life. | _____ |
| _____ | Leisure time. | _____ |
| _____ | (other) | _____ |

Discuss ways you might be asked to give up some of the things that you consider most important. In what way does the promise from the Abraham and Isaac story that "the Lord will provide" (Genesis 22:14) give you the assurance and strength to be willing to give up those things that are important to you?



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BAPTISM: GOD'S PROMISE TO YOU

God made a new beginning in the five promises to Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 12:1-3). By the faith God gave them, Abraham and Sarah trusted God even when it seemed like all hope was dried up. What God did in Jesus Christ made it possible for that same promise of God to come to you. You experienced the new beginning of God's promise to

FURTHER

opportunities

Bible Reading

Select one or more passages from the list below. After reading it, summarize its main point. Tell how it relates to this session. List one or two thoughts you had as you read the passage.

- Romans 4:13-25
- Psalm 113
- Genesis 15:1-6
- 1 Corinthians 10:13
- 1 Peter 1:3-9

Memory

Memorize Genesis 12:2-3. These verses include the promises to Abraham and Sarah which are carried forward as the promises of God to all of God's people throughout the Bible.

Activity 1

Baptism is the means by which we are made members of the family of God. If you haven't been baptized, talk to your teacher or pastor about Baptism and whether Baptism would be appropriate for you now. If you have been baptized, find out the date of your baptism from your parents, your baptismal certificate, or the church records. Mark that date on your calendar and celebrate your baptismal anniversary.

you when you were baptized. In your Baptism, you were made a member of the family of Abraham and Sarah and thus, a member of God's whole family of faith.

Name two or three ways you can remember the good gifts God has given you and show thanks for those gifts. Remember, like Abraham and Sarah, you did not earn these promises. They are God's gift to you—a gift given in love through Jesus Christ.

Activity 2

Make a time line of your family's history. Your family may include anyone you wish. Make a long strip of paper from either adding machine paper or by taping together many sheets of plain paper. Draw a line the long way at the center of the paper strip. Mark off one inch for each year from the birth of the oldest member of your family until this year. Number the years.

Below the line, record the birthdate, and if they have died, the date of death, for each person in your family under the year.

Above the line, mark significant family or historical events that are important to your family. You may wish to include events such as wars, moving to a new community, or serious illnesses experienced by members of your family.

Discuss with your family how they have seen God's sustaining hand through the events you have recorded.

Activity 3

If you have younger brothers and/or sisters, make a "thank you" prayer bag for use in family devotion time or after meals. Cut pictures from magazines of things for which you are thankful to God and put them in a bag. Family members draw one each evening and pray, thanking God for that item.

FOCUS

ON THE FAMILY STORIES OF GENESIS 12-50

The family stories of Genesis 12-50 are more realistic and true to our daily experience than were the stories of the creation and fall in Genesis 1-3. In Genesis 12-50, we read of very ordinary things that happen in many families even today: babies are born, young people grow up and marry, people work and play, old people prepare to die and then are buried. The people we read about in the Bible were real people who at times had a strong faith in God, but at other times forgot their trust in God and went their own way.

We do not know much about these ancestors of God's people apart from what is written in the Bible. It is difficult to know precisely when they lived. However, the names, customs, and way of life described in these stories in Genesis 12-50 suggest that these ancestors of God's people lived

sometime between the 20th and 17th centuries B.C. In other words, they lived as many years *before* the birth of Jesus Christ as we live *after* the birth of Christ.

Although nearly 4000 years separate us from Abraham and Sarah and their family, many of the very same human struggles and concerns they had are also struggles and concerns we have in our lives and faith. The God with whom they walked on the journey of faith is the same God with whom we walk on our own journey of faith.



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