

Abraham's seed.

All the Old Testament patriarchs "were still living by the same faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised (the spiritual realities); they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. They admitted they were aliens and strangers on earth. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God for He has prepared a city for them" (Hebrews 11:11-16).

ABRAHAM LOOKED FOR A CITY BUILT BY GOD

Men and women with Abraham's kind of faith – faith in the Living God and His gift of Jesus Christ – look for a New Jerusalem. Jesus Christ promised them a place in that city. He said to His followers, "I am going to prepare a place for you . . . I will come back and take you to be with Me . . ." (John 14:2-3).

All who love God and look forward to Christ's Second Coming, await a bodily resurrection. They will be raised to glory and live in the heavenly city forever.

Some long to return to the land of their birth, or to Israel. Some have opportunity to do this, but it is far less important than it is to be ready to go to God's city, the New Jerusalem (Revelations 21:1-6). There we will meet Abraham, the friend of God.

TALK ABOUT

1. Did God keep the promise He made to Abraham (Genesis 22:17-18)? 2. Have you left your homeland? Do you want to go back? 3. Have you left your old way of life to follow Jesus Christ? 4. What city did Abraham look forward to living in (Hebrews 11:10)? 5. What is the name of God's city (Revelations 21:1-6)? 6. God's city is a place of peace and joy. Read about it in the Book of Hebrews (12:22-24),

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Bible study units

ABRAHAM, Friend of God !



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Written in Everyday English**

Abram, Friend of God

To the Reader: This study covers different parts of the Bible, if you have a Bible keep it with you as you study these notes. Find the Bible verses and read them carefully. They are from the New International Version of the Bible. Groups may use the questions in "Talk About" for discussion.

Unit 1.

TERAH AND HIS FAMILY LEAVE UR

God looked for a man who would trust Him. He found Abram living in the city of Ur of the Chaldeans. Ur was in Mesopotamia near the Tigris River in Iraq, also called "the fertile crescent" The great rivers Euphrates and Tigris watered the land as they flowed eastward into the Persian Gulf.

Abram lived with his father Terah, his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot (Genesis 11:27). Terah did not worship the living God, he bowed down to idols like the moon god (Joshua 24:2). This may have troubled Abram.

Abram's wife Sarai had no children. His brother Nahor and his nephew Lot, son of Haran, also lived in the family compound.

One day Abram heard a voice. God spoke to Abram's spirit. Deep inside his mind, he heard God tell him to leave Ur. When he told his father, Terah agreed to go with him. So Terah moved his family out of Ur to go to a place he did not know. When they came to Haran they settled there. The name is not spelled the same as the name of Abram's brother (Genesis 11:26).

Haran was a bustling caravan stop of the trade route to Egypt At the time Abram lived (19th century BC), Haran and Nahor were flourishing cities. Further up the Balikh valley lay the city of Nahor, the home of Abram's uncle.

In 1934 French excavators dug deep into Tell Hariri and found a small statue of Lamgi-Mari, king of Man. They also found a palace of the King of Mari (Haran) where Abram had lived. They found tubs in the bathroom, cake moulds in the kitchen and even charcoal in the ovens. They also found documents, receipts, decrees and other official papers cut with a stylus in cuneiform on clay tablets. Names of people and places on these tablets were very much like those in the Bible record – Peleg, Serug, Nahor and Terah (Genesis 11:10-26).

TERAH DIED IN HARAN

Terah died and Abram buried him at Haran. The family mourned, but God had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). So Abram left Haran to go to Canaan.

Abram left Haran and Lot went with him (Genesis 12:4). Tablets from the kingdom of Man confirm that the records left by the ancestors are true to that time. Using these ancient documents, the period can be accurately dated. Abram

A WIFE FOR ISAAC

Isaac had grown into manhood. Abraham thought and prayed about finding a wife for his son. God's son of promise must not marry one of the Canaanite girls, but a girl from among his own people.

One day Abraham called his chief servant Eleazer and told him his plan. "God has blessed me in every way," he told Eleazer. Now I need to find a wife for Isaac. "I want you to swear by the Lord, the God of heaven . . . that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, . . . but will go to my own country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac" (Genesis 24:1-4).

Eleazer had a question for his master. "What if the woman is unwilling to come back with me . . . shall I take your son to the country you came from?"

Abraham warned his servant not to do this. He said to Eleazer, "The Lord . . . who brought me out of my native land . . . and promised me on oath . . . He will send His angel before you, so that you can get a wife for my son . . . If the woman is unwilling to come back with you, then you will be released from this oath . . ."

Abram told Eleazer to take camels and load them with supplies and many gifts for the bride and the bride's family. Then the servant set off on the long journey to a land that lay beyond the great Euphrates river. This was the land where Nahor lived.

TALK ABOUT

1. Why did Abraham send to his own people to get a wife for Isaac?
2. Why did Abraham not want Isaac to marry a Canaanite girl (Genesis 24)?
3. Is it important who we marry?
4. Should a Christian marry a Christian?
5. What is God's marriage law (Genesis 2:24)?
6. Does it apply to men today?

Unit 18.

GOD KEPT HIS COVENANT PROMISES

God kept His promise. Under Joshua the Israelites entered the Promised Land. They settled the land prospered under King David and his son Solomon.

But God's covenant promises made to Abraham pointed to "better promises" and a more abiding country. They had a spiritual dimension, Abraham knew this and Scripture tells us that he "looked forward to the city, with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Hebrews 11:10). He looked toward the New Jerusalem (Revelations 21:1-6).

Abraham knew the God of resurrection. One who could bring life out of death. "From one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars . . ." They were a picture of Abraham's offspring by faith in Jesus Christ. Every person – Jew or Gentile – who has the same faith in the living God that Abraham had, is a descendant of Abraham (Galatians 3:29). They are

and Sarah rejoiced, but their hearts were full of praise to God. May we praise Him with full hearts for the greatest gift of all, the gift of Jesus Christ to be our Saviour and king. God gives us the victory of faith in His name (1 Corinthians 15:57).

TALK ABOUT

1. How did God test Abraham's faith? 2. Did Abraham obey God fully? 3. What did Abraham mean when he said to his servants, "We will worship . . . and we will come back (Genesis 22:5)? 4. What did the angel of the Lord say to him (Genesis 22:12)? 5. Who is called "the Lamb of God?" 6. What is God's greatest gift to mankind?

Unit 17.

ABRAHAM BUYS A FIELD

Abraham spent his last days not far from present-day Hebron. He moved his tents back northward to a place called Kiriath Arba (Joshua 14:15). Sarah died there at the age of 127 years (Genesis 23:1). Abraham wept for her and buried her in a cave on lands he bought from the Hittites.

The old patriarch went to the gate of the city and introduced himself to his Hittite neighbours as "an foreigner and a stranger among you." They replied, "Sir . . . you are a mighty prince . . . bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs."

Abraham bowed down and replied, "If you are willing . . . then intercede for me with Ephron son of Zoar . . . so he will sell me the cave of Machpelah . . . which is at the end of his field. Ask him to sell it to me for the full price . . ." (Genesis 23:7-9).

Ephron said he would give his field and cave to Abraham (Genesis 23:10-11). He said this in the presence of the elders who sat in the gate as the city council.

Abraham bowed down and said, "I will pay the price of the field." Ephron drove a hard bargain – four hundred shekels of silver, "but what is that between me and you?" he said.

Abraham wanted to give the wife of his youth a secure, rocky tomb for a resting place, so they paid out the price Ephron had named. The two men made a treaty and drew up a deed which gave the borders of the field "and all the trees within the borders" (Genesis 23:16-20). It was the only piece of land Abraham ever owned. Later his body was buried there beside Sarah's.

In the years that followed, all the patriarchs of Israel and their wives were buried at this place: a) Sarah (Genesis 23:19). b) Abraham (Genesis 25:9). c) Isaac (Genesis 35:27, 29). d) Isaac's wife Rebekah (Genesis 49:31). e) Isaac's son Jacob (Genesis 50:13).

left Haran 645 years before Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt.

The most outstanding thing about Abram was his faith in God. His faith helped him see where there was nothing to see, to walk where there was no path. His faith became a pattern for all of us. Without Abram's kind of faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:1-6).

TALK ABOUT

1. Where was Abram living when God first spoke to him (Genesis 12:1)? 2. What did God tell Abram to do? 3. Abram's father worshipped idols True False (Joshua 24:2)? 4. Who did Terah take with him when he left Ur (Genesis 11:31)? 5. Where did they settle first? What happened there?

Unit 2.

GOD MADE A PROMISE TO ABRAM

Abram was 75 years old. He packed up his household, took all his livestock and left the city of Haran. He went forward not knowing where God was leading him. He often sat by the fire thinking about God's command. Then God gave Abram a great promise. It puzzled him. The promise pointed to a land and to a son who would be born to Sarai his wife. God spoke of "a blessing for all people on earth" through the promised 'seed' (Genesis 12:2-3).

Abram wandered and traveled on toward the south.

God's promise to Abram is set out in seven parts:

1. "I will make you into a great nation"
2. "I will bless you"
3. "I will make your name great"
4. "You will be a blessing" (to the whole world)
5. "I will bless those who bless you"
6. "Whoever curses you I will cursed"
7. "All peoples on the earth will be blessed through you"

THE LAND OF CANAAN

A trade route that dates from antiquity runs from Haran south along the Balikh valley and across the Euphrates river. It continues south skirting the oasis Palmyra (Tadmor, 2 Chronicles 8:4), then on to Damascus in Syria and to Galilee and the seaports of Phoenicia on the shores of the Great Sea.

The Phoenicians were some of the first peoples to develop an alphabet. In the ninth century BC the Greeks adopted the Phoenician alphabet and developed it into the Greek symbols or letters (the Greek language) in which the New Testament was written.

The journey southward toward Canaan must have taken Abram many months. He arrived in Canaan and "travelled through the land as far as the great tree of Moreh at Shechem" (Genesis 12:6). Shechem was a fortified city built on

the slopes of Mount Ebal in central Canaan. Abram must have thanked God that he had arrived safely for at that time many warlike tribes occupied the land. Canaan was not an empty, desolate wilderness.

"The Canaanites were in the land" (Genesis 12:6), This was a common place for many tribes or races of people. They occupied all the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. The warrior tribes had swords and spears. The Bible names seven nations of Canaan (Genesis 15:20-21; Exodus 3:8).

God came to meet Abram at Moreh and said to him, "To your offspring I will give this land, so Abram built an altar there to the Lord" (Genesis 12:7), The altar was a symbol of Abram's growing love for God. He worshipped God with all his mind and strength (Deuteronomy 6:5). And he was ready to move his tents when God directed.

TALK ABOUT

1. Who came out of Ur with Abram (Genesis 11:31)? 2. Where did they stop? 3. Who died at Haran? 4. What did God promise Abram (Genesis 12:2-3)? 5. Do these promises mean anything to us now? Why? 6. Do you share in these promises? 7. How many nations lived in Canaan (Genesis 15:20-21)?

Unit 3.

ABRAM CAME TO SHECHEM

Abram pitched his tents near the great trees of Moreh. They may have been sacred trees where the Canaanites worshipped idol gods like Baal, the god of thunder and war. There were shrines on every high hill and under every tree, but Abram worshipped the living God, the only true God.

The people of Shechem may have been afraid of this stranger and his large herds of animals which roamed their part of the country, so Abram moved on. He took the road over the hills toward Bethel and camped between Bethel and Ai, toward the Negev in southern Palestine. There he built an altar to the Lord. God did not leave Abram and Abram did not stop trusting God.

Abram had true faith and God declared Him "righteous" (Genesis 15:6). He will be remembered for his altar of worship and for his tents. He 'walked with God' in a close personal relationship. He presented his family and servants to God at the altar and he cared for them in his tents. God is always ready to bless the man who puts his wife and family first.

He was not ready to settle down and build a city. The Bible tells us that Abram looked for "a city whose architect and builder is God," that is heaven (Hebrews 11:10). He was a "pilgrim and sojourner (nomad) in the land" (Genesis 23:4), ready to move on at God's command. Later, two local men – Eschol and Aner – became Abram's close friends and allies. They fought side by side with him in local battles. God gave Abram victory

Unit 16.

GOD HONOURED ABRAHAM'S FAITH

The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven (Genesis 22:11-19): "Abraham! Abraham!"

The angel voice said, "Do not lay a hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from Me your son, your only son" (Genesis 22:12).

Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram, caught by its horns. He seized the ram, killed it and sacrificed it as a burnt offering to God instead of his son Isaac. So Abraham called that place, "The Lord will provide." And to this day it is said, "On this mountain of the Lord it will be provided." Abraham obeyed God's command, but God had a better plan.

THE LAMB OF GOD

Some 1900 years later, God provided "the Lamb of God" who died to take away our sins. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believe on Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Jesus Christ, the only Son of the Father, hung on a Roman cross. He hung between heaven and earth for the sins of mankind. The apostle John pointed to Him and said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Many prophets spoke of his coming into the world. Some saw Him in the burnt sacrifices made under the Law. But only Abraham believed that the Lord God would raise Isaac out of the ashes, if that was necessary. The writer tells us, "He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death" (Hebrews 11:17).

What shall we say to these things? We can only wonder at Abraham's magnificent faith. And we will not understand why God offered up His only Son for our salvation, unless the Holy Spirit brings this great truth home to our hearts.

Paul asked, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:31-32).

At Mount Moriah the angel of the Lord repeated the promises God had given Abraham when he came into the land. God had said, "I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky . . . (They) will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring (seed) all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed Me" (Genesis 22:17-18).

Jesus Christ was born the 'seed' of Abraham (Galatians 3:16). By faith Christ we are "sons of Abraham" and joint heirs of the promises made to him (Galatians 3:29).

Abraham and Isaac went back to the servants. We are not told how Abraham

unhappy, for he loved the boy Ishmael.

God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed about the boy . . . Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."

Early next morning Abraham gave Hagar food and water and sent her off with Ishmael. She wandered in the desert of Beersheba. When all the water and food was gone, she left Ishmael under a tree and went on farther for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die."

Then the angel of the Lord called to Hagar from heaven and said, "Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying . . . Lift him up and take him by the hand for I will make him into a great nation" (Genesis 21:17-18).

ABRAHAM'S LAST TEST OF FAITH

Some time later, God tested Abraham's faith. God told him to take Isaac to Mount Moriah and sacrifice the lad as a burnt offering there (Genesis 22:2-14). This was a place where the Canaanites sacrificed their children to their god Molech. This was murder and God had commanded "You shall not murder."

Abraham knew God hated this heathen practice, but he did not argue or question God's command.

Early the next morning Abraham took his donkey, two servants and his son Isaac. He cut wood and they set out for the place god had told him about.

On the third day, Abraham saw the place. He said to the servants, "Stay here with the donkey . . . We will worship and then we will come back to you." Abram believed both he and Isaac would return.

Abraham put the wood on Isaac's shoulder. He carried the fire and the knife and the two of them went up the mountain. As the two of them walked on, Isaac said to his father, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

Abraham answered, "God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son," and the two of them went on together.

On the heights of Mount Moriah, at the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar and placed the wood on it. Then he bound Isaac, the son he loved, and laid him on the altar. As he reached out his hand to take the knife, Abraham heard a voice from heaven . . .

TALK ABOUT

1. Who was Isaac's mother? 2. Was his birth a miracle? Why? 3. Why did God tell Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22:12)? 4. How did God provide for the sacrifice (Genesis 22:13)? 5. How did God provide a perfect sacrifice for our sins?

FAMINE IN THE LAND OF CANAAN

No rain had fallen in Shechem for months. All the grass dried up and blew away in the wind. Abram's flocks and herds needed food. The Shechemites faced the same problems, so they did not offer Abram food or water. He had no one to turn to for help! Had Abram forgotten that it was the Lord God who provided for him?

Abram talked to his family about going down to Egypt. Traders had told him that there was plenty for everyone in Egypt. So Abram packed his tents and moved on. He did not wait on the Lord God for directions, he trusted in his own judgment.

As they drew near to the land of Egypt, Abram looked at his wife Sarai. She was 65 years old and very beautiful. What if the King of Egypt saw her and wanted to take her into his harem? Abram's own life would be in danger!

Abram had lived a half-truth. Sarai was his half-sister, his father's daughter by another woman. When he married Sarai, Abram should have thought of her as his wife, not as his half-sister. Now he thought of a way to save his own skin. He would tell the Egyptians that Sarai was his sister! (Genesis 12:12-13). He said to Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me, but will let you live. Say that you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you." Sarai agreed.

When we trust in our own resources, spiritual famine comes into our own lives! God uses this to teach us important lessons about trusting in Him.

TALK ABOUT

1. Abram trusted God and set out from Haran or the land of C..... ? 2. What vision has God given you to follow? 3. Who was living in the land when Abram arrived at Shechem? 4. What did Abram do after he pitched his tents (Genesis 12:8)? 5. Which 'city' was Abram looking for (Hebrews 11:10) 7 Did he find it? 6. Will you live in that city of God, which is heaven?

Unit 4.

ABRAM WENT DOWN TO EGYPT

The Pharaoh, king of Egypt, sent officials to meet Abram; There were no passports or entry visas, but all foreign visitors had to state the number of persons in their party, the reason for them coming to Egypt and the length of their stay. Ancient records tell us about this practice.

The officials saw Sarai and spoke of her beauty to the Pharaoh, king of Egypt. He sent men to bring her to his palace. The Pharaoh treated Abram well because of Sarai his wife. But Abram had not been faithful to his marriage covenant and God was not pleased. Abram gained herds of sheep and cattle and many servants, but he broke his marriage covenant to be true to Sarai (Genesis 12:16).

Abram thought he could plan his own way, but it only got him into trouble. True faith must ‘give all’ to God. We must not try to plan our own way. Without God in control, we will surely sink in our own struggles, distresses and failures.

OUR FAILURES LEAD TO GOD’S DELIVERANCE

It soon became clear that the health of Pharaoh’s household was in danger. Many had serious diseases. The Pharaoh sent for Abram and demanded, “What have you done to me? Why didn’t you tell me she was your wife? Why did you say, ‘She is my sister?’ Now then here is your wife. Take her and go!” (Genesis 12:18-20).

Pharaoh gave orders to his officials to send Abram away. Abram folded his tents, herded his flocks and took everything he had with him. Lot also took his herds and possessions. Abram and Lot Abram’s nephew, had large herds and flocks of sheep, goats, cattle and camels with many herders.

They passed through the Negev, “and went from place to place until Abram came to Bethel” where Abram had camped many years before (Genesis 13:3). There “Abram called on the name of the Lord.” He had a lot to thank God for. God had spared his life and that of Sarai, his wife. God had made him rich in possessions. God had proved He was faithful, even when Abram failed to protect his wife. And God had saved Sarai to bear Abram’s son of promise.

The brown hills of Canaan were very different to the green plains of the Nile river in Egypt and Abram’s herders and Lot’s herders soon began to quarrel. They told their masters “the land cannot support all our animals. We cannot stay together.”

Abram loved Lot and wanted to keep peace between them. He said to Lot, “Let’s not have any quarreling between you and me, for we are family” (Genesis 13:7-9).

Then Abram made a generous offer. He said to Lot, “The whole land is before you – you can have your choice. If you go to the left, I will go to the right . . .”

Lot looked out over the plain of the Jordan. “It was well watered, like the garden of the Lord (possibly referring to Eden), like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar.” And Lot chose the Jordan valley toward the south end of the Great Sea (or the Dead Sea).

TALK ABOUT

1. Why did Abram move his family to Egypt? 2. What should he have done first?
3. What makes our faith in God grow stronger? 4. Why was Abram afraid? 5. What happened to Sarai (Genesis 12:15)? 5. What made Pharaoh send Abram away (Genesis 12:17-20)? 6. When Abram returned to Canaan, where did he settle? 7. What caused Lot’s servants to quarrel with Abram’s servants? 8. What offer did Abram make Lot? 9. In what part of the land did Lot choose to live (Genesis 13:11)? 10. Do you pray before you choose?

closer to the trade routes. This part of the Negev was ruled by King Abimelech.

Again Abraham told the old lie – that Sarah was his sister. King Abimelech sent for Sarah and took her to his palace to be one of his many ‘wives’. But God spoke to the King in a dream and said to him, “You are as good as dead, because the woman you have taken is a married woman” (Genesis 20:1-3). The King pleaded, “Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? Did he not say, ‘She is my sister?’ And didn’t she also say, ‘he is my brother?’ I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands.”

Then God came again in a dream and said to Abimelech, “Yes, I know . . . and so I have kept you from sinning against Me . . . Now return the man’s wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all yours will die” (Genesis 20:6-8).

If you are on the wrong path because you do not know the right one, you are not excused. God has given men and women a conscience to tell them right from wrong (Romans 12:20).

King Abimelech returned Sarah to Abram and gave her a large gift. He tried to blame Abram, but gave him more land for his flocks and herds. Abraham made a poor excuse for his lack of faith: “I said to myself, ‘Surely there is no fear of God in this place . . . they may kill me because of my wife.’” Abram did not judge fairly, which is worse than not judging at all (Matthew 7:1).

God had said to Abram, “Walk before Me and be blameless,” but Abram stumbled. We all do. We must get up and repent. Abram did. He was not worthy, but He believed God’s promise and held on to it to the end.

TALK ABOUT

1. What happened to Lot’s wife (Genesis 19:26)? 2. When the angel led Lot out of Sodom, where did Lot ask to go? 3. Why did God grant Lot’s request (Genesis 19:16)? 4. What will happen to those who reject Christ? 5. Do you love God but live for worldly pleasures? 6. What happened to Sarah while Abraham lived in the land of the Philistines? 7. Why did Abraham say Sarah was his sister (Genesis 20:11)?

Unit 15.

THE BIRTH OF ISAAC

God kept His promise, Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age. Abraham was 100 years old. He gave his son the name Isaac -which means ‘laughter.’ Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me” (Genesis 21:6).

When Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God had commanded. The day Isaac was weaned, Abraham held a great feast. But Sarah saw Ishmael mocking her son, Isaac. At once she said to Abraham, “Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for that slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with my son, Isaac” (Genesis 21:8-20). This made Abraham very

He answered, "Very well, I will grant this request too. I will not destroy the town you speak of; But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it."

Those who live closest to God know more of His will (Psalm 107:43). Communion with God is maintained by studying His word and by prayer.

God still warns men today. He does not bring judgment on men and women without warning them (Amos 3:7). He is warning you through the things that happen to you and the counsel of Christian friends.

Perhaps God has put an Abram at the head of your family, but you are careless and don't listen to his wise words. Your father or grandfather prays for you. He prays that you will hear God's voice and come out of the 'Sodom' where you are living before it is too late. Be warned or you will be sorry!

TALK ABOUT

1. How did Abram pray for Sodom (Genesis 18:22-33)?
2. What did Abram say about himself (Genesis 18:27)?
3. Why did God destroy the five cities of the plain (Genesis 18:20)?
4. When the angels came to Sodom where did they find Lot (Genesis 19:1)?
5. Tell how Lot and his two daughters were saved (Genesis 19:26)?
6. What happened to Lot's wife (Genesis 19:26)?

Unit 14.

GOD DESTROYS THE FIVE CITIES

"Then the Lord rained down burning sulphur on Sodom and Gomorrah – these cities and the entire plain" (Genesis 19:25).

Present-day visitors to the south end of the Dead Sea note the wild and desolate landscape, the crusted salt on everything and the oily waters. The surface of the Sea is slowly rising and it is thought to have covered the site of the five cities. Sparkling salt hills lie very near the submerged Vale of Siddim, Everything near to the "Salt Sea" is, even to this day, quickly covered with a crust of salt.

The trick played on Lot by his two daughters, ends the sad story of a man who did not live near to God (Genesis 19:33-38). Yet we read that the sin of Sodom "grieved his heart" (2 Peter 2:7).

Sin pays hard wages. Lot began as a righteous man but in the end he lost everything he had – wife, home, children and possessions. And Lot's sons became the forefathers of the heathen nations of Moabites and Ammonites, both enemies of Israel in later times (Deuteronomy 23:3; 2 Chronicles 20:1-23; 1 Samuel 14:47).

ABRAHAM IN THE LAND OF THE PHILISTINES

This account may have happened earlier. Abraham moved to the region of the Negev, the land of the Philistines. For a time he lived in Gerar, perhaps to be

Unit 5.

ABRAM AND LOT AND THE CITIES OF THE PLAINS

An editor's note tells us, "This was before God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah." Zoar was one of five cities on the plains near the south end of the Great Sea, now called the Dead Sea. The cities were known for their wickedness (Genesis 13:13). This fertile part of Canaan was also known as the "Vale of Siddim."

Lot pitched his tents near Sodom, for he wanted to be able to buy and sell and trade with the local people. Sodom would be a good place to do this.

ABRAM'S TRAVELS

Later Lot moved into the city and probably married a woman who lived there. He "sat in the gate," where the businessmen of the city and its governing council met. He was part of the council and knew Bera, the king of Sodom, very well.

At best Lot was a worldly Christian. Like lot, Christians sometimes move into bad jobs or make bad friendships, even bad marriages for personal gain. But God's grace is still toward them. We may think it good to better our position at work or seek a promotion. This may force us to do things that we should not do. Bad choices usually bring troubles and struggle and confusion.

After Lot left Abram God said to His friend, "Lift up your eyes . . . all the land you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the . . . land, for I am giving it to you" (Genesis 13:15-16). This was an amazing promise, but Abram had a real problem; he had no children.

Abram moved again "and went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he built an altar to the Lord" (Genesis 13:18).

When Lot left him, Abram took the land that was not so good. He trusted the Lord to help him. God prospered Abram and his family. He did not forget his nephew and one day he received news of Lot that troubled him.

WAR ON THE PLAINS

The Bible record uses the history of that time to prove the boldness and leadership of the patriarch (chief) Abram. He was not some nomad figure of ancient folklore. Abram was a real flesh and blood person.

For twelve years the five 'kings' or chiefs of the five cities had paid tribute to a king from the north named Kedorlaomer. This king from Mesopotamia led an army down "the King's Way" and forced the five local kings to pay tribute money to him.

Natives of the Jordan valley know "the King's Way" to this day. It was the same road that the people of Israel followed when they went north from Mount Sinai to the Promised Land (Numbers 20:17-19).

When the five kings of the cities of the Jordan plain rebelled and refused to pay tribute, Kedorlaomer allied himself with other local ‘kings’ and invaded the five cities of the plains (Genesis 14:1-12). They seized goods and food from the city of Sodom. King Bera of Sodom was defeated and Lot and his family were taken as part of the plunder. One man escaped and told the sad news of Lot’s capture to Abram.

TALK ABOUT

1. Why was it so important for God to protect Sarai? 2. Why did Abram separate from his nephew Lot? 3. Why did Lot pitch his tents toward the city of Sodom? 4. Who had the most faith in God, Abram or Lot? 5. How can we help other family members grow in their faith (Genesis 13:4,9)? 6. What happened to Lot and his family (Genesis 14:10-12)? 7. Who was king of Sodom? 8. Where did king Kedorlaomer come from?

Unit 6.

ABRAM ANSWERS A CALL FOR HELP

A man escaped and brought the news of Lot’s fate to Abram. Here Abram is called “Abram the Hebrew,” or of the family of Eber (Genesis 10:21). So the descendants of Abram were called Hebrews. Abram’s neighbours and friends were Amorites, one of the larger tribes living in Canaan. Three local men – Aner, Eshcol and Mamre – agreed to go with Abram and his men to rescue Lot (Genesis 14:24).

Abram quickly gathered the men of his household – 318 trained men -and set out after the enemy. He and his men kept their distance until they reached Dan, a town on the northern frontier of Canaan. When they saw that the enemy was off guard, they attacked and rescued Lot and his family. Then Abram divided his men and one party pursued Kedorlaomer’s men as far as Hobah, north of Damascus.

They rescued many other people who had been captured, with all their possessions, and returned to Sodom.

Abram and his men hurried back toward Sodom with Lot and his family and many other citizens of that city. Along the way a strange thing happened.

ABRAM SAVED LOT AND HIS FAMILY

As Abram and his men passed the city of Salem, they came to the Valley of Shaveh. There Bera, King of Sodom, came out to “meet the returning hero”. He hoped to get some of the spoils of war from Abram.

Another figure, Melchizedek, king-priest of Salem, also came out to meet Abram. He “brought out bread and wine” and set it before the weary warriors (Genesis 14:18-20). Melchizedek is introduced to us as “priest of God Most High,” and he blessed Abram with a special blessing:

God hates homosexual acts and prostitution. We may call these ‘another lifestyle,’ but God calls them “an abomination” (Romans 1:26-27).

TALK ABOUT

1. Who came to visit Abraham (Genesis 18:2-10)? 2. What did the angels say about Sarah (Genesis 17:15-16)? 3. What did the angel of the Lord say about Abram (Genesis 18:18)? 4. Why did God destroy Sodom and the cities of the plain (Genesis 18:20-21)? 5. God destroyed Sodom because the people refused to.....? 6. Who escaped the destruction? How?

Unit 13.

ABRAM LOVED LOT AND PRAYED FOR HIM

Abraham loved Lot who was a very successful business man in Sodom. But Lot was careless and self-seeking. Abram always prayed that Lot would come to his senses and leave Sodom. He knew God’s judgment was about to fall on the city.

Now Abraham drew near to God as a mediator for Lot and the city of Sodom (Genesis 18:23). He well knew that “the judge of all the earth would do right.” But he would ask for mercy. If there were fifty righteous souls in Sodom, would God spare the city? If only 30 or 20 or even 10 – would God not spare the city?

Every time Abraham asked God to spare the city of Sodom, he thought to himself, “I am nothing but dust and ashes.” Yet each time he grew bolder, and each time God said He would spare the city if the number of righteous souls Abraham asked were found in it.

THE ANGELS ARRIVE IN SODOM

The record tells how the angels made a mercy visit to Lot and his family (Genesis 19:1-5). And how the Sodomites responded to the visitors, almost dragging Lot to his death (Genesis 19:9-15).

Dawn was breaking in the eastern sky and the angels urged Lot, “Hurry! Hurry! Get out of this place.” The angels grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and two daughters and led them safely out of Sodom – a remnant of people that God would save. Even so Lot’s wife looked back – she may have been born there – and she was turned to salt as God had warned “Don’t look back!”

In the same way, God will deliver a remnant of His people from the judgment coming upon the earth (Matthew 24:31).

Those who refuse to listen to God’s warnings will be swept away. It will be as it was in the flood of Noah’s day.

“Flee to the mountains. Don’t stop anywhere in the plain,” the angels warned Lot, but he hesitated and tried to have his own way.

“Please,” he begged, “You have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life, but I can’t flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me. Look, here is a town near enough to flee to . . .

Unit 12.

THREE VISITORS CAME TO ABRAHAM'S DOOR

Abraham sat in the door of his tent. The day was very hot! Not a breath of air stirred under the great trees. Something moved. "Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby" (Genesis 18:2-10). He turned to greet them and bowed low to the ground.

"If I have found favour in your sight," he said, "do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought . . . to wash your feet, and rest under this tree. Let me get something to eat, so that you can be refreshed . . ." This was the custom of the East. Even strangers were taken in arid give hospitality.

"Very well," they answered, "do as you say."

Abraham hurried into the tent and told Sarah to bake fresh bread. Then he went to the herd and chose a young calf. He gave it to the servant to prepare.

When all was ready he set it before the visitors.

While they were eating, they asked, "Where is your wife Sarah?"

"There in the tent," Abraham answered.

Then the Angel of the Lord said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son" (Genesis 18:9-10).

Sarah was in the tent listening. She laughed to herself. She thought, "After I am old and worn out, and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?"

"Why did Sarah laugh?" the angel of the Lord asked Abraham. Then he asked, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:14).

Sarah was afraid and said, "I did not laugh." But the Lord said, "Yes, you did laugh."

ABRAHAM PLEADS FOR SODOM

When the three visitors rose to go on their way, Abraham walked a short distance with them. He may have stopped at a place where he could see the city of Sodom. The angel looked down on Sodom where Lot lived.

"Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" he asked. Then the angel noted these things: 1. His offspring would become a great and strong nation. 2. All the nations will be blessed through him. 3. He will direct his children. 4. He will keep the way of the Lord by doing justly. 5. The Lord will bring about for Abram what He has promised.

The Lord (the angel) said to Abraham, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if the outcry is as bad as has reached Me. If not I will know."

The cry of Sodom came from the poor and oppressed people. God hated the city's wickedness and idolatry. The people of Sodom were in bondage to sexual perversion. Wrong sexual acts of all kinds hurt men and women.

"Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. Blessed be God Most High, Who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of everything.

Bera said to Abram, "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself." Perhaps he thought to gain favour with Abram in case of later enemy attacks.

Would Abram bow to this heathen king Bera? Not for a moment! He received the blessing of Melchizedek, but he did not want the kind of relationship that his nephew Lot had with Bera. So Abram gave testimony to his faith in the living God.

"I have raised my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth" he said, "and have taken an oath that I will accept nothing belonging to you . . . so that you will never be able to say, 'I have made Abram rich . . .'." (Genesis 14:22-23). a) God was king in Abram's life, b) God protected Abram's family, c) God had given him victory, d) Melchizedek had blessed him "by the Most High God."

Abram let Bera claim the booty, Abram had no interest in the stuff of Sodom. Lot did not share in the booty or the treaty. He was glad to get home alive and have his family with him.

We can think of Abram going into Satan's territory to get Lot out. When Satan steals our family, we must seek God for them. Go to God on you knees. Claim Christ's victory over Satan. The blood of Jesus Christ will set the captives free and God will be our great reward (Genesis 15:1),

TALK ABOUT

1. What happened to Lot?
2. What did Abram do?
3. Who came out of Sodom to meet Abram (Genesis 14:7)?
4. Who came out of Salem to meet him?
5. What did Abram say to Bera, the King of Sodom (Genesis 14:21)?
6. What must we do to have God on our side?
7. Who was the King-Priest of Salem who blessed Abram?

Unit 7.

MELCHIZEDEK, KING-PRIEST OF SALEM

Melchizedek is the 'mystery man' of the Bible. He did not worship the idol gods of Canaan and he blessed Abram in the name of the Creator, the Most High God. He appears again in Psalm 110 and again in Hebrews chapters 6 and 7. There his office of king-priest is like that of Jesus Christ

The King-Priest of Salem held a high office, one that was not found among the people of God. When God set up the priesthood in the time of Moses, and later gave Israel a king, the offices of king and priest were separate. In Israel, no single person could be both king and High Priest.

Abram honoured Melchizedek who in turn blessed Abram. Abram gave the King-Priest one tenth of the spoil, which was a king's due (1 Samuel 8:15).

Melchizedek provided as a king and blessed as a priest Jesus Christ does this for His people. He blesses us with “every spiritual blessing” (Ephesians 1:3), and gives “according to His riches in glory” (Philippians 4:19 KJV).

If Abram was a picture of God’s people, then Melchizedek might be seen as a type of Jesus Christ, our High Priest, who was appointed to the same order (Hebrews 7:11-17). He is both High Priest to God’s people and King Jesus.

No history or family records were kept by the Canaanites, so the king-priest had no genealogy or family record of his birth and death (Hebrews 7:3).

ABRAM, DO NOT BE AFRAID

After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision. God said to His servant, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward” (Genesis 15:1; Psalm 5:11-12). God spoke in a voice Abram could hear clearly. God assured His friend that his family was safe, as safe as God Himself could keep them. Abram was not to fear the kings from the north or the Canaanites who lived in the land.

And God promised to be Abram’s rich reward. He had refused the spoils of war which Bera had offered him. But God would make it up to him many times over. At this time Abram asked God about a matter that troubled him, the matter of who would inherit his estate (Genesis 15:1-2). God had promised Abram a ‘seed’ or offspring. Eleazer of Damascus was his trusted servant, but surely God meant a son.

Ancient documents uncovered at Nuzi, near Kirkuk in Iraq, tell us that a man without children could adopt a male servant to be his heir. Perhaps Abram had already adopted Eleazer into his family. But God had a better plan. He told Abram, “This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body . . . ” (Genesis 15:4).

God’s Spirit led Abram into the clear, cool night air and told him to look up. Abram obeyed. “Look up at the heavens and count the stars,” God said - “if indeed you can count them.” God’s voice was as clear as the night sky.

Then God said to him, “So shall your offspring be” (Genesis 15:5). Abram believed the Lord, “and He (the Lord God) credited it to him (Abram) as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6). God marked his friend as righteous because of his faith, not because of anything he did or did not do.

TALK ABOUT

1. Why would Abram be afraid? 2. Is God always with us? 3. If we have God with us, need we fear others? 4. Who met Abram and his men as they returned from the battle? 5. Who was Melchizedek? 6. Melchizedek was like J.....C.....(Hebrews 7:11-17)? 7. Jesus Christ is our H..... P..... in heaven. 8. What did this King-Priest do for Abram and his men?

bought from a foreigner – those who are your offspring. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male . . . will be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant”

“On that very day,” Abraham circumcised Ishmael and all the males in his household (Genesis 17:23). Circumcision was practiced by many ancient people, but God commanded it as a seal and a sign of His covenant blessing. When it is spoken of in the New Testament is the sign of a changed heart, old ways are cut off. Parents who did not circumcise their sons, broke the covenant and suffered the judgment of God (Exodus 4:23-24).

This was the foundation of the covenant of grace made with all believers in Jesus Christ (Luke 22:22; Acts 7:8; Colossians 2:10-11). Paul called circumcision a ‘seal’ (Romans 4:11) and used it as a symbol of Christian baptism (Colossians 2:11-12).

Male circumcision was made part of the law, for under the law all things were made pure by blood sacrifice (Hebrews 9:22). When Christ shed His own precious blood, all blood ordinances were done away (Hebrews 8:13).

ISAAC, THE SON OF PROMISE

Sarah was listening in the tent when the Lord appeared to Abraham. She heard the Lord say again that she would bear a son to Abraham and that she would be “the mother of nations, kings and peoples” (Genesis 17:16-17).

Abraham fell face down and laughed. He said to himself, “A son, born to a man a hundred years old, and Sarah at the age of ninety?”

Then Abraham said to God, “If only Ishmael might live under Your blessing.” God answered Abraham, “Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son (by this time next year), and you will call him Isaac. I will establish My covenant with him . . . and his descendants after him (Genesis 17:21- 22).

“As for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will . . . greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve tribes, and I will make him into a great nation. But My covenant I will establish with (or pass to) Isaac . . . ” (Genesis 17:4-6).

The covenant of promise would pass to Isaac because he was the ‘son of promise.’ Then it passed to Jacob, Isaac’s son (Genesis 35:9-12). God changed Jacob’s name to Israel, “because he struggled with God and with men and overcame” (Genesis 32:28).

The Arab nations descended from the twelve sons of Ishmael and their tribes (Genesis 21:20; 25:12-18). They, too, look to Abram as their father, as do the Jews.

TALK ABOUT

1. Did God bless Abram because he was a good man? 2. What did God tell Abram to do to all the males in his house (Genesis 17:1-12)? 3. What was circumcision a sign of? 4. Can we be ‘blameless’ before God (Genesis 17:1)? 5. How is this possible? 6. How does God ‘seal’ those who believe in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:13)? 7. What did God say He would do for Ishmael (Genesis 17:21-22). 8. The covenant God made with Abraham passed to his son I..... and then to J..... whose name was changed to Israel (Genesis 35:9-12)?

Hagar obeyed God and went back to Sarai. She bore Abram a son and named him "Ishmael." And Abram was eighty-six years old.

A COVENANT SIGN

Thirteen years later, when Abram was ninety nine, God appeared to him again and said, "I am God Almighty (El Shaddai); walk before Me and be blameless. "I will confirm My covenant between Me and you and will greatly increase your numbers" (Genesis 17:1-2).

This was the name God chose to make Himself known to Abram, rather than the name Jehovah (Exodus 6:3). Jehovah was the name usually used for God. El Shaddai spoke of the mighty power of God, a God who is strong enough for all occasions or all-sufficient.

God demands a blameless life. Neither Abram nor we can live without sin. We sin every day by thought and action. But we can confess our sinfulness to God and receive His forgiveness (1 John 1:9). God commanded Abraham to be totally yielded to His purpose and to trust only in Him.

The Christian life is a 'walk of faith.' We go forward one step at a time, never seeing far ahead, but always trusting our Lord. It is not a pleasure ride, but a long journey. Every step is planned by God and meant to strengthen our faith. Oh, how we might like to ride along and enjoy ourselves, to be treated like kings and queens! God has not planned life to be easy, but joyous.

Abram fell on his face (at the brightness of God's presence?). He heard God say, "You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram, your name will be Abraham . . . (father of nations) I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant . . . for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you . . . (Genesis 17:3-14).

God changed Abram's wife's name from Sarai to Sarah and promised, "I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her . . . she will be the mother of nations . . ." (Genesis 17:15-20).

TALK ABOUT

1. Who was to blame for the trouble in Abram's family? 2. What name did Abram give his son (Genesis 16:15)? 3. Where did the angel of the Lord find Hagar? 4. What promise did God make to Hagar (Genesis 16:11-12)? 5. Who was Ishmael? 6. What did the angel say Ishmael would be like (Genesis 16:11-12)? 6. Has history proved God's words about Ishmael to be true?

Unit 11.

ABRAM, YOU MUST KEEP MY COVENANT

God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep My covenant . . . This is My covenant with you and your descendants after you . . . (Genesis 17:9-14). "Every male among you shall be circumcised . . . those born in your household or

Unit 8.

THE LORD GOD MADE COVENANT WITH ABRAM

The Lord also said to Abram, "I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it" Abram answered, "O Sovereign Lord, how will I know that I will gain possession of it?"

God knew that Abram would obey Him in everything, so He made or 'cut' a covenant with him. Covenants were made between two parties. Each party must obey the terms of the covenant. If either party broke the covenant it became worthless.

This was to be a blood covenant and God told Abram which animals to bring. Abram killed the animals and 'cut' them in two pieces, laying the pieces out on the ground (Genesis 15:10).

God made covenant with man by sacrifice. Blood had to be shed (Hebrews 9:22). There could be no agreement between a holy God and sinful man without blood was shed to atone for man's sin.

Abram waited for God. Vultures and "birds of prey" came to eat the meat, but Abram drove them away. Some believe the vultures pictured the nations that would attack Israel and fight against God's people (Deuteronomy 28:49; Jeremiah 49:22).

The sun was about to set and darkness began to fail. Abram dozed into a deep sleep. As he slept, Abram felt a "deep and dreaded darkness" come over his spirit. Abram slept while God made a covenant with him and his descendants. God did not need the man's help.

Then God came to where Abram lay and passed between the pieces of flesh, God appeared as a blazing torch and a smoking firepot, a light and comfort in a world of trouble (Genesis 15:17). It is quite possible that the blazing torch consumed the sacrifice to show that God had accepted Abram's offering.

God's presence may have awakened Abram for God spoke to him in the darkness and said, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years.

"I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions" (Genesis 15:13-15).

God continued to tell Abram, "In the fourth generation (or four life-spans) your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

Abram's offspring would possess the land, but not because of any merit in them. The Amorite nations must first be punished for their sins. This happened when Joshua led the people of Israel into the Promised Land (Joshua 3).

God told Abram, "you will be gathered to your fathers in peace, but I will give this land to your descendants, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates . . ." And God named the peoples who lived in that region.

So God's Spirit moves in grace toward mankind and takes away the sin that separates us from Him. He does this when we believe in Jesus. Christ and His death for us on the cross. All God's promises are "Yes and Amen," in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20). He will always make them come true if we have faith to obey Him (Philippians 2:12-13).

TALK ABOUT

1. How did God 'cut' a covenant with Abram (Genesis 15:9-15)?
2. Why did God tell Abram to look at the stars (Genesis 15:2-5)?
3. Why did God call Abram "righteous" (Genesis 15:6)?
4. Name some great men of faith?
5. What did God do to 'cut' a covenant with Abram and his descendants (Genesis 15:9-14)?
6. Does God require the same faith of us?
7. Can we claim the promises God made to Abram as our own?

Unit 9.

ALL MEN AND NATIONS ARE INCLUDED

All Scripture seems to focus on the promises God made to Abram and his faith in the living God. The New Testament writers give these promises spiritual meaning. Paul said that Abram was the father of all who put their trust in God (Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6,29). Abram's inheritance becomes our inheritance and His blessing our blessing, by faith in Jesus Christ Jesus was the promised 'seed' or offspring God promised from the beginning (Genesis 13:15; Galatians 3:16).

In making covenant with Abram, God Himself filled up or took away the space that separated Him from mankind. He joined all people who have Abram's kind of faith into one fellowship, the Christian Church (Galatians 3:29; Ephesians 2:14-18). This fellowship, which God wanted so much, had been largely missing since Adam and Eve sinned (Genesis 3:22-24). Only a few of the first people on the earth had faith and fellowshipped with their God. Abel, Enoch, Noah and Job were some of them.

One day the great community of faith, the Kingdom of God, will be complete. Christ will perfect His Body, the Church (Ephesians 5:27), and present her holy and glorious in heaven (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

We, with ancestor Abram, wait for that great day. "Only together with us would they (all the men and women of faith) be made perfect" (Hebrews 11:14).

GOD PROMISED ABRAM A SON

Abram was puzzled. God had promised him "a son coming from your own body" (Genesis 15:4). But Sarai, his wife, was too old to have a child. He had carried God's promise in his heart for many years, hoping. But nothing happened! Surely, only God could bring life out of such old dead bodies? But Abram continued to believe God for a miracle.

Sarai did not want to wait any longer (they had been living in Canaan for ten

years). "Go, sleep with my maid servant," she said to Abram, "perhaps I can build a family through her" (Genesis 16:1-2). This was a common custom at that time.

So Sarai gave Abram her Egyptian maid servant Hagar to be his wife. Hagar became pregnant and "despised her mistress." So Sarai fussed at her husband. For his part, Abram had only been trying to please her.

"You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering," Sarai told Abram.

"Your servant is in your hands," Abram replied. "Do with her whatever you think best" Then Sarai treated Hagar harshly and Hagar ran away.

When God's children take things into their own hands, it always leads to trouble. Abram and Sarai had to learn that God was in control and His time is the right time. They had to learn to "wait on the Lord" (Exodus 14:14). Death had to work in their natural bodies so that new life could come forth. This is the truth of the gospel; we must 'die' to our old nature and allow a new nature of Christ to grow in us by His Spirit.

God was testing Abram's faith. Abram had to learn that God requires faith alone. It was not possible for Abram and Sarai to have a son unless God worked a miracle When we cannot do anything more, God can work!

TALK ABOUT

1. Are God's promises to Abram for all who believe?
2. Did Sarai think she would have a child of her own? Why not?
3. What did Sarai do to help God (Genesis 16:1-2)?
4. What happened to Hagar?
5. Why did God allow this to happen?
6. Does God show grace and favour toward all peoples?

Unit 10.

ABRAM'S SON BY HAGAR

The angel of the Lord found Hagar walking along the road to Shur close to a spring of water and a well (Genesis 16:7-10). He said to her, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" God knew the answers to these questions, but Hagar needed to confess her sin.

When Hagar told her sad story, the angel said to her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her . . . I will so increase your descendants that they will be too many to count" Hagar could run away from Sarai, but not from God!

The angel also said to Hagar, "You will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael . . . He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone . . . and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers" (Genesis 16:11-12).

"God is watching me," Hagar said to herself. And from that time the well where the angel had spoken to her was called Beer Lahai Roi, which means "well of the Living One who sees me." It is still there on the road between Kadesh and Bered, in the Wilderness of Shur.