

## Lesson 4-A

**Wed. July 8**

Abraham: Father of Faith

- Read Background
- Read Gen. 10:-12:20
- Personal Reflection Questions

### **Background**

A century or two after the second millennium B.C. and following the account of the Tower of Babel, one of the first known attempts at creating a genealogical record appears. At first glance it is unimpressive and plain, however the careful preserving of the names of ancient characters (including women) from an oral tradition that dates back some four thousand years signifies something altogether new. Out of Mesopotamia, where an ancient people worshipped petty gods to insure prosperity and favor, and from the clan of Terah, emerges one the Old Testaments most important and colossal figures; Abram of Ur.

Erdman, Charles R. *The Book of Genesis.*

His sphere of influence was solely that of religion. To him Christians, Mohammedans (Moslem), and Jews look back in reverence as to the founder of their faiths. It is to Abraham that the world owes its belief in the one living and true God. His character and his career are summed up in two familiar phrases: Abraham was "the Friend of God," and "the Father of Faith." With Abraham began a new chapter in the ancient story of salvation history. A man was chosen to be the head of a family from which issued a favored race, a Chosen People. They would develop their own religious beliefs and customs, maintain their primitive faith, and become a conduit of divine revelation. They were narrow in their sympathies, often apostate, and unfaithful; but through them was preserved for the world the knowledge of God which will reach its climax in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Erdman, Charles R. *The Book of Genesis*

### **Personal Reflection Questions**

- What are some reasons that people choose to trace their genealogy or lineage?
- In your family history is there a significant person, figure or event that has helped shape you and/or you family?

### **Questions for Zoom Online Discussion**

- What do you suppose is the significance of the genealogy found in Ch. 11?
- In Ch.11:30: Why do you think the author makes a special point of saying; '*Sarai was barren, she had no child,*' to end this particular lineage?
- In Ch. 12:1-5: Who is speaking to Abram? Does anything unusual strike you in this verse?
- What are the promises that God makes to Abram?

**Application** It has been rightly said that Abraham's journey is our journey too. Ultimately, faith is proven when it has endured tests and trials that require acceptance of what is and surrender to something that is beyond ones capacity to understand or control. It is reassuring to know that with hope and even the slightest degree of faith God can produce well beyond what we think ourselves capable.

## Lesson 4-B

- Read Gen. 15
- Read Background
- Personal Reflection Questions

### Background

A bit of the shrewd chieftain emerges in Abram when he hears God's voice speak the words; <sup>1</sup> *'Do not fear, Abram! I am your shield; I will make your reward very great'*, and in reply he Abram complains, <sup>2</sup> *"What would you give me for I am going to die accursed."* Intending to leave his entire estate to his chief servant God in turn replies;

*<sup>4b</sup> No, that one will not be your heir; your own offspring will be your heir. <sup>5</sup> He took him outside and said: Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so, he added, will your descendants be. <sup>6</sup> Abram put his faith in the LORD, who attributed it to him as an act of righteousness."*

For this simple trust we are given no other reason than Abram's insight. This self-reliant man uses his own judgement to interpret what is happening. In an age of tall tales of warriors and kings, all so like one another that they are hard to tell apart, comes an account of a skeptical, worldly patriarch's trust in a disembodied voice. This is becoming, however incredibly, the story of an interpersonal relationship.

Cahill, Thomas. *The Gift of the Jews; How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels.*

### Personal Reflection

- What is meant by the term *'righteousness'* at the end of verse 6?
- Why would it take considerable faith for Abram to believe the promises God made?
- Is there often a difference between how we expect or want God to bless us and how he actually does bless us?
- How might the same principle apply to our own need for perseverance and patience?

### Application

Faith trusts and believes that God is true to his word. Resorting to human conniving or relying up on our own understanding can place an obstacle between us and God. In the course of this life, our faith and trust in God undergoes numerous trials. Regardless of how difficult the circumstances, we are consoled by the knowledge that God walks with us through them all, despite an unspoken desire that God might remove them from us.

## Lesson 4-C

Read Gen. 16 Hagar and Ishmael

Background

Personal Reflection & Questions for Discussion

Application

### Background

Unaware of what God has spoken to Abram, Sarai grumbles against God who has “*obstructed me from bearing,*” after ten years in Canaan. Not unheard of in ancient times, Sarai presents Abram with her Egyptian maid to serve as a surrogate through whom Abram will be provided a son. Once Hagar becomes pregnant she begins to treat Sarai dismissively which is more than Sarai can take. Once Abram instructs her that she can treat Hagar as she will, her mistreatment and beatings drive Hagar from the camp. Found wandering in the desert by an angel, she is instructed to return to the encampment, and endure what may come. Providing some consolation to Hagar, the angel assures her that her offspring will also be “*too many to count,*” resulting in the eventual emergence of the Arab people and nation of Islam through her son, Ishmael.

### Personal Reflection

- Have you ever suggested to someone - or someone suggested to you - that God might choose an alternative means by which to answer your prayer(s)?
- How do you determine whether or not to heed the suggestion?

### Questions for Discussion

- Why would Hagar begin to despise Sarai once she became pregnant? Are there further implications that make things even more difficult?
- Does the emergence of the Muslim faith from such unconventional circumstances indicate in any way that it is not a legitimate faith and therefore inconsistent with what God willed?

**Application** What should one's perspective be in terms of God's working when our circumstances are far from ideal and we are left with no clear solution?

#### Lesson 4-D

- Read Ch. 17-18:1-15 A Covenant of the Flesh
- Background
- Personal Reflection
- Questions for Discussion
- Application

#### **Background**

We read in Gen. 17 that Abram is an old man of 99 years and it is clear that Sarai is well beyond what her body could possibly endure in childbirth, yet it is here that the solitary voice that called and led Abram now invites him to walk in His presence. Overwhelmed by the splendor and significance of the moment, we are told Abram falls to his face, for the new covenant that God will establish with 'Abraham' is a permanent and unmistakable one- a covenant in flesh. By this covenant the children of Abraham will be unable to forget the God who will never forget them. While it becomes clear that God plans to make Ishmael bear fruit exceedingly, he tells Abraham, <sup>21</sup> *But my covenant I will maintain with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you by this time next year.*" Erdman, Charles R. The Book of Genesis.

#### **Personal Reflection**

- Recall an experience or moment when you were completely overcome with awe and wonder.
- What did the significance of that moment have to teach you?

#### **Questions for Discussion**

- What is unique or significant about the covenant that God makes with Abraham?
- What are the implications of such a radical covenant?

#### **Application**

Other nations (Arabs) also practiced circumcision (Jeremiah 9:25-26; Ezekiel 32:18-19), but not for the covenant reasons that Israel did. Circumcision signified Abraham's covenanted commitment to the LORD and that the LORD alone would be his God whom he would trust and serve.

## Lesson 4-E

Read Ch. 22:1-18 Test of Abraham

Background

Personal Reflection & Discussion Questions

### Background Ch. 21

Chapter 21 tells the story of Isaac's birth (21:1-7), the fulfillment of God's promise of an heir and surely the happiest time of Abraham and Sarah's lives. Then the story quickly turns sour when Sarah becomes angry with Ishmael and insists that Ishmael will not share the inheritance with Isaac (21:10). She puts pressure on Abraham to expel Hagar and Ishmael from their camp. Abraham is distressed at the prospect, but God tells him to do what Sarah asks (21:12-13), so he sends Hagar and Ishmael into the wilderness with minimal provisions (21:14). After running out of water, Hagar and Ishmael prepare to die (21:16), but an angel of the Lord intervenes to promise that God will make a great nation of Ishmael. Then God opens Hagar's eyes to see a well, where she and Ishmael get water (21:19). Then we are told that God was with the boy, and he grew up and became an expert bowman—and that Hagar (an Egyptian woman) got a bride from Egypt for Ishmael (21:20-21). Donovan, Richard Niell. *Commentary on the Book of Genesis*.

### Background Ch. 22:1-18

The text doesn't mention Abraham's reaction upon hearing what God requested of him and despite the reality of human sacrifice in ancient times, it must have come as quite a shock. Not only does he love Isaac, God had promised to give Abraham descendants through Isaac (21:12) and this becomes the key to understanding the requirement that God has placed on him. God is requiring that Abraham render to God the most precious offering he can give. The test (v. 1b) is to see whether Abraham, who loves Isaac, loves God even more. Donovan. *Commentary of the Book of Genesis*

Indeed, the very first time the Bible uses the word love, is in this very episode; *"<sup>2</sup> Then God said: Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There offer him up as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you."* Since we are told at the very beginning that it was a test, we know that Isaac was not in danger of being sacrificed but of course Abraham didn't know that—which is what made it the ultimate test of his faith. Nothing was more precious to Abraham than his son, Isaac. The test was whether Abraham would give God the one thing nearest and dearest to his heart. Cahill, Thomas. *The Gift of the Jews; How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels*.

### Personal Reflection

In Genesis 22:13 Abraham looks up to see a ram provided by God for the sacrifice. Abraham called the altar *"the Lord Will Provide"* in memory of the incredible experience.

- What is the most recent example that God has provided for you?

### Discussion Questions

- As an objective observer, what would you like to have had an answer to as you read Ch. 22:1-18?
- What tells you that Abraham was confident Isaac would not be sacrificed?
- Think about Abraham and Isaac's experience. What might you talk about on the 3-day journey home?
- Name a particular moment from Chap. 10-22 when God and Abraham's relationship intensifies.

### Conclusion

To Abraham, the plurality of gods worshiped and adored in long ago Sumer must by now seem like good luck charms at best. In light of what Abraham has learned about himself from the 'One-god' whose voice beckoned him forth from the land of Ur, not only is this God divine, he is only God that matters. *"The God Who Will Provide"* as Abraham calls him, is nothing like the gods of Sumer whose fickle relationship with humans proved unreliable and often vindictive. No, this God is the Unknowable One whose ways are not our ways, yet through whom impossible promises are made and brought to fulfillment.