



SESSION 2

# ABRAHAM

I. PRAYER

II. PANORAMA TIMELINE (Movements #1 and #2)

"Prologue"

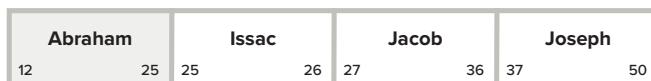


"Patriarchs"



III. PATRIARCHS

A. Genesis 12-50 (Horizontal Chart)

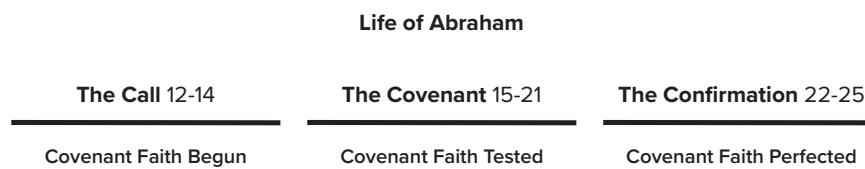


B. Toledots (Terah, Ishmael, Isaac, Esau-2 times, Jacob)

\*see session 1, p. 7.

IV. ABRAHAM: MAN OF "FAITH"

A. Horizontal Chart (Genesis 12-25)



B. The Call (Genesis 12-14)

\*Covered in Session 1

### C. The Covenant (Genesis 15-21): Chapter Outline

1. Covenant Given and Ratified (15)
2. Hagar and Ishmael (16)
3. Covenant Confirmation and Circumcision (17)  
(Abram → Abraham)
4. Sodom and Gomorrah (18-19)
5. Abraham and Abimelech (20)  
(Sister Story #2)
6. Birth of Isaac (21)  
(Departure of Hagar and Ishmael)
7. Treaty at Beersheba (21)

### V. LIFE OF ABRAHAM: THE COVENANT (Genesis 15-21)

#### A. Covenant Given and Ratified (Genesis 15)

1. Structural overview (adapted from Waltke, Genesis, 239)

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A Promise to Abraham : “I am” (1)

B Question of Abraham : to “Sovereign LORD” (2-3)

C Assurance to Abraham : stars and offspring (4-6)

A' Promise to Abraham : “I am” (7)

B' Question of Abraham: to “Sovereign LORD” (8)

C' Assurance to Abraham: torch and sacrifices (9-21)

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2. Thematic overview (based upon the structure above)



3. Promise #1

GENESIS 15:1-5

“After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.’<sup>2</sup>

◆ For a full view of the “Life of Abraham” with chapter outlines as above, see “Life of Abraham: Vertical Chart” in Session 1, p. 8

But Abram said, ‘Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?’<sup>3</sup> And Abram said, ‘You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.’<sup>4</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to him: ‘This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.’<sup>5</sup> He took him outside and said, ‘Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’”

(Note: these verses were covered at end of Session 1)

#### 4. Faith Response

GENESIS 15:6

“Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”

Note: “Technically, Abram trusted in a Person and hoped in a promise” (Constable, 136).

#### 5. Promise #2

GENESIS 15:7-8

“He also said to him, ‘I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.’<sup>8</sup> But Abram said, “Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?”

- a. Verse 5 had indicated that “offspring” (or seed or descendants) was a part of the Abrahamic Covenant. Here (v. 7), “land” is a promised part of the Covenant.
- b. Genesis 12:1-3 recorded the initial call and earliest promise of the Abrahamic Covenant.
  - (1) Leave and go to the “land” I will show you (v. 1).
  - (2) I will make you a great “nation” (descendants) (v. 2).
  - (3) You will be a “blessing” (v. 2) and all peoples will be “blessed” through you (v. 3).
- c. Charted



- d. Confirmation / Ratification

### GENESIS 15:9-11

“So the LORD said to him, “Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.”

<sup>10</sup> Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. <sup>11</sup> Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.”

- (1) The actions of cutting and dividing the animals speaks of a blood covenant (contract or agreement).
- (2) The birds were not cut in two. Perhaps their small size was a factor (cf. Lev. 1:14-17).
- (3) The animals are all three years old indicative of being mature, in the prime of life (cf. 1 Sam. 1:24).
- (4) Ancient Near Eastern peoples and customs practiced several kinds of covenants (as attested in the Scriptures).

### GENESIS 15:17-18

“When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. <sup>18</sup> On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I give this land...’”

- (1) Abram at sunset falls into a dream/trance (“deep sleep”) whereby he sees a vision. Compare to the experiences of Adam (2:21) and Daniel (Dan. 8:18; 10:9).
- (2) Prophetic (future) bondage to the Egyptians is declared (13-14) but a return to the promised land is also given (16), one which will involve the descendants of Abram to be God’s instrument of judgment upon the Amorites (Canaanites).

### DEUTERONOMY 18:9-13

“When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there.

<sup>10</sup> Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, <sup>11</sup> or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. <sup>12</sup> Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD; because of these same detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. <sup>13</sup> You must be blameless before the LORD your God.”

### ◆ TYPES OF “COVENANTS”

1. **Blood Covenant:** contract sealed by blood; pledges the lives of the covenant makers to ensure fidelity to stipulations. (cf. Jer. 34:8-11, 17-20)
2. **Hand Covenant:** contract sealed by striking of the pelvis or by shaking/grasping hands. (cf. Ezra 10:19; Ezek. 17:18)
3. **Shoe Covenant:** contract sealed by exchanging of sandals. (cf. Ruth 4:7-10)
4. **Salt Covenant:** contract sealed by pinch of salt taken from one person’s salt pouch and placed in the other’s. (cf. Lev. 2:13; Num. 18:19)

N.B. Of all these different covenants, the most solemn (perhaps most binding) was the “blood covenant.”

- (3) In Abram's vision a "smoking firepot" with a "blazing torch" appeared and passed between the severed pieces of the animals arrayed for the blood covenant. This smoky cloud and bright fire foreshadows the Shekinah presence of God during the "Sinai" event (Ex. 19:18; Deut. 4:10-12).
- (4) In blood covenants between equals, both parties would pass between the sacrificial animals. In this case only, God (smoke and fire) passed through. This blood covenant is a unilateral and unconditional covenant dependent upon God alone for its confirmation and ratification.
- (5) Note that the boundaries of the "promised land" are delineated (15:18-21).

#### B. Hagar and Ishmael (Genesis 16)

##### 1. The Hagar Story (16:1-6)

Beginning here in Genesis 16 to and until Genesis 21:2 (the birth of Isaac), the focus strays away from the "land" aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant and centers upon the delay in the "descendants" (or seed) aspect of the covenant.

##### GENESIS 16: 1-2

"Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar;<sup>2</sup> so she said to Abram, 'The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her.' Abram agreed to what Sarai said."

- (1) Abram and Sarai are still barren 10 years after settling in Canaan (16:3). Sarai's suggestion was a common custom of that day (Nuzi Tablets and Code of Hammurabi). If a wife was barren, a child through a maid servant would produce an heir for inheritance rights.
- (2) Sarai's actions may be culturally permissible, but evidence of a lack of faith (at this point in the narrative). Abram, though a man of faith, has lapsed again (first lapse, note the Egyptian sojourn of Genesis 12:10ff). He should have trusted God's provision in God's timing. The actions of the couple take the initiative out of God's hands and places it within their own. At this point the culture of the day is guiding their actions, not faith in God.

#### GENESIS 16:4-6

“He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress.<sup>5</sup> Then Sarai said to Abram, “You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me.”<sup>6</sup> ‘Your slave is in your hands,’ Abram said. ‘Do with her whatever you think best.’ Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her.”

- (1) The ill-conceived plan has backfired. Hagar, the handmaid, disrespects barren Sarai, further adding to the embarrassment of being without child.
- (2) Sarai blames Abram (the “blame game” - see Adam and Eve, Gen. 3:11-13). Strife and contention are at a high point.

#### PROVERBS 30:21-23

“Under three things the earth trembles, under four it cannot bear up:<sup>22</sup> a servant who becomes king, a godless fool who gets plenty to eat,<sup>23</sup> a contemptible woman who gets married, and a servant who displaces her mistress.”

- (3) Sarai is given Abram’s blessing to do what she thought best, not to be harsh and overbearing.

## 2. The Ishmael Story (16:7-16)

Hagar flees the mistreatment of her mistress. But the angel of the Lord meets her near a spring in the desert on her way back home to Egypt. The angel confirms that her child will be named Ishmael, and that he will be a free-spirited nomad (“wild donkey of a man”) who clashes with his brothers.

#### GENESIS 16:9-10

“Then the angel of the LORD told her, ‘Go back to your mistress and submit to her.’<sup>10</sup> The angel added, ‘I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count.’

- a. The angel of the Lord commands her to return and submit to her mistress.
- b. The angel of the Lord promises numerous descendants through Hagar’s son.
- c. The angel of the Lord prophesies that the child will indeed be a son, that he will be named Ishmael (Hb. “God hears”), that he will lead a nomadic, violent life and that he will live in “hostility toward his brothers” (i.e., the descendants of the future Isaac, son of Abram and Sarai... implications for today?)

#### ◆ HISTORICAL/CULTURAL INSIGHT

“The barren wife is an object of pity, an archetype of the outcast in Hebrew society (e.g. Sarah [Gen. 16:1-6], Rachel [Gen. 29:31-30:24] and Hannah [1 Sam. 1:1-11]).”

(Ryken, et al. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 67)

GENESIS 21:20-21

“God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer.<sup>21</sup> While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt.”

(“living in the Desert”...nomadic existence)

GENESIS 16:15

“So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne.”

C. Covenant Confirmation and Circumcision (Genesis 17)

1. Preliminary observations (for Gen. 17)

- a. This chapter’s events occur about 13 years after the Hagar/Ishmael story (cp. Gen. 16:16 and 17:1). It has also been 24 years since Abram left Haran to go to the land God had promised (12:1-3). Abram and Sarai are still barren.
- b. Genesis 17 marks the formal confirmation/signification of the Abrahamic Covenant

(1) Call to Covenant...Genesis 12

(2) Formation of Covenant...Genesis 15

(3) Confirmation of Covenant...Genesis 17

Just as the “sign” of the rainbow signified the Noahic Covenant (Gen. 9:12-16), now the “sign” of circumcision will signify the Abrahamic Covenant.

- c. The word “covenant” appears 14 times in the chapter (NIV 84) highlighting the thematic emphasis. To be precise, in some occasions it refers to the formal, unconditional Abrahamic Covenant (e.g. vv. 4, 7, 11, 19, 21); on others it refers to the conditional covenant act of circumcision (e.g. 2, 9, 10, 13, 14).

2. Structural overview (for Gen. 17)

(Following structure adapted from Sarna, as quoted in Waltke, *Genesis*, 257)

“ANGEL OF THE LORD”

This is the first occurrence of the phrase “angel of the Lord” in the OT (16:7FF), where it occurs 48 times. The parallel phrase “angel of God” also is found (cf. 21:17). Christian theologians often ascribe the identity of this “angel” (messenger) to a special God-appearance, namely for some, the preincarnate Person of Christ.

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A Abraham : father of nations : new name (1-8)

B Command of circumcision enacted (9-14)

A' Sarah : mother of nations : new name (15-22)

B' Command of circumcision enacted (23-27)

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Note that the change of names is significant. Abram ("exalted father") becomes Abraham ("father of a multitude"). Sarai ("my princess") becomes Sarah ("the princess," i.e., the royal princess). This is the only place in the Scriptures where a woman's name is changed. In each case, the name change is attached to the promise of many "descendants," one of the aspects of the total Abrahamic Covenant. Many years have passed since the promise of a heritage. This is the faith-test of the couple.

3. Chapter exposition (Gen. 17)

a. God's appearance (17:1-3a)

GENESIS 17:1-3a

"When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless.<sup>2</sup> Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.'<sup>3</sup> Abram fell facedown..."

(1) This is God's fifth appearance to Abram. It has been 23 years or so since the formalizing of the Covenant (Gen. 15), 13 years since the birth of Ishmael. But Abram and Sarai are still barren. For all they know, Ishmael may be their promised son as nothing else suggests otherwise.

(2) God reveals Himself as "God Almighty" (Hb. El Shaddai). The actual meaning of the description is obscure. Likely it means "God the Powerful or the Strong" or it could mean "God the All-Sufficient." It seems to be God's primary name until the Mosaic period (cf. Ex. 6:2-3).

(3) With this theophany ("God-appearance"), God commands Abram with two imperatives:

(a) "Walk before me"

(b) “Be blameless”

To walk before God speaks of full obedience. It is “to orient one’s entire life to his (God’s) presence, promises and demands” (Waltke, *Genesis*, 259). To be blameless is to be unblemished, that is, to live a life of integrity before God (it does not mean perfection without sin, but speaks of integrity of heart).

- (4) Again, God confirms two promises. First, “I will confirm my covenant.” This reaffirms God’s commitment to His covenantal promise. (This is the first of seven times in this chapter that God declares unconditionally, “I will” rather than “If you then I”). Second, God promises to “greatly increase your numbers” (the “descendants” aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant).
- (5) Abram’s response was a response of humble worship and submission (cf. Lev. 9:24; Josh. 5:14).

b. God’s part (17:3b-8)

GENESIS 17:3b-5

Abram fell facedown, and God said to him,<sup>4</sup> “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations.<sup>5</sup> No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.”

- (1) “As for me” delineates what God commits Himself to do (compare to Abraham’s and Sarah’s obligations which will follow).
- (2) God reaffirms His covenant loyalty with the promise of “many nations” coming forth from Abraham. This is true not only of Isaac through Jacob (Israel) - Israelites, but the descendants of Abraham and Keturah (25:1-4), the descendants of Abraham and Hagar (Ishmaelites-Gen. 16:9-12; 12:18), the descendants of Isaac’s other son, Esau (Gen. 36:9-43).
- (3) This expanded promise (from your descendants to father of nations) also carries the name change for Abram and Sarai as well.

c. Abraham’s part (17:9-14)

GENESIS 17:9-11

“Then God said to Abraham, ‘As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come.<sup>10</sup> This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised.<sup>11</sup> You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.’”

- (1) “As for you” clarifies God’s expectations of Abraham now in covenantal relationship. The Covenant is unconditional (sure, trustworthy, binding) but the enjoyment (blessings) of such a covenant is predicated upon obedience to expressed responsibilities.
- (2) The covenant of circumcision (see earlier comments) becomes the “sign” (expected obedience) of those who desire to live by and enjoy the covenantal blessings attached to this Abrahamic Covenant. Just as salvation in the New Testament is a free gift (Ro. 6:23; Eph. 2:8-9), yet there is the expected response of obedience and good works (Eph. 2:10), so also the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant has expectations and blessings of obedience alongside it.
- (3) Why circumcision?
  - The reproductive-sexual member recalls the blessing of numerous descendants.
  - The ritual sets one apart to a specific faith-community or exclusion by non-participation (17:14).
  - The rite may have been chosen by God for hygienic and health reasons.
  - The rite involved blood, perhaps a reminder of the blood covenant aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 15:9-11ff).

d. Sarah’s part (17:15-16)

GENESIS 17:15-16

“God also said to Abraham, ‘As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah.<sup>16</sup> I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.’”

- (1) “As for Sarai” speaks of her role in this ongoing revelation of God.
- (2) Sarai’s name will change to Sarah. “My princess” will now become “the princess” from whom will come nations, even “kings of peoples.”
- (3) God reveals clearly that Ishmael is not the son of promise, but a son that will come forth from Abraham and Sarai. This is the first clear statement of this fact.

HEBREWS 11:11-12

“And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise.<sup>12</sup> And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.”

e. Abraham’s reactions (17:17-27)

GENESIS 17:17-18

“Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, ‘Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?’<sup>18</sup> And Abraham said to God, ‘If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!’

- (1) Abraham laughs. Is this a laughter of joy/expectation at the outrageous idea of fathering a child at age 100 (conception at 99; birth at 100?) Or, is this a laughter born of disbelief that such a thing could not truly happen? Also, Abraham “fell facedown.” This could be a posture of humble and thankful trust or to cover up an inner skepticism. Scholars are divided over the question.
- (2) Abraham pleads for Ishmael’s status, that he, too, might live under God’s blessing. God clearly indicates that the miracle-child will be the fulfillment of the “descendants” promise (17:19, 21) but that Ishmael would indeed be blessed (17:20).
- (3) In response, 99 year old Abraham and 13-year-old Ishmael were circumcised on the same day (17:24-25) as well as the male servants of the household (17:23).

D. Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18-19)

1. Preliminary observations

- a. The text gives no chronological marker as to the timing of this event, but the implication is that Sarah is not yet pregnant (though will bear the promised child within the year, “at the appointed time next year” – 18:14).
- b. This event is the sixth revelation of God to Abraham. Some rabbinic tradition suggests that Abraham was recovering from his circumcision, though there is no direct Biblical support for this.
- c. This two-chapter story will highlight Abraham’s role as a prophet of God (18:16-19; 20:7) and intercessor on behalf of others (18:23-32).

d. Further, the contrast of Abraham (17:1 “walk before me and be blameless”) and Lot (the man of “flesh”, chose the best land to live—13:10-11) are in stark relief. Abraham is the man of faith; Lot is the man of the flesh (carnality).

## 2. Structural overview

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### Contrast of Two Men

A LORD appeared to Abraham . . . three men (18:1-2)

B Abraham hosts the three visitors (18:3-8)

C Conversation and laughter: About life (Isaac) (18:9-15)

D Intercession before God: To spare cities (18:16-32)

E LORD leaves Abraham (18:33)

A' LORD's messengers appeared to Lot... two men (19:1)

B' Lot hosts the two visitors (19:2-3)

C' Conversation and alarm: About violence (Rape) (19:4-5)

D' Intercession before men of Sodom: To spare two visitors (19:6-11)

E' Lot's family leaves Sodom (19:12-29)

Appendix: Sordid story: Lot and Daughters (19:30-38)

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## 3. Chapters' exposition (Gen. 18-19)

### a. Abraham: The three visitors (18:1-15)

#### GENESIS 18:1-2

“The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day.<sup>2</sup> Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.”

(1) The Lord “appeared”; Abraham “saw” the men. The encounter will confirm the birth of Abraham and Sarah’s child; the encounter will position Abraham as a prophet privy to God’s plans and judgments.

- (2) The “three” will later (19:1) become “two.” Who is the third man; what became of him?
- (3) The location, “near the great trees of Mamre,” identifies Abram’s home as still being near Hebron (13:18; 14:13). Hebron was located to the west of the Dead Sea and south of Jerusalem in the hill country of Judah. It would eventually be the burial spot for Abraham and Sarah.
- (4) Abraham “bowed low to the ground” as a sign of respect. Then, according to the custom of oriental hospitality, he provided refreshment, food and drink. (18:3-5ff).
- (5) One of the three guests is the more prominent and speaks on behalf of all. He asks the whereabouts of Sarah (18:9) and the text then reveals the true identity of their third visitor. (cp. v. 10 and v. 13).

**GENESIS 18:10**

“Then one of them said, ‘I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.’ Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him.”

- (6) Sarah laughs at the preposterous notion, but is called out by the Lord.

**GENESIS 18:13-14**

“Then the LORD said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh and say, “Will I really have a child, now that I am old?”’<sup>14</sup> Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.”

The supernatural insight of what Sarah was doing and thinking outside the tent and the reaffirmation of the child to come must have bolstered the weak faith of Sarah, perhaps even Abraham. Laughter will become the name of the child (Hb. Isaac = laughter or he laughs).

- b. Abraham: Interceding for Sodom (18:16-33)

**GENESIS 18:16-19**

“When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way.<sup>17</sup> Then the LORD said, ‘Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?<sup>18</sup> Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.<sup>19</sup> For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.’”

(1) The text reveals the internal dialogue of God concerning His very soon action against Sodom ("the LORD said," perhaps better, "thought"). Abraham is a prophet (20:7) and God reveals His intentions through them (i.e., through prophets).

AMOS 3:7

"Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets."

(2) The internal question—should I hide from Abraham—is an obvious "no."

(a) Abraham will father "a great and powerful nation."

(b) Abraham and his offspring will realize the covenantal aspects of the Abrahamic Covenant. Nation (children) speaks of "descendants"; blessed speaks of the "blessing all nations" aspect (see earlier Abrahamic Covenant chart, p. 20).

(c) Abraham must now begin to see, understand, embrace and model God's kind of justice, righteousness and judgment. Sodom will be a dramatic illustration.

GENESIS 18:20-21

"Then the LORD said, 'The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous <sup>21</sup> that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.'"

(a) God is not capricious. He will act in accordance to what actually is ("go down and see").

(b) "Outcry" (speaking here of public, sinful activity) is contrasted to Abraham's imperative (v. 19 – "doing what is right"). In the Hebrew language the two contrasting words carry a similar pronunciation, thus highlighting the contrast of unjust and just.

GENESIS 18:22-23

"The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. <sup>23</sup> Then Abraham approached him and said: 'Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?'"

(1) Abraham is a man of faith (Gen. 15:6), but is he a man of compassion (his nephew, Lot, lives in Sodom). Further, can he also be an advocate for righteous actions and just

dealings? Can the righteous be spared while the morally wicked are punished?

- (2) Abraham “remained standing before the LORD.” His intercession is about to begin. “Then Abraham approached him (God) and said...” This is the first time in recorded Scripture that man takes the initiative with God.
- (3) In the ensuing dialogue (18:23-32) Abraham carefully intercedes for the possible righteous ones in the condemned cities. Note that his appeal to God is not simply for mercy, but for the city to be spared for the sake of the righteous.
- (4) Abraham poses the question to God: What if there are...
  - 50 righteous
  - 45 righteous
  - 40 righteous
  - 30 righteous
  - 20 righteous
  - 10 righteous

#### INSIGHT

“Ten is still a community; fewer than ten can be saved individually, as happens in Genesis 19.”

(Waltke, *Genesis*, 271)

- (5) Abraham’s bold intercession is a model of godly persistence. Jesus commended this quality in His teaching on prayer (cf. Luke 11:5-10; Luke 18:1-8).

#### c. Judgment: Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed (19:1-29)

The 19th chapter of Genesis stands in stark contrast to the 18th. Abraham has interceded for ten righteous people and the averting of judgment. The moral condition of the city will not find ten righteous. The moral perversion of the city (evidenced in the mob—see 19:5) validates the “outcry” (18:20) that came before the Lord.

- (1) Ten righteous people are not to be found in Sodom; judgment is deserving.
- (2) Lot, Abraham’s nephew, is a believer (cf. 2 Pet. 2:6-9) but has been shaped and molded by the sinful city. He is a man of “flesh” (carnality, worldly) not a man of blameless lifestyle. He illustrates what New Testament writers warn of:

#### I CORINTHIANS 3:1-2

“Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly (carnal, fleshy)—mere infants in Christ.<sup>2</sup> I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.”

ROMANS 12:1-2

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

I JOHN 2:15-19

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. <sup>16</sup> For everything in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. <sup>17</sup> The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever. <sup>18</sup> Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. <sup>19</sup> They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.”

(3) Lot’s own family has been infected by the unrighteousness of the city. His sons-in-law will laugh and refuse to leave the city (19:14). His wife will reluctantly leave but disobey the angels’ admonition and “look back” (“became a pillar of salt”-19:26). His daughters will be saved from destruction but will conceive an immoral plan to have children by their father (19:30-38). Apparently, Lot could take his daughters out of Sodom but could not take “the Sodom” out of his daughters.

E. Abraham and Abimelech (Genesis 20)

(Sister Story #2)

Following the dramatic events of the Sodom and Gomorrah epic, the reader of Scripture might expect the birth of Isaac to occur at this very juncture. But what follows is another failure of Abraham. Though a man of faith, he, like so many, also has “clay feet.”

GENESIS 20:1-2

“Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar, <sup>2</sup> and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, ‘She is my sister.’ Then Abimelech king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her.”

The event is a “second sister story.” Earlier (Gen. 12:10-20), Abraham received the promise of land, blessing and descendants, yet put it all

at risk in Egypt. He and Sarah deceived Pharaoh by telling that she was his sister. Only by divine intervention was Sarah rescued from Pharaoh's harem.

Now, Abraham and Sarah have moved south into the hill country of the Philistines (as it will later be known). Abimelech (a title, not a proper name), the King of Gerar will again take Sarah into his household. This may have been more of a treaty/alliance-building arrangement than a child-bearing one.

1. Abimelech and God (20:3-8)

God reveals to Abimelech by means of a dream (20:3-5) that Sarah is in fact the wife of Abraham. Abimelech protests that God surely would not destroy an innocent nation because of Abraham and Sarah's deception.

GENESIS 20:6-7

"Then God said to him in the dream, 'Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her.<sup>7</sup> 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 who belong to you will die.'"

- a. God acknowledges Abimelech's innocence.
- b. God commands the immediate return of Sarah to her husband.
- c. God reveals that Abraham is a prophet and must pray for Abimelech or he will suffer death along with others.

2. Abimelech and Abraham (20:9-15)

GENESIS 20:9

"Then Abimelech called Abraham in and said, 'What have you done to us? How have I wronged you that you have brought such great guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should never be done.'"

- a. A pagan king upbraids the "man of faith" for his deception, an act of disbelief.
- b. The prophet of the true God, the recipient of covenantal promise, the one charged to walk before God "blameless" and in righteousness has acted unrighteously before the King of Gerar.

**INSIGHT**

Compare Abraham to the reluctant prophet, Jonah, who fled on a boat to escape his calling. In Jonah's story, the frightened sailors and the repentant King of Nineveh showed more spiritual heart than did the prophet. A similar charge could be made against Abraham as well.

#### GENESIS 20:11-13

"Abraham replied, 'I said to myself, There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.' <sup>12</sup> Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife. <sup>13</sup> And when God had me wander from my father's household, I said to her, 'This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, 'He is my brother.'"

- a. Abraham attempts to excuse his behavior by supposing a lack of fear of God. What a touch of irony: Abimelech fears God apparently more than Abraham.
- b. Abraham clarifies that actually Sarah was his half-sister (same father, different mother). This would later be forbidden in Mosaic legislation (cf. Lev. 18:9, 11; 20:17; Deut. 27:22).
- c. Abimelech gives livestock, servants, and silver to Abraham to settle the matter of Sarah's honor. Yet, the king still needs the prophet's intercession.

#### GENESIS 20:17-18

"Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife and his female slaves so they could have children again, <sup>18</sup> for the LORD had kept all the women in Abimelech's household from conceiving because of Abraham's wife Sarah."

#### ◆ INSIGHT

Here also is dramatic irony: when Sarah is among them, they (wife and slave girls of Abimelech) become barren; when she leaves, wombs are opened but she (Sarah) remains barren

(Waltke, *Genesis*, 288).

#### F. Birth of Isaac (Genesis 21)

(Departure of Hagar and Ishmael)

##### 1. The birth of Isaac (21:1-7)

#### GENESIS 21:1-4

"Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. <sup>2</sup> Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. <sup>3</sup> Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. <sup>4</sup> When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him."

- a. The "descendant" promised in the Abrahamic Covenant arrives in the birth of Isaac, the child of promise (and of the Covenant).

#### GENESIS 15:4

"Then the word of the LORD came to him: 'This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.'"

GENESIS 17:6

"I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you."

Later historical books (Samuel, Kings) will document the truth of this promise. Further, the "special" King of the line of Judah is also faintly cast (later, Gen. 49:8-12 and Num. 24:7-9).

- b. In Covenantal obedience, Isaac is circumcised on the eighth day as required (17:2). Abraham is one hundred years old, Sarah is ninety (17:17); the event is a miraculous birth, one of several recorded in Scripture.

HEBREWS 11:1-2

"And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise.<sup>12</sup> And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore."

2. Departure of Hagar and Ishmael

GENESIS 21:8-10

"The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast.<sup>9</sup> But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking,<sup>10</sup> and she said to Abraham, 'Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.'"

- a. Hagar had earlier mocked Sarah and her barrenness (16:4-5). Now her son, Ishmael (17 years of age or so), mocks and ridicules the child of Isaac (probably 3 or so, the common time of weaning in ancient cultures). This is but a precursor for the animosity between the descendants of Ishmael and the descendants of Abraham.
- b. Sarah perceives Ishmael (Abraham's son) as a threat to Isaac's inheritance rights (v. 10). Before his own death and after the death of Sarah, Abraham will bequeath all that he owns (i.e. inheritance) to Isaac. However, he will send his other children away with gifts (25:5-6).
- c. Abraham was distressed by Sarah's insistence but God commanded Abraham to heed his wife's advice (21:11-13). Sarah is demonstrating a measure of faith in the covenantal promises of numerous offspring through miraculous Isaac.
- d. Hagar and Ishmael are given provisions and sent away. Hagar soon despairs but God (angel of God) promises a future for Ishmael; he will father a great nation (21:14-21).

G. The Treaty at Beersheba (Genesis 21)

This section of Abraham's life (see chart, p. 8, "Vertical Chart") draws to a close with the reappearance of Abimelech. Whereas the first conflict focused on the precarious state of the promised descendant

(seed) and Sarah's uncertain place in Abimelech's household (harem?; Gen. 20), this conflict concerns water rights in the "land" covenantally promised to Abraham. Thus, two aspects of the Abrahamic Covenant are the focal points in the disputes.

1. Abimelech wants a peace treaty (21:22-24).
2. Abraham wants an agreement (treaty or covenant) concerning the water rights and well at the place now called Beersheba ("well of oath" or "well of seven").

#### GENESIS 21:32-34

"After the treaty had been made at Beersheba, Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his forces returned to the land of the Philistines.<sup>33</sup> Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD, the Eternal God.<sup>34</sup> And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time."

