

The Agreement With Abraham



SABBATH—MAY 7

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Genesis 15:1–21; Genesis 16:1–16; Genesis 17:1–19; Genesis 18:1–15; Genesis 18:16–Genesis 19:29.

MEMORY VERSE: “But Abram said, ‘LORD and King, what can you give me? I still don’t have any children. My servant Eliezer comes from Damascus. When I die, he will get everything I own’ ” (Genesis 15:2, NIV).



Abram cares very deeply about the evil people in Sodom.

IN GENESIS 15, we read about the agreement that God makes with Abram. This agreement is the second one that God makes with humans. The first agreement God makes is with Noah.

The agreement with Noah included a blessing for other people. The agreement with Abram also includes a blessing for other people (Genesis 17:7; Hebrews 13:20).

At this time, the life of Abram is filled with both fear and laughing. The Bible tells us that Abram is afraid (Genesis 15:1). Sarah is afraid, too (Genesis 18:15). So is Hagar (Genesis 21:17). Abram laughs (Genesis 17:17). Sarah laughs, too (Genesis 18:12). So does Ishmael (Genesis 21:9). These chapters show us the warm feelings and the love in the heart of Abram. Abram cares very deeply about the evil people in Sodom. Abram wants them to be saved. Abram shows how much he cares for Sarah, Hagar, and Lot. Abram also is kind to the three visitors (Genesis 18:2–8).

During this time, God changes the name of Abram to Abraham. This name shows us that Abraham will be the “father of many nations” (Genesis 17:5, ERV). This promise shows us that God has big plans for Abraham, for sure.

THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM (Genesis 15:1–21)

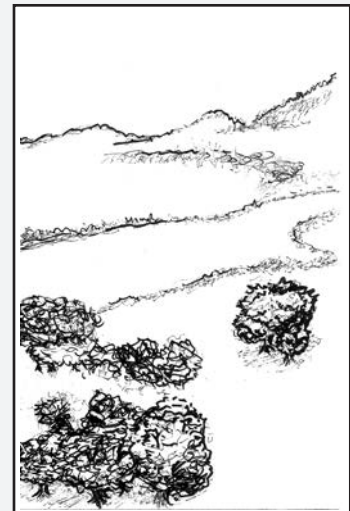
How does Abram show that we must live by faith? God asks Abram to give Him an animal offering. What Bible truth does this offering show us? For the answers, read Genesis 15:1–21 and Romans 4:3, 4, 9, and 22.

Abram is worried. He does not have a son. So, the first thing that God makes to Abram is a promise: “ ‘You will have a son of your own. He will get everything you have’ ” (Genesis 15:4, Nlrv). Abram believes the promise of the Lord (Genesis 15:6). Abram understands that God will keep His promise because of His mercy (Genesis 15:6; compare with Romans 4:5, 6). This story shows us the way that God saves us. At the time, no one else but Abram believed this way. The Egyptians believed that you had to earn everlasting life by your good behavior.

God then asks Abram to make an offering. So, Abram offers animal gifts to God. The killed animals show us the future death of Jesus for our sins. This offering also is a special message for Abram. The birds that fly down to eat the animal offerings (Genesis 15:9–11) are a word picture for what will happen in the years to come. These birds show Abram that his future children will suffer as slaves in Egypt for 400 years (Genesis 15:13, 16). After that time, his future children will come back to the Promised Land (Genesis 15:16).

Next, we read about what happens after “the sun set [went down] and it became dark. Then a burning torch [a long piece of wood that is set on fire and used for light] and a pot filled with smoking coals appeared. They passed between the pieces of the animals that had been cut in two” (Genesis 15:17, Nlrv). This miracle shows us that God will keep His promise to the future children of Abram. God will give them the Promised Land (Genesis 15:18).

So, “the Lord made an agreement with Abram on that day. He said, ‘I have given this land to your children and to their children’s children, from the river of Egypt as far as the big Euphrates River’ ” (Genesis 15:18, Nlrv). The rivers around the Promised Land help us remember the rivers around the Garden of Eden (compare with Genesis 2:13, 14). So, the promise to Israel is a promise to the end-time people of God, too. God will bring us back to the Garden of Eden, the same as He brought Israel back to Canaan.



The rivers around the Promised Land help us remember the rivers around the Garden of Eden.

ABRAM DOUBTS (Genesis 16:1–16)

Read the story about Hagar in Genesis 16:1–16. Why does Abram choose to make a baby with Hagar? Did not God promise to give Abram a son? Compare Hagar with Sarai. How do these women show two different ideas about faith?



When we go against the plan of God for our lives, we get into trouble now and in the future.

God promises to give Abram a son. Now, years later, Abram has no son. So, Abram doubts God (Genesis 15:2). Sarai suggests an idea to help God keep His promise to them. She gives her servant Hagar to Abram so that he can make a baby with her. People in the Near East at this time often did this same thing when they wanted a child.

In this story about Abram and Sarai we see the story about Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The two stories show many of the same ideas. (1) Sarai and Eve take the lead in the stories. (2) Abram and Adam obey their wives instead of trusting in God. The connection between the two stories shows us that God is not happy with the decision that Sarai and Abram make.

Paul talks about their story to show us that God saves us by His mercy and not by our good behavior (Galatians 4:23–26). In both the Adam and Eve story and the story about Hagar, the same thing happens. When we go against the plan of God for our lives, we get into trouble now and in the future. Do you see that God is not a part of the story in Genesis 16:1–16? Sarai talks **about** God, but she never talks **to** Him. God does not talk to Abram or Sarai. God is silent. His silence is surprising. Why? Because He had so much to say to Abram in the chapter before this story, right?

Later in the story, God shows Himself to Hagar, but only after Hagar leaves the home of Abram. We read: “The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring of water in the desert” (Genesis 16:7, NIV). “The angel of the LORD” is often a name for Jesus, the Lord (read Genesis 18:1, 13, 22). God announces to Hagar that she will have a son, Ishmael. His name means “God hears” (Genesis 16:11).

Why is it so easy for us to make the same mistake that Abram and Sarai made with Hagar?

THE PROOF OF THE AGREEMENT (Genesis 17:1–19)

What Bible truth does circumcision show us? Circumcision is the act of cutting off skin at the tip of the male sex parts. How is circumcision also a special promise about the future? For the answers, read Genesis 17:1–19 and Romans 4:11.

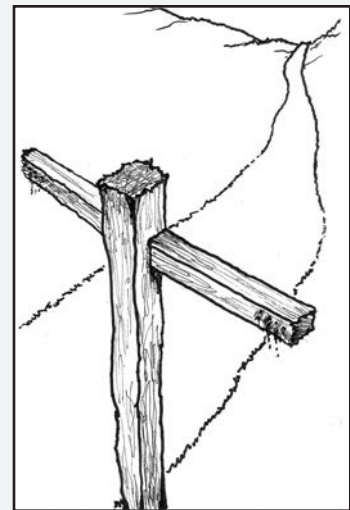
Abram doubted God (Genesis 16). His doubt separated him from God. During that time, God was silent. Now God talks to Abram again for the first time since he doubted. God connects with Abram again in the same way that He connected with Abram when God made His agreement with him.

God gives Abram a sign or proof of the agreement: circumcision. Circumcision includes spilling blood (Exodus 4:25). So, we can see that circumcision is a word picture for the offering that God made for our sins. This idea shows us that “his [Abram’s] faith had made him right with God” (Romans 4:11, NIV) before his circumcision.

The agreement and the sign of circumcision also help us remember the first promise of a Savior that God gives humans. (Compare Genesis 17:7 with Genesis 3:15.) The promise of God to Abram shows us more than the future people of Israel. The promise to Abram also includes the saving plan of God for all people on the earth. The promise of the everlasting agreement (Genesis 17:7) shows us the work that Jesus will do. We see in this promise to Abram the death of Jesus for us on the cross. His death will give everlasting life to everyone who accepts this gift by faith (read Romans 6:23 and Titus 1:2).

We see this promise of everlasting life in the change of names for Abram and Sarai. Abram means “most honored father.” Sarai means “my princess.” The change of their names shows us God’s future plan for their lives. Abraham means “father of many people.” Sarah means “the princess” (for everyone). Also, the name of their son, Isaac, means “he will laugh.” This name helps us remember the laughing of Abraham in Genesis 17:17. This laughing shows us his doubt or maybe his wonder at the powerful promises of God. Yes, Abraham believed what the Lord promised him. At the same time, Abraham had trouble living in perfect faith and trust in God.

How can we learn to keep believing in God when we have a hard time trusting? What must we do with our doubts?



The promise of the everlasting agreement (Genesis 17:7) shows us the work that Jesus will do.

THE SON OF PROMISE (Genesis 18:1–15)



When we welcome other people into our homes, we welcome God Himself.

Everyone who lives with Abraham is circumcised. As we saw yesterday, circumcised means cutting off the skin at the tip of the male sex parts (Genesis 17:23–27). So, Ishmael and “all” (Genesis 17:23, KJV) the servants of Abraham are circumcised. The word written as “all” comes from the Hebrew word “kol.” “Kol” means “all” or “every.” After all the males are circumcised, God appears to Abraham. Then God promises Abraham a son.

Read the story about Abraham and the three visitors in Genesis 18:1–15. What lessons do we learn from this story about being kind to people and serving food to them? How does God bless the kind acts of Abraham? How do we explain this promise from God?

“Later, the LORD again appeared to Abraham near the oak trees of Mamre. It was the hottest part of the day, and Abraham was sitting at the door of his tent” (Genesis 18:1, ERV). Visitors do not often come to the desert. So, Abraham may have wanted to meet these strangers and talk with them. Abraham ran to the men (Genesis 18:2). Remember, Abraham was 99 years old! Abraham names one of these persons Adonai, which means “my Lord” (Genesis 18:3, NIV). This name is often used for God (Genesis 20:4; Exodus 15:17). Then Abraham rushed to get the meal ready for them (Genesis 18:6, 7). Abraham stood next to the visitors. He took care of their needs. He was ready to serve them (Genesis 18:8).

Abraham is an excellent example of how we should welcome people into our homes (Hebrews 13:2). The Bible tells us that welcoming strangers and guests into our homes is our religious duty as Christians. When we welcome other people into our homes, we welcome God Himself (compare with Matthew 25:35–40). God is shown more in the hungry and needy stranger than in the person who feeds him.

In the same way that God came to Abraham, we see Jesus, who left heaven and came to this earth. Jesus became a human servant to save humans (Philippians 2:7, 8). Jesus came to this earth to keep the promise of God to save us. In the same way, God comes to Abraham to keep His promise to Abraham and Sarah that they will have a son. The coming of God to Abraham makes His promise sure (Genesis 18:10).

LOT IN SODOM (Genesis 18:16–Genesis 19:29)

Read the story about Sodom in Genesis 18:16–Genesis 19:29. How responsible does Abraham feel for Lot, who lives in Sodom?

God has just told Abraham again that He will give him a son. What does Abraham do next? Does he celebrate the good news? No. Abraham wants to talk to God about Lot in Sodom. Abraham is a prophet or special messenger. As a prophet, Abraham is someone who goes to God to ask Him to save sinners and evil people. “The men turned away and went toward Sodom. But Abraham remained [stayed where he was] standing in front of the LORD” (Genesis 18:22, NIV). Do you see the words “standing in front of the LORD”? Those words show us that Abraham was praying.

Abraham asks God to save Sodom, where his nephew Lot lives. Abraham asks God to save the lives of the people of the city. God agrees to save the people of Sodom if only ten good Sodomites live in the city.

In the meantime, the two angels go to Sodom to warn Lot (Genesis 19:1–3). What happens next shows us that the city of Sodom is very evil (Genesis 19:4–10).

“Now the final night of Sodom comes. Dark clouds are above the city. These clouds are a sign. They show the anger of God. But the people of Sodom do not understand the sign. The destroying angels come near the city. At the same time, the men in the city dream about pleasure and getting rich. The final day of Sodom is the same as every other day that came before it. Evening comes. The city looks so safe and beautiful in the fading light of the sun. The evening is cool and inviting. Crowds of people come out into the city to seek for pleasure. They care only about the pleasure they can find at that hour.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pages 157, 158, adapted.

In the end, God saves only Lot, his wife, and their two daughters (Genesis 19:15). The sons-in-law of Lot stay in the city (Genesis 19:14). Then the beautiful country is destroyed. The word written as “destroyed” is “**hafakh**” in the Hebrew language. We see this word many times in the story: Genesis 19:21, 25, 29. “**Hafakh**” shows us that Sodom is totally destroyed (Deuteronomy 29:23; Amos 4:11). Nothing is left. So, Sodom is “reversed” in the same way that the Flood “reversed” everything God made (Genesis 6:7). What happens to Sodom is a word picture, too. It shows us what will happen in the end times (Jude 1:6, 7).



“Dark clouds are above the city. These clouds are a sign. They show the anger of God.”

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “The Law and the Covenants,” pages 370–373; in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

Abraham asked God to save the people of Sodom (Genesis 18:22–33). The example of Abraham should encourage us to pray for sinners, even if we feel there is no hope for them to be saved. The answer of God shows us that God is willing to forgive. God will show His mercy, even when only a small number of people can be saved.

“God will forgive the whole city if there is only a small group of people in the city who are loyal to Him.”—Gerhard F. Hasel, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea From Genesis to Isaiah*, 3rd edition (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1980), page 150, adapted.

“All around us people are being ruined. What is happening to them is as awful and hopeless as the evil that happened to Sodom. Every day people die. Their chance to be forgiven is at an end. Every hour some people can no longer be saved by mercy. Where are the people who are warning these lost souls? Where are the hands that are reaching out to pull these lost souls back from death? Who has a heart with no pride? Who has faith that will never give up? Who will ask God to help the person who is lost? The spirit of Abraham was the spirit of Christ Jesus. The Son of God Himself is the One who goes to God to get help for sinners. Jesus paid the price to save us from sin. He knows the worth of every person.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 140, adapted.



“Where are the hands that are reaching out to pull these lost souls back from death?”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Only the rainbow and circumcision are named as signs, or proof, of the agreement. As you will remember, circumcision is the act of cutting the skin off the top of the male sex parts. Compare the agreement of Noah to the agreement with Abraham. How are the two agreements the same? How are they different?
- ② Abraham is an example of what it means to live by faith. At the same time, he made mistakes. What lessons should we learn from his examples?
- ③ Some people argue that God will not punish the lost. These people say that this act goes against the love of God. How do we answer people who believe this false idea?