



Genesis

Abraham: A Man of the Covenant

History of the Early World	Patriarchs	Israel in Egypt	Conquest of Canaan	Judges	United Kingdom	Divided Kingdom Exile	Exile	Return	Maccabean Revolt	Jesus the Messiah	Church
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Introduction

We have seen that waiting for God to act can prompt the kind of impatience that leads to imprudence. So it was in the case of Sarah, who urged Abraham to fulfill God's promise of a son by using Hagar, her maid. This was a solution that would create lasting difficulties, a pain that could have been avoided had Abraham and Sarah submitted their new plan to God for His approval. Nevertheless, God was merciful to Hagar and to the son born to her, Ishmael. When the boy was thirteen, God appeared to Abraham to renew, expand, and formalize the covenant He had made with him and his descendants. He asked Abraham to walk blamelessly before him, as He repeated the magnificent promise to make him the father of a multitude of nations. God changed Abram's and Sarai's names to indicate that He intended to use them as the foundation for the new thing He was doing on earth - creating an entire nation of people who would be His very own.

The sign of the covenant was circumcision. This act, performed in the flesh of Abraham and his household, would demonstrate their unique relationship with Him. Ishmael's circumcision at the age of thirteen would identify him as an Egyptian, not a Jew. Although he was Abraham's firstborn son, he would not be the one through whom the covenant promise was kept. Isaac would be that son, born through Sarah. God assured Abraham that the time for that birth was not far off.

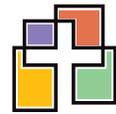
Now that Abraham has formally entered a covenant with God, after twenty-five years of living with Him, will there be any changes in their relationship? What does it mean for a man to be drawn up so dramatically in the life of God? What will characterize his life? In this lesson, we will see Abraham at work as God's covenant keeper. These questions we have about Abraham's new role aren't academic. We know that through our faith and baptism, we have also entered into a covenant with God. Who are we becoming?

Read the following passage all the way through, at least once. Then answer the questions on the text that follow.

Genesis 18



1 And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. 2 He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men stood in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the earth, 3 and said, "My lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. 4 Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, 5 while I fetch a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on--since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." 6 And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes." 7 And Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. 8 Then he took curds, and milk, and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate. 9 They said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "She is in the tent." 10 The LORD said, "I will surely return to you in the spring, and Sarah your wife shall have a son." And



Genesis 18 (cont.)

Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. 11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. 12 So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?" 13 The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' 14 Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, in the spring, and Sarah shall have a son." 15 But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. He said, "No, but you did laugh." 16 Then the men set out from there, and they looked toward Sodom; and Abraham went with them to set them on their way. 17 The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, 18 seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by him? 19 No, for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him." 20 Then the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, 21 I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me; and if not, I will know." 22 So the men turned from there, and went toward Sodom; but Abraham still stood before the LORD. 23 Then Abraham drew near, and said, "Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked? 24 Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? 25 Far be it from thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" 26 And the LORD said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake." 27 Abraham answered, "Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. 28 Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking? Wilt thou destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And he said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." 29 Again he spoke to him, and said, "Suppose forty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it." 30 Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there." He answered, "I will not do it, if I find thirty there." 31 He said, "Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it." 32 Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it." 33 And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.

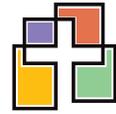


Questions on the Text

Three Visitors

Read Genesis 18:1-15

[Note: "This new appearance of God to Abraham is somewhat mysterious: the three men stand for God. When Abraham speaks to them, sometimes he addresses them in the singular (as if there were only one person there: cf. vs. 3), and sometimes in the plural (as if there were three: cf. v. 4). That is why some Fathers interpreted this appearance as an early announcement of the mystery of the Holy Trinity; others, following Jewish tradition (cf. Heb. 13:2) take these personages to be angels. The sacred text says that one of the three men (Yahweh, apparently) stays with Abraham (cf. v. 22), while the other two, who are referred to as angels, go to Sodom (cf. 19:1)." (Navarre Bible: Pentateuch; Princeton, NJ: Scepter Publishers, 1999; p. 103-104)]



Questions on the Text (cont.)

Three Visitors (cont.)

1. How does Abraham respond to the presence of the three visitors? See Matt. 25:35; Heb. 13:2; Acts 16:14-15; 27-34. What example does he set for covenant-keeping people?

[Although Abraham possibly did not know at first who these visitors were, when One renews the promise God had made to him for the birth of a son within a year, he would have understood that this was a divine visit.]

2. What prompted Sarah to laugh at the idea of having a son within a year? Was this laugh like Abraham's laugh in Gen. 17:17?

Abraham Prays for Deliverance

Read Genesis 18:16-33

3. Why does the Lord decide to confide His plan to judge Sodom to Abraham (vss. 17-19)?

4. What is it that God intends to do by visiting Sodom and Gomorrah? What has provoked it (vss. 20-21)?

5. What concern does Abraham have when he hears this plan? Why?

6. Abraham doesn't want the righteous to suffer the same fate as the wicked, but he asks God to allow the presence of fifty righteous to spare the wicked ("Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it?"). Is that justice?

7. Why do you suppose Abraham keeps working the numbers down? What is Abraham's demeanor throughout this exchange?

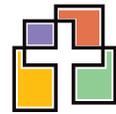
8. If we are looking at Abraham's life for examples of what covenant-keeping people can expect in their lives with God, what can we conclude from this chapter?

Read the following passage all the way through, at least once. Then answer the questions on the text that follow.

Genesis 19

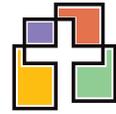


1 The two angels came to Sodom in the evening; and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and bowed himself with his face to the earth, 2 and said, "My lords, turn aside, I pray you, to your servant's house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise up early and go on your way." They said, "No; we will spend the night in the street." 3 But he urged them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. 4 But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; 5 and they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them." 6 Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, 7 and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. 8 Behold, I have two daughters who have not known man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof." 9 But they said, "Stand back!" And they said, "This fellow came to



Genesis 19 (cont.)

sojourn, and he would play the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door. 10 But the men put forth their hands and brought Lot into the house to them, and shut the door. 11 And they struck with blindness the men who were at the door of the house, both small and great, so that they wearied themselves groping for the door. 12 Then the men said to Lot, "Have you any one else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or any one you have in the city, bring them out of the place; 13 for we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it." 14 So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, "Up, get out of this place; for the LORD is about to destroy the city." But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting. 15 When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city." 16 But he lingered; so the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him forth and set him outside the city. 17 And when they had brought them forth, they said, "Flee for your life; do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley; flee to the hills, lest you be consumed." 18 And Lot said to them, "Oh, no, my lords; 19 behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life; but I cannot flee to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me, and I die. 20 Behold, yonder city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one. Let me escape there--is it not a little one?--and my life will be saved!" 21 He said to him, "Behold, I grant you this favor also, that I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken. 22 Make haste, escape there; for I can do nothing till you arrive there." Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar. 23 The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar. 24 Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; 25 and he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. 26 But Lot's wife behind him looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. 27 And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD; 28 and he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the valley, and beheld, and lo, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace. 29 So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt. 30 Now Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to dwell in Zoar; so he dwelt in a cave with his two daughters. 31 And the first-born said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the earth. 32 Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve offspring through our father." 33 So they made their father drink wine that night; and the first-born went in, and lay with her father; he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. 34 And on the next day, the first-born said to the younger, "Behold, I lay last night with my father; let us make him drink wine tonight also; then you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve offspring through our father." 35 So they made their father drink wine that night also; and the younger arose, and lay with him; and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. 36 Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. 37 The first-born bore a son, and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites to this day. 38 The younger also bore a son, and called his name Ben-ammi; he is the father of the Ammonites to this day.



Questions on the Text

Angels Visit Lot

Read Genesis 19:1-14

[Note: "The 'street' was an open space within the city, and if a traveler were unsuccessful in finding hospitality, it would be quite the customary thing for him to settle down for the night within the protection of the city walls, but in the open air of this broad square." (The New Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1960; p. 92)]

9. Although Lot probably doesn't know the identity of the visitors right away, what does his response to them suggest about the kind of man he was?

[Note: The sin of the men of Sodom was homosexuality ("know" is the word Scripture uses for sexual intercourse); in fact, we use the term derived from the name of this city to refer to the sex act of homosexuals, which is "sodomy." Cultures given over to homosexuality are ones that are far advanced in rebellion against God and in rejection of His will for men (see Rom. 1:26-27).]

10. What resistance does Lot give the men at his door? Why do you think he makes the offer he does?

11. What reaction do the men at the door have to Lot's offer? What does this reveal about them?

12. When Lot warns his sons-in-law about the impending judgment in the city, they think he's joking. What does this suggest to you about them?

Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed

Read Genesis 19:15-38

13. As you read through this account of the destruction of Sodom and the deliverance of Lot, what is your opinion of Lot? Remember the account of the day Lot chose to live in the valley that included Sodom (see Gen. 13:10-13). Did we see anything there that might have prepared us for what we see in this chapter?

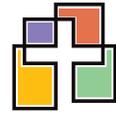


Questions for Reflection

One of the best ways to meditate on God's Word is to take it deeply into your life through memorization. The suggested memory verse is always highlighted in the text in the lesson (see Genesis 19). Or you may choose one of your own. For further reflection, consider these questions:

1. Read carefully through your answer to question 8. Think about your life as a covenant-keeper. Can the example of Abraham in this lesson strengthen you in your calling? Be specific (i.e., Hospitality to strangers? Growth in your knowledge of God? Prayer for those who need it?) and determine to give yourself fully to it.

2. Lot appears to be a man who allowed fear to control his life. That put him dangerously close to destruction. Does fear have a foothold anywhere in you? What can you do to master it?



Opportunities for Additional Study

Points to Ponder

Our first exposure to Abraham after his circumcision, when he formally accepted God's covenant with him, is impressive. It is clear that God intends to work with him because he has been called to such an important role - teacher, example, and source of blessing to the whole earth. It is worth taking note of something that might slip by us as we are absorbed in the dramatic story of Abraham's prayer and Lot's deliverance. There is something exquisitely beautiful going on here. And it's only the beginning.

Remember that in Eden, the serpent had a conversation with Eve in which he attacked the character of God. The serpent accused God of being untrustworthy, bad instead of good, and not really caring about the humans. Adam did not defend God's character. There was only silence from him.

In Genesis 18, God initiates a conversation with Abraham which gives the appearance that He is not just. What happens? Abraham vigorously and boldly defends God's character. How? He passionately engages with God to request that He act in keeping with Who He is - the just Creator and Judge of all the earth. What a reversal!

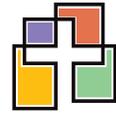
Beginning with Abraham, God will use covenant-keepers to declare the goodness of His character. It will be human voices that cry out in testimony to the greatness of God and His love for His people. Because of God's covenant with men, never again will there be silence in the face of accusations against His character. After Abraham, it will be Moses, David, and the prophets who extol the majestic perfection of God. In the Incarnation, God Himself will take on human flesh to reveal His trustworthiness, goodness, and love. That testimony lives on in the Church, the Body of Christ. Someday all creation, with one voice, will proclaim it: "Great and wonderful are Thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are Thy ways, O King of the ages! Who shall not fear and glorify Thy name, O Lord? For thou alone art holy. All nations shall come and worship Thee, for Thy judgments have been revealed." (Rev. 15:3-4)

Catechism Connection

Excerpted from the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

On the blessing of the earth through Abraham – "Against all human hope, God promises descendants to Abraham, as the fruit of faith and of the power of the Holy Spirit. In Abraham's progeny all the nations of the earth will be blessed. This progeny will be Christ himself, in whom the outpouring of the Holy Spirit will 'gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.' God commits himself by his own solemn oath to giving his beloved Son and 'the promised Holy Spirit...[who is] the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.'" (706)

On Sarah as a type of Mary – "Throughout the Old Covenant the mission of many holy women prepared for that of Mary...By virtue of this promise [of Gen. 3:15], Sarah conceives a son in spite of her old age. Against all human expectation God chooses those who were considered powerless and weak to show forth his faithfulness to his promises." (489)



Opportunities for Additional Study (cont.)

Catechism Connection (cont.)

On the sin of homosexuality – "Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. It has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures. Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that 'homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered.' They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved....Every sign of unjust discrimination in their [homosexuals] regard must be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition. Homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection." (2357-2359)



Summary

In this lesson, we observed that:

1. God visited Abraham mysteriously after the covenant had been formalized. He announced that Sarah would soon give birth to a son. She greeted the news with laughter, just as Abraham had done. Sarah, like him, found the news too good to be true. The Lord assured them that nothing would be impossible for Him. Sarah was rebuked for denying that she laughed.
2. God decided to reveal to Abraham His plan to visit Sodom. He intended to draw him into a deeper knowledge of Himself, making him a co-worker. In his role as "chosen," he would be a source of knowledge of "the way of the Lord," a way of righteousness and justice. This he would do by teaching, by example, and by mediation.
3. God announced His plan to visit Sodom and test it. Abraham seemed to know that He would find great wickedness there, worthy of destruction. He boldly stepped in to suggest that to destroy the righteous along with the wicked would give the appearance of injustice and was not in keeping with His character as the just Judge of all. God accepted his proposal to let the righteous spare the wicked, even if only ten were found.
4. In fact, not even ten righteous people could be found in Sodom. Lot, his wife, and his daughters escaped the destruction, but barely. Lot's wife did not fully realize her deliverance; she looked back at the city and was turned to salt. Lot, who never had learned to master fear in his life, allowed it to drive him into a separated and sad existence. In this deliverance, God proved His justice and His mercy. He had been willing to spare the whole city for ten righteous souls. When He didn't find them, He didn't condemn the righteous to destruction along with the wicked. Because of the prayer of Abraham, which loosed God's mercy, Lot was saved.
5. Abraham showed himself to be a covenant-keeper. Drawn up into the life of God, he showed hospitality to strangers, trust in God's character, and boldness tempered by humility in interceding for Lot. God seems to have found a true friend in him.

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