

Review: *From your experience at the Cornerstone meeting last week, share something that helped build your faith.*

NOTE: Chapter 13 is the story of Abraham and Lot going their separate ways and Abraham resolves a family dispute by an act that shows both trust in God and generosity toward his nephew. In chapter 14 Abraham plays a role with other world leaders in defeating a coalition of kings from the east to rescue his nephew and is recognized by a Canaanite king as blessed by God Most High.
NABRE

DAY ONE

Read Genesis 15:1-6

1. Chapter 15 begins after the faithful and obedient Abram returned from rescuing his nephew, Lot, refusing to accept any of the gains of war (see [Genesis 14:23-24](#)). The word of the LORD came in a vision to renew his promise and remind Abram of his protection. Record what the LORD told Abram (verse 1).

THINK: Pray about one person or circumstance in your life that needs the protection of the "shield" of God.

2. Despite this reassurance, Abram lamented that because he remained childless his only option for an heir was his slave. The LORD reassured him that "no one but your very own issue shall be your heir" (verses 2-4). After what the LORD had done for Abram, why do you think he would question the LORD's promises?

NOTE: A childless couple adopting a legal heir is a Near Eastern practice known from the Nuzi tablets of the 15th century B.C. and from an Old Babylonian text. *Ignatius Study Bible*

3. For the first time, Abram was promised an heir of his own issue. Consider what effects, both emotionally and materially, this might have had on Abram.

4. Abram's vision continued and the LORD brought Abram outside to show him the night sky. Record the beautiful promise he made in verse 5.

5. Abram believed in the LORD who found this to be an act of "righteousness" (verse 6). Read one of the following Scripture passages and record how Abram has been described as the model of a person of faith.

1 Maccabees 2:52

Romans 4:20-22

James 2:23

NOTE: Later generations of believers exalted Abraham as a paradigm of faith. They saw his future, their future, in this poignant moment when God showed this anxious old man the peaceful, majestic canopy of stars and Abram broke through to a new grace of faith. We should also consider the impression made on God by Abram's faith that perhaps means that from now on he will have more confidence in the father of the people he has begun to fashion. *Miller*

6. CONNECTION: As Abram and the LORD stood together looking toward heaven, God told him that his descendants would be more numerous than the stars. This eloquent, visual picture expanded Abram's understanding and he believed. The Creator also stands at the side of each of us who may be confused, impatient or frustrated with some of the challenges of our faith and world. Share an experience when you understood a difficult concept through the grace of God.

Read and record Psalm 119:27. Today, write a prayer asking God for the wisdom and grace you need to be open to greater understanding.

DAY TWO
Read Genesis 15:7-14

7. The LORD reaffirmed his promises by making a very distinct statement. According to verse 7, who did he say he was and why did he bring Abram from Ur?

8. Despite his previous affirmations of faith, Abram did not appear to comprehend completely what the LORD was saying and asked, "how am I to know that I shall possess it?" (verse 8)

Frequently we read that Abram doubts and questions the LORD. What message does this hold for you?

9a. God tried to reassure Abram of his oath by instructing him to prepare a covenant ritual. Describe the steps of this ritual from verses 9-10.

NOTE: Cutting up animals was a well attested way of making a treaty in antiquity. Jer 34:17-20 shows the rite is a form of self-imprecation in which violators invoke the fate of the animals upon themselves. *NABRE*

b. See the Commentary, page 37, and explain in a few words why it was necessary for the LORD to enact an elaborate covenant ritual with Abram.

NOTE: The precise significance of the swooping birds of prey (verse 11) is not known; it can be understood as a way of expressing Abram's willingness to abide by the agreement even when danger threatens. Likewise, the liminal light of sunset highlights the unknown dimension of Abram's agreement with the Lord. *Collegeville*

10. As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram and a terrifying darkness descended upon him. The LORD told Abram in his dream that his offspring would be slaves in a foreign land for four hundred years (verses 12-13). What will happen to these future children of the promise (verse 14)?

NOTE: This is the first announcement of the Exodus in the Pentateuch. The effect is to show Abram that the promised land and nationhood will not materialize in his own lifetime, but are the hope of a future generation. *Ignatius Study Bible*

11. How do you think Abram reacted when he heard that the promise of land and nationhood would not happen in his lifetime but was only the promise for future generations?

12. CONNECTION: In today's lesson the LORD initiated a covenant ritual with Abram so that he understood the seriousness of his promises. We too are in a covenant relationship with God. Believing in God's promises and stepping into the future with hope and trust is the mark of a faithful Christian. Select a promise of God from the Scripture verses listed or one that is written on your heart and share with your group how it has led you to greater trust in the Lord.

Psalm 103:11-12

Isaiah 40:29-31

Matthew 11:28-29

John 14:27

Prayerfully reread the verse you selected to begin your prayer today. Ask for courage to rely on the promises of God even when you cannot see the way ahead.

DAY THREE

Read Genesis 15:15-21

13. As today's lesson begins, the LORD continued to speak to Abram in his dream. What did God have in mind for the end of Abram's life according to verse 15? (Good memory verse)

14. In verse 16 the Lord told Abram that his descendants would return to the land that he has promised in the fourth generation. Refer to one the following scripture passages and summarize what you learn about the reason for this delayed promise.

Deuteronomy 9:5

2 Maccabees 6:14

15. Abram was still in the deep sleep the LORD had placed him in. According to verse 17, what time of day was it and what happened next?

NOTE: Up to this point, Abram has received only promises of land. Now, God lays his uncertainties to rest by strengthening his promise with a covenant oath (15:18). The covenant ceremony included dividing animal carcasses and walking between the pieces as a ritual enactment of the threat of a curse that a covenant partner invokes upon himself when he swears an oath to ratify the agreement. Here it is God, appearing as smoke and fire, who puts himself under the threat of a curse as he moves through the slaughtered beasts and swears to grant land to the family of Abram. *Ignatius Study Bible*

16. God made the terms of the covenant specific by saying, "To your descendants I give this land." Consider the vastness of the land that was promised in verses 18-21 from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates. What do you think about the fact that the Promised Land will have to be taken from the ten nations listed in this verse who lived there?

17. A covenant is one of the ways God relates to his people and defines his relationship with them. Compare this covenant to the one made with Noah in Genesis 9:11 as discussed in the Commentary, pages 28-30. What does the fact that God makes covenants with humanity tell you about him?

18. CONNECTION: In today's lesson, the LORD generously rewarded Abram with the promise that he would "go to your ancestors in peace" in "good old age." What beautiful words of assurance with which to face the future! If you heard these words today, how would you live the rest of your life? Would you make any changes? Share some thoughts with your group.

Read Hebrews 11:8. Write a prayer today asking God to help you learn to trust in his plan for your future like the faithful heart of your ancestor, Abraham.

DAY FOUR

Read Genesis 16:1-4

19. We have learned that God renewed his covenant with Abram and also promised that he would have a son of his own issue. As we begin today's study, what do you learn about Sarai in verse 1?

20a. According to verse 2, Sarai spoke to Abram. Whom did she blame for her situation and how did she plan to remedy her problem?

NOTE: [The custom of an infertile wife providing her husband with a concubine to produce children] is in keeping with ancient Near Eastern customs. While we today find this a disconcerting arrangement, it illustrates the importance of children in the ancient world. Large families with many hands to do the work were a necessity for subsistence. In addition, it was a point of honor for a man to father a large family who would carry on his name. *Collegeville*

b. After reading verse 2, how would you describe Sarai's state of mind concerning God's promise of a child to Abram?

21. According to verse 3, Abram and Sarai had lived in Canaan and waited for the fulfillment of God's promised heir for ten years. Describe how Sarai took matters into her own hands.

22. According to the beginning of verse 4, Abram cooperated with Sarai's plan and Hagar conceived a child. Refer to Genesis 15:4-5 and comment on what might have led Abram to believe that Hagar was to be the mother of his promised offspring.

23. It seemed at first that Sarai's plan was successful, but when Hagar conceived a child, there were unexpected consequences (last part of verse 4). How would you describe the relationship that developed between Sarai and Hagar?

24. CONNECTION: In today's lesson we read how Sarai grew impatient after waiting ten years for God to give her a son and decided to act on her own. Many of us also find that waiting for the answer to our prayers can be frustrating. Often, we are tempted to take matters into our own hands. What can we do to build our trust in the Lord during the painful experience of waiting for answers? Share some thoughts.

The Psalmist prays in Psalms 130:5, "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope." Let this verse lead you into prayer today.

DAY FIVE

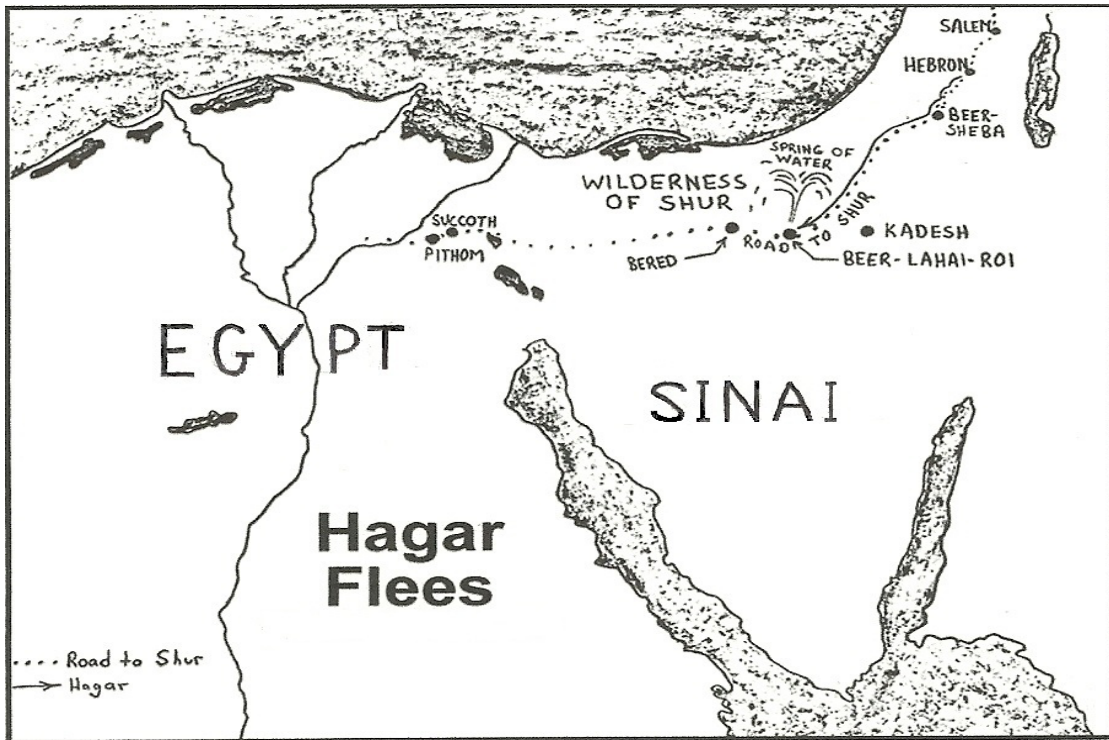
Read Genesis 16:5-9

25. Yesterday we learned about Sarai's plot to have Abram father a child, and in today's lesson she turns her attention to Abram for the wrong she has suffered from Hagar's treatment (verse 5). Logically it was wrong for Sarai to place all the blame on Abram since she devised the plan, but how might you hold him responsible?

26. In response to Sarai's outrage, Abram told Sarai that Hagar was her slave to deal with as she pleased (first sentence of verse 6). Although Abram was following a traditional practice of ancient times, he abdicated any responsibility for the problem that existed between Sarai and Hagar. What might he have done instead?

27. Sarai dealt harshly with Hagar who fled into the wilderness (end of verse 6). According to verse 7, the angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness. Once again divine intervention saves the day. Refer back to Genesis 12:17-20 and compare these two occurrences.

NOTE: The way to Shur was a desert route leading from Canaan to Egypt. It is implied that Hagar is fleeing back to her homeland. *Ignatius Study Bible*



28. Summarize the interchange between the angel of the LORD and Hagar in verses 8-9.

29. Our Commentary author offers a few theories about the purpose that the story of Hagar and Ishmael serves in the biblical narrative on page 39. Summarize one of those ideas.

30. CONNECTION: In today's lesson, the angel of the LORD found Hagar in the desert as she was running away. The angel encouraged her to return and face her problems. Running away rarely solves our troubles. Instead, with God's help, we should seek reconciliation with others. Though it is difficult after injury and hurt, how does the gift of forgiveness offer hope and growth in relationships? Can you share an example from your life experience?

Write a prayer today asking God to help you on your personal journey for reconciliation in a troubling relationship

DAY SIX

Read Genesis 16:10-16

31. The angel of the LORD continued speaking with Hagar. What was she told in verse 10 if she returned and submitted?

NOTE: There are numerous times in the patriarchal stories when individuals were promised descendants. Abram received six such promises and Isaac and Jacob each received one. Hagar was the only matriarch to be given such a promise. Numerous descendants will spring from Hagar through Ishmael (Genesis 17:20). Her descendants would be included in Abram's descendants, thus making her an honored woman.

32. The angel of the LORD told Hagar she would bear a son and to name him Ishmael which in Hebrew means, *God has heard*, because the LORD had given heed to her affliction (verse 11). Complete the phrases of verse 12 below in which the angel described the man Ishmael was to become.

He shall be a

with his hand against everyone

and he shall live

33. According to verses 13-14, Hagar spoke to the LORD at the well she named after him. Why do you think she said she was surprised to remain alive after seeing God?

34. The messenger who found Hagar was identified as the angel of the LORD (verse 7). Listed below are a few key features of this visitation that indicate we may not be hearing from an "angel" but from God himself. Record the words from Genesis 16:7-14 that illustrate one of the following examples of this.

He promised to perform what God alone could do.

He revealed knowledge that only God would know.

The angel allowed Hagar to refer to him as God.

35. Hagar returned to the household of Abram, who was by then eighty-six years old, and bore his son whom he named Ishmael (verses 15-16). What benefits would Hagar possibly realize by going back to Abram and Sarai?

36. CONNECTION: It is easy to see Hagar as an innocent victim of Sarai's jealousy and Abram's irresponsibility. Her flight into the wilderness was impulsive and jeopardized her life and the life of her child. In the desert, alone and friendless, she sees God and God sees her. This story teaches us that God sees and loves all his children even when they have wandered away and are acting in unlovable ways. Share your thoughts from this story about your loved ones who've strayed far from a God who loves them in spite of the choices they've made.

Read Psalm 139:7-12 and record one verse that applies in your life. Pray today that the Lord will find all those who are running from him and offer them the comfort they need.

Read pages 36-40 in *The Book of Genesis* by Lawrence DiPaolo, Jr., Ph.D. The Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study acknowledges that scripture quotations in this study are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, Catholic Edition. Copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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