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

DAY ONE

Read Genesis 17:1-8

NOTE: The Priestly source gathers the major motifs of the story so far and sets them firmly within covenant context; the word "covenant" occurs thirteen times. *NABRE*

1a. As we begin a new chapter, thirteen years have passed since the birth of Ishmael. When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and identified himself as God Almighty. Record his demands from verses 1-2.

walk before me

And I will make my covenant

and will make you

b. The exhortation by God to “walk before me and be blameless” was extended by Jesus to all when he said in Matthew 5:48, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Briefly explain how you think it is possible to live a life that is *blameless* or *perfect*.

2. Awed by God’s appearance and out of respect, Abram “fell on his face.” Though it had been almost 25 years since the covenant was first made (Genesis 12:1-3), God reminded him that he had not forgotten the terms of the covenant by which Abram would become the ancestor of a multitude of nations (verses 3-4). What did God tell Abram and for what reason in verse 5?

NOTE: A royal dynasty will stem from Abraham and Sarah through the genealogical line of their great grandson, Judah (49:8-10). This promise is first realized with the founding of the Israelite monarchy under King David (from Judah's son Perez, Ruth 4:18-22) and comes to its fulfillment in Jesus the Messiah (from David's royal son, Solomon, Mt 1:1-18). *Ignatius Study Bible*

3. What does the Commentary suggest on pages 41-42 about the meaning behind the name change in verse 5?

NOTE: Abram and Abraham are merely two forms of the same name, both meaning, “the father is exalted.” *NABRE*

4. The LORD repeated the covenant blessings to Abraham (verses 6-7). A new element was introduced by the Priestly author suggesting that the covenant was not made solely with Abraham but included his future descendants. What does it mean to you that the covenant established with Abraham would be everlasting?

5. God repeated the promise of the land in verse 8 reminding Abraham that it, too, was an everlasting possession. How did the final phrase of verse 8 suggest that God intended to develop his relationship with his covenant people?

6. CONNECTION: In today’s lesson God repeats his covenant promises to Abraham and, in doing so, changes his name. Names are intimately connected with our sense of identity. For example, our name is the first piece of information we offer when we meet other people because it tells them something about who we are. What does your name mean to you? Do you know why you were given your name? Would you change it if you could and why? Share some thoughts.

In Psalm 91:14 we read that the LORD will protect those who know his name. Let this thought lead you into prayer.

DAY TWO
Read Genesis 17:9-17

NOTE: The covenant in verses 2 and 4 is basically a promise given by God and does not imply any obligations on Abram's part, much like the covenant of 15:18. The Priestly version of the covenant with Abraham in verses 9-14 is a mutual agreement with duties expected of Abraham and his descendants. *Miller*

7. In today's lesson, God spoke with Abraham a second time. He commanded that Abraham and his offspring keep his covenant throughout the generations and perform the ritual act of circumcision as a sign of the covenant (verses 9-11). What might the performance of the ritual of circumcision have meant or symbolized to the people of the covenant?

NOTE: Circumcision was widely practiced in the ancient world, usually as an initiation rite for males at puberty. By shifting the time of circumcision to the eighth day after birth, biblical religion made it no longer a "rite of passage" but a sign of the eternal covenant between God and the community descending from Abraham. *NABRE*

8. Summarize the covenant requirements described in verses 12-13 including verse 14 for those who have broken the covenant.

NOTE: The male descendants of Abraham, including Jesus, entered the old covenant under the sign of physical circumcision. Read Colossians 2:11-12 for what St. Paul tells us is the sign of the New Covenant.

9. After the discussion of the sign of the covenant was completed, God turned his attention to Sarai. In a third conversation with Abraham, what did God say about her in verses 15-16?

As for Sarai your wife

I will bless her

I will bless her

10. Just as Abraham's name was changed, so too was Sarah's. (Sarah means "Princess.") What did the changing of her name suggest about her life?

11. Abraham's response was spontaneous and human. He "fell on his face and laughed." How would you answer his questions from verse 17?

12. CONNECTION: Today we read that in response to God's extraordinary revelation that Sarah would have a son and be the mother of kings, Abraham laughed! The promise was so incredible and outrageous that he could only laugh. The birth of his son would truly be an act of God's pure grace. God moves with incredible and outrageous grace and compassion in all our lives—maybe we have even laughed in amazement at his goodness! Do you think laughter is a healthy way to express our doubt, faith or love for God? Can you share a story of God working through humor in your life?

Read Psalm 30:11-12. Begin your prayer today reminded that in time God can turn our pain and loss into laughter.

DAY THREE

Read Genesis 17:18-27

13. As we begin today, Abraham pleaded with God in verse 18, "O that Ishmael might live in your sight!" What do you think Abraham was asking God with this prayer?

NOTE: The Lord's choice of heir for Abraham reflected what has been called "the doctrine of divine election" which describes God's actions in selecting whomever he chooses without reason or explanation. Refer to Genesis 4:4-5.

14. In his reply to Abraham, the LORD first attempted to convince him that Ishmael was not the promised heir but was sensitive to Abraham's concern for his firstborn son. Summarize what was said about the sons of Abraham in verses 19-20 below.

Isaac

Ishmael

15. God repeated that he would establish his covenant with Isaac, and that Sarah would bear the child in the same season the following year. Then he finished talking and went up from Abraham (verses 21-22). Summarize what Abraham did *that very day* as God commanded (verse 23).

16. Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised (verse 24). His compliance with the terms of the covenant destined him to be the spiritual father of all who imitate his faith. From the Commentary on pages 42-43, record a note on the importance of Abraham as our father in faith as recorded in the writings of St. Paul.

17. Ishmael was 13 when he was circumcised with Abraham on "that very day" that the Lord commanded as were the men of his house including his slaves (verses 25-27). There was repetition concerning the timing and requirements of the rite of circumcision in this chapter. Why do you think the details are important?

NOTE: The nations that descended from Ishmael continued to circumcise their children at the age of 13 as a puberty rite of passage. Even though his descendants moved away and evolved into other cultures they maintained this fundamental and enduring relationship with God through Abraham.

18. CONNECTION: God told Abraham that, although his nation would grow through Isaac, he would not overlook Abraham's love for his son, Ishmael, whom he also blessed. God chose one son over the other to fulfill the blessings of the covenant because of his love and his grace. Any other reason is beyond our comprehension. In our lives, we may have struggled at times while it seemed that others lived with bountiful blessings. How does the story of Ishmael and Isaac help you to understand the discrepancies you see in life?

Read Romans 11:33. Write a prayer today asking God for wisdom to accept something you cannot understand.

DAY FOUR

Read Genesis 18:1-8

NOTE: [A problem encountered in this narrative is the ambiguity of the identity of the three strangers.] The three men are identified in the context as Yahweh and two of his angels. Following the encounter, the two angels are sent off to instruct Sodom while Abraham is left to haggle with the Lord over the fate of the city. *Ignatius Study Bible*

19. Today we begin chapter 18, "one of the most popular passages in the story of the patriarchs." (*Navarre*) What do you consider unusual about Abraham's actions in verses 1-2 given his age, the time of day and the arrival of strangers?

20. Abraham addressed one of his guests as "my lord" and then extended to the three men the customary practices of Arab hospitality (verse 3). What did Abraham offer to do for his visitors and how did they reply (verses 4-5)?

21a. Holy Scripture emphasizes that we are called to meet the needs of strangers. Look up one of the following verses and briefly note how it addresses this thought.

Exodus 23:9

Isaiah 58:7

Matthew 25:35

b. How does this ancient tradition of hospitality towards the stranger compare to how we treat strangers at our doors today?

22. After Abraham's visitors accepted his invitation to stay and eat with him, he rushed into the tent to begin to prepare the meal. Discuss something you find interesting about the preparations made by Abraham to feed his guests from verses 6-7.

NOTE: Abraham's concern for the comfort of the visitors is a typical depiction of Middle Eastern courtesy: washing away the dust of the journey, providing hastily baked cakes of what was probably unleavened bread loaves, milk in two forms and roasted meat. A *seah* [Hebrew word for *measure*] was a measurement equivalent to two gallons or eight liters of grain - 3 *seah* was 6 gallons/24 liters of flour for bread; it is a super abundant amount of bread for just three visitors, suggesting that this is not an ordinary visit. *Agape*

23. According to verse 8, Abraham added curds and milk to the menu and set the meal before them. Note all that Abraham did after the food preparation was completed.

24. **CONNECTION:** After Abraham invited the travelers for a meal and to rest, he hurried to provide for their needs and served food of the highest quality. Hospitality was important in the culture of his day. Providing others food, drink and fellowship meets the same needs in our lives today. Is hospitality a part of your Christian lifestyle? How can hospitality be more fully utilized in the faith community to spread the love of the LORD? Share some thoughts with your group.

Read and record [Hebrews 13:2](#) and let those words lead you into prayer today.

DAY FIVE

Read Genesis 18:9-15

25. We read today that after the meal, the men got to the point of their visit and inquired about Abraham's wife, Sarah (verse 9). The question was surprising because in the Arab culture women were usually overlooked. How did it introduce the long awaited promise to Abraham (first sentence of verse 10)?

26. In the second sentence of verse 10, we learn that Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent behind the men. She laughed when she heard these words. In your own words, explain why you think she reacted this way (verses 11-12).

THINK: In verse 13 we are reminded that nothing is unknown to God. He knows our innermost thoughts and feelings. Meditate on 1 John 3:20, "for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything."

27. The first sentence of verse 14 is one of the most beautiful in Scripture. Record these words and commit them to memory to recall anytime you are tempted to doubt God's power to work miracles in your life. (Good memory verse)

28. The LORD elaborated on his promise saying at the end of verse 14, "At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son." This story was echoed in the encounter that took place between Mary and the Angel Gabriel. Refer to Luke 1:26-38 and comment on one similarity between these two miraculous births.

29. In verse 15 we learn that instead of focusing on the reassuring words Sarah overheard, she was unnerved by the visitor's knowledge of her thoughts and denied that she laughed. Why did she lie and how did the angel respond according to the end of this verse?

30. CONNECTION: "Is anything too wonderful for the LORD?" In this passage the Lord reassures Sarah of his miraculous power. He also addresses this question to each of us. How does asking this question remind you of your relationship with God and the power of prayer in your life? Can you share a story of witnessing the answer to a prayer that was thought to be impossible?

As you begin your prayer today, take a moment to recognize your greatest challenge that is out of your reach today and ask God to take control of it. As you pray, be confident that nothing is too wonderful for the LORD.

DAY SIX

Read Genesis 18:16-33

NOTE: What is incredible about this interchange is not only that Abraham can bargain with the Lord, but that Abraham has framed the discussion from the perspective of justice - a divine justice that holds for both man and God. We are given many laws in the Book of Genesis and many more in the books that follow. But the law that emerges from this conversation over Sodom and Gomorrah is, in my opinion, one of the most important in the entirety of Sacred Scripture - namely, that the innocent are to be protected. *Commentary*

31. As we begin today, the two men have left for Sodom but the LORD remained behind with Abraham. The LORD spoke aloud his thoughts wondering if he should hide his future actions from Abraham who was to become a great nation in whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed (verses 16-18). Complete the words of verse 19 below that reveal his decision.

No, for I have chosen him

to keep the way of the LORD

so that the LORD may bring about for Abraham

32. What are some reasons why Abraham should know about God's plans? You can refer to the Commentary, page 43, [Amos 3:7](#), or suggest your own answer.

33. This author often depicts God in humanlike terms. In verses 20-21, the LORD told Abraham that he "must go down" to Sodom and Gomorrah to confirm reports of their wickedness. What does that act teach us about God?

34. In verse 22 the author repeated that two of the visitors departed for Sodom while Abraham remained standing before the LORD. Abraham then "came near" to the LORD to begin a conversation with him. What concern did Abraham express to the LORD (verse 23)?

35. Abraham began to intercede boldly for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Read verses 24-33 and answer one or two of the following questions relating to those verses.

How many times did Abraham bargain with God to reduce the number of righteous men who, if found, would prevent the destruction of the cities?

How did he refer to God in this argument?

What did Abraham call himself?

What was the final result?

36. **CONNECTION:** Today's passage is a wonderful example of intercessory prayer. By coming near the LORD, Abraham exhibited a loving spirit that cared for others. God not only listened to Abraham but also was willing to consider his requests. This shows us that God desires his people to come to him with their concerns for the welfare of others. In his pleading and prayer, we also see that Abraham was specific and persistent. What are some other ways we can make our intercessory prayer more effective?

Write an intercessory prayer today for someone who needs God's mercy and power.

OPTIONAL READING: Although we will not study chapter 19, the following summary completes the story of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Verses 1-11: The two angels arrive in Sodom greeted by Lot. They discover that the sinfulness of the people was indeed as great as feared.

Verses 12-23: The angels urge Lot to escape from the city or be destroyed with it. He delays so they seize him, his wife and two daughters by the hand and bring them out of the city warning them to flee to the city of Zoar and not look back. His two sons-in-law do not believe in the impending destruction and do not accompany them.

Verses 24-26: Then the LORD rained sulfur and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah from heaven. But Lot's wife, behind him, looked back and became a pillar of salt.

Verse 29: The author finished the story, "when God destroyed the cities of the Plain, God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow..." The intercession by the Patriarch on behalf of the city saved Abraham's nephew and his family and thus Abraham displayed that he was a blessing for his descendants.

After completing this lesson, read pages 41-45 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: 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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