

**...Now I Know**

**Faith, Faithfulness, and Learning to Righteously Fear and Trust the Lord (Genesis 12:1 - 22:1-19)**

**Genesis 12:1-3**

**Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.**

**Genesis 22:1-12**

**After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” 2 He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” 3 So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. 4 On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. 5 Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.” 6 And Abraham took the wood**

of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. 7 And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" 8 Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together. 9 When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. 11 But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 12 He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

## **Introduction**

The teaching "Now I Know" is from the story and study of Abraham, the man that the Bible calls "the father of faith." We are going to consider the defining moments of Abraham's faith in God and gather wisdom and understanding of our defining moments of faith and how they can grow in strength and effectiveness. We will answer the questions surrounding

Abraham's faithfulness to God in those defining moments and how he learned to righteously fear and unquestionably trust God - culminating in the final test of his faith in what the historic Hebraic tradition calls the "The Aqedah, or The Binding."

We are going to find both the historical and Biblical context for Abraham's tests of faith, as well as discover present-day applications from the timeline of Abraham's life and sojourning as it is chronicled by the Book of Genesis, chapters twelve through twenty-two. In the historical and Biblical context of these passages, we will pursue further understanding and revelation as to why Abraham made right and righteous choices in certain faith-defining moments. And yet, while in other equally defining circumstances, he would make some of his most questionable and troubling decisions.

Our pursuit of contextualizing the life and journey of an ancient Biblical character for present-day use will be strategic in that the faith-defining moments of Abraham's life will provide us with a timeless and proven template for helping us to develop and build our own faith. We will learn how to make faithful and unquestionable decisions in defining moments of faith while also providing a deep-dive understanding of what it means for us today in real time to maintain and display a righteous fear and trust in the Almighty God during the most critically defining moments of our lives.

We will also answer the big questions such as:

*What are the differences, if any, between having faith in God and becoming faithful to God?*

*What exactly is a faith-defining moment?*

*How do I know when I'm in one of those moments?*

*What does **my** faithfulness, compared to God's faithfulness, have to do with the outcomes of those moments?*

*What does it mean to righteously fear the Lord?*

*What is the relative connection between fearing the Lord and trusting the Lord?*

*How does righteously fearing and trusting God impact our faith and our faithfulness to Him?*

So, off we go in pursuit of the Spirit's revelation and a Biblical understanding of our faith, faithfulness, and learning to righteously fear and trust the Lord in the most "outcome determining" moments of our lives. Even now, those moments are before us.

Dr. Stephen Isaac

The Reunion Church

Fully Equipped Bible Institute

## **Now I know You Fear God**

### **Isaiah 33:5-6**

**The LORD is exalted, for he dwells on high; he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness. He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the LORD is the key to this treasure.**

The righteous fear of God is the access to His sure and eternal foundation. The righteous fear of God unlocks the fullness of our salvation, as well as leads us to the approach points of the wisdom and knowledge of God's truth. Along with the love of God (the most important commandment), the fear of God is the construct of the very foundation of life! It will be important that we learn we cannot truly love God until we righteously fear Him, nor can we righteously fear Him until we truly love Him.

In Jewish thought, the love and fear of God are to be understood as complementing one another. Fear without love can easily result in being too rigorous and ultimately obstruct our approach to the spiritual life. Love without fear can just as easily degenerate into sheer sentimentalism.

**From the many references in the Bible to both the love and the fear of God, without any clear distinction being made between the two, it would seem, as many biblical scholars suggest, that the two (fear and**

**love) are essentially interdependent with an intense relationship with God, especially as realized in ethical and moral conduct.**

The Biblical expression “the fear of God” often refers to an extraordinary degree of sacred worship and moral worth. Of the Hebrew midwives who defied Pharaoh’s order for them to kill the infants, the verse says: “*The midwives, fearing God, did not do as the king of Egypt had told them; they let the boys live (Exodus 1:17).*” Job is described as “*wholehearted and upright, and one that feared God, and shunned evil (Job 1:1).*” In Hebraic literature, the usual expression for the fear of God is *yirat shamayim*, “the fear and awe of Heaven,” by which is meant the determination to carry out God’s will and precepts, while consecrating one's life to the awe and honor of worshipping **Yahweh** as Creator and Almighty God.

**Leviticus 10:3**

**By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified.**

### **9.3.23**

**...Now I Know**

**(Faith, Faithfulness, and Learning to Righteously Fear and Trust God)**

**Week One**

**The Historical and Biblical Timeline for Abraham's Most Defining Moments of Faith**

**Genesis 12:1-3**

**God tells Abraham to leave his homeland and family to be a stranger in the land of Canaan.**

**Genesis 12:10-13**

**Immediately after Abraham's arrival in Canaan - Negeb (the land of Promise), he encounters a famine.**

**Genesis 12:14-20**

**The Egyptians seize his beloved wife, Sarah, and bring her to Pharaoh.**

**Genesis 14:1-24**

**Abraham faces incredible odds in the battle of the four and five kings.**

**Genesis 16:1-15**

**He marries Hagar after not being able to have children with Sarah.**

**Genesis 17:1-14**

**God tells Abraham to circumcise himself at an advanced age.**

**Genesis 20:1-18**

**The king of Gerar captures Sarah, intending to take her for himself.**

**Genesis 21:1-14**

**God tells Abraham to send Hagar away after having a child with her.**

**Genesis 21:15-21**

**Abraham's son, Ishmael, becomes estranged.**

**Genesis 22:1-19**

**God tells Abraham to sacrifice his son of promise, Isaac, upon an altar.**



**9.10.23**

**...Now I Know**

**(Faith, Faithfulness, and Learning to Righteously Fear and Trust God)**

**Week Two - God tells Abraham to leave his homeland and family to be a stranger in the land of Canaan.**

**Test One - The Call and Promise**

**Genesis 12:1-9**

**Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.**

**2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."**

**4 So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan,**

**6 Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.**

**7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the**

**LORD, who had appeared to him. 8 From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD. 9 And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.**

The sojourning of Abram is in and of itself a great act of faith. In fact, historically, it is acknowledged as one of the greatest acts of faith in the entire legacy of God and His people. Abraham remains a gold standard and preferred teaching template for building and expressing one's faith in God. Abram had a country, a people, and the house of his father. God chose Abram because He knew he would act in faith to God's plan to bless and establish an everlasting covenant with His people. And Abram did. At 75 years old, Abram gathered up his possessions and his wife Sarai and went as the Lord had told him. With one exception - ***“and Lot went with him” (verse 4).***

### **Why?**

There are many thoughts on this question - both the thoughts and the question are important to our own spiritual growth and understanding of faith and faithfulness while in the most critically defining moments of our lives.

Those who are in defense of Abram taking Lot with him say that Abram saw himself as a guardian over his nephew or even as an adoptive parent who was under the authority dependency of Abram since his father, Haran (Abram's brother), had died. This possibility would, according to Hebraic tradition, make Abram a Kinsmen Redeemer to Lot. Others have concluded that Abram, at 75 years old, had no direct heir to his name and inheritance, and so including Lot would be his insurance plan for that possibility were it to take place. And there are others who have determined that Lot himself had built a strong faith in God and wanted to be a part of God's promise to his uncle Abram. The thinking is that Lot appealed to Abram and persuaded him to include him in his sojourning of faith.

The reality is that Scripture is silent on the specific details of Abram's process, but the Scripture is very clear on the outcomes and consequences of Abram's decision. But let's first go back and remember that Abram was told to leave not only his father's house but also his "country" and "relatives." The Hebrew word מוֹלֶדֶת *môledet* used in Genesis 12:1, and its meaning helps us to be more clear here. *Moledet* comes from a root word that normally indicates offspring or relatives who are direct family (which, if that were the case here, would seem to include even an "adoptive offspring" whom one is a guardian over). In this literary context, the word *moledet* included any extended relative as well.

Here is the call from God to Abram to do the following:

**Go from your country.**

**Go from your family and your people.**

**Go from your father's house.**

## **Go to the land that I will show you.**

The call from God to Abram is very specific and detailed.

*Here is what I want you to do Abram, and here is what I promise to you when you do it.*

The one thing we do not hear in God's call to Abram is simple. We do not hear God say, "**Take Lot with you.**"

The decision to take Lot with him was a decision and choice Abram made on his own. As we will learn, the God-less decision of Abram to bring Lot on his sojourning of faith became many things - but when it came to Lot, blessed and highly favored was not one of them.

Here are the historical facts and Biblical truths to support that claim.

- God gave the promise to Abram and his descendants, not to Lot.
- Lot never embraced God's promise to Abram.
- In fact, Lot would cause Abram nothing but difficulty.
- When their flocks became too large to tend together, Lot's people became contentious and disgruntled. Abram graciously offered Lot whatever land he chose. Lot greedily selected the choicest and most fertile land and left the desert for his kindhearted uncle (Genesis 13:5-13).
- When King Chedorlaomer and his allies captured Lot and his family as they sacked Sodom, Abram was forced to chase across the length of Israel in order to rescue his nephew (Genesis 14:13-17).

- When God was preparing to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Abram interceded for the city, and God ultimately sent an angel to rescue Lot once again (Genesis 19:1-29).
- Lot hid in seclusion after the destruction of Sodom; his daughters, fearing they would not ever conceive, got him drunk and slept with him so that they would have a lineage. They did - the Moabites and the Amorites! (Genesis 19:30-38)
- Lot did nothing to assist Abram in his quest for God's promise and actually did more to inconvenience and distract him.

## **GOD IS IN THE DETAILS - OUR FAITHFULNESS TO HIM IS FOUND AND ACCOMPLISHED BY FULLY EMBRACING HIS MOST INTIMATE DETAILS**

The greatest faith-defining moments of our lives are before us. In these moments, our faith will only be as good as our faithfulness to the God in whom we have put our trust. As we pursue the Spirit's revelation and a Biblical understanding of the relationship of our faith - to our faithfulness, we are also learning to righteously fear and trust the Lord in those "faith-defining" moments. We must come to an understanding that fearing and trusting God fully allows us to see and prioritize the details of God's call and promise in our lives. Minding the details keeps us faithful to God and our faith in Him intact.

**9.17.23**

**...Now I Know**

**(Faith, Faithfulness, and Learning to Righteously Fear and Trust God)**

**Week Two - Immediately after Abraham's arrival in Canaan - Negeb (the land of Promise), he encounters a famine.**

**Test Two - Dust or Trust**

Genesis 12:10-13

**10 Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.**

**11 When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, "I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, 12 and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. 13 Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake.**

Abram's story in Genesis 12-22 is indeed the story of faith, faithfulness, and learning to righteously fear and trust God. The story restores within us the reality that Abraham, the patriarch, and paragon of faith that we read of in the book of Hebrews, struggled, just like we do. He struggled to reconcile God's promises for the future with very difficult in-the-moment experiences requiring complete trust and faithfulness to God.

## **Hebrews 11:8-12**

**By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. 11 By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.**

Abram/Abraham took a "leap of faith" when he gathered up his family and left his people (except Lot) and home to answer God's call, and his faith shows that initially, he feared God and fully trusted Him enough to follow through on His promises made. His faith, however, was quickly tested when he arrived in the land of promise and was immediately faced with famine. Not only did Abram feel compelled to leave the land he was promised, but he also foolishly and unfaithfully lied and deceived the Egyptian pharaoh, putting at risk his wife Sarai/Sarah's life and the promise given to him by God.

Abram's lack of trust and unfaithful behavior in Egypt should encourage us to question not only how much he fully trusted God but also push us to have spiritually healthy and honest conversations about how Abram's

story can also provide us the evidence we need that God remains faithful even when our faithfulness and trust in Him struggles and fails us during some of the most critical and challenging times. Let's dig a little deeper to see just how Abram got to his place of compromise and fear.

First, let's look at how unrealistic it is to regard Egypt as a forbidden territory to God's people at this stage in history when it was soon to be expressly allotted to them as a place of favor and refuge and that their presence there would not nullify or damage their claim to Canaan. The reality is that Abram had to feel his way forward (verses 8, 9) without a moment-to-moment revelation or personal daily instruction at every step, guided often-times largely by physical and natural circumstances.

Secondly, It was a common practice in ancient history for people groups to be nomadic when in the circumstance of providing food, water, and shelter for family and people. In the region of Canaan, where famine had hit hard, it might well seem a providence or even provision that Egypt was nearby, plentiful in crops and livestock, watered by the flooding of the Nile. We can see that Abram greatly feared his ability to provide for his family enough to abandon God's promise, plan, and purpose.

### **Why?**

The fear of Abram's circumstances overshadowed his ability to be faithful to the promised blessing and favor of God - provision. Some would say, *"You can't eat a promise."* But others would say, *"Yes, but you can live by faith while being faithful to what God has promised."*



What provision did Abram have available to help him stay the course, overcome his natural fear, and remain faithful in a faith-defining moment?

**The Call of God - leave all behind and go to the place I show you.**

**The Promise of God - generational blessing and favor.**

**The Purpose and Place of God - worship and dwelling in Canaan.**

When he left his homeland in Haran, Abram was no longer living life under common rules or circumstances. His life was set apart, a life of calling, promise, and purpose - there is nothing common about that. He was called not only to live and walk by faith but to do so in the fear of only God, moving forward in faithfulness and complete trust in the ONE who called him. It is clear that Abram had placed His faith in God. It is also clear that He had not yet learned how to be completely faithful in trusting God during those faith-defining moments. Trusting God for all that He had called him to, and then faithfully walking in all that He had promised to him. Sound familiar? Of course, it does. Here is what we see Abram do in the critical faith-defining moment of famine.

(Verse 10) Abram leaves Canaan for Egypt.

(Verses 11-13) Abram conspires with his wife Sarai to lie to Pharaoh. "Tell him you are my sister."

### **What Can We Learn**

Could Abram not trust God enough to provide food and provision, even in the land that he had specifically selected for him and his people? All the indications are that Abram did not stop or stay long enough to find out.

Instead, he went on his own initiative, taking everything into account but God's call and promise. *His faithless and trustless processes are doubly revealing, both of the duplicitous natural character of this spiritual hero and patriarch and of the sudden transition that can be made from the righteous place of faith to that unrighteous place of fear.* Caught in the trap of his deception, Abram found himself unable to refuse his questionable earnings (16), if indeed he wished to, and unable to answer Pharaoh's stinging rebuke. Yet if this experience lay behind his powerful reply to the king of Sodom in 14:22, then there was something worth salvaging from it.

The crucial importance of the story, however, is its bearing on the promise of land and people. This is the true theme of these chapters, with Abram's vision under constant challenge. Here, at the first touch of hunger, fear, and opportunity for riches, the vision was lost, and the whole enterprise was put at risk: it would need plagues to restore Sarai to her destiny (17) and deportation (20) to get Abram back to Canaan.

**THE RIGHTEOUS FEAR OF GOD WILL ALWAYS DELIVER US FROM THE UNRIGHTEOUS FEAR OF MEN - BUT AN UNRIGHTEOUS FEAR OF MEN WILL ALWAYS HOLD US CAPTIVE, NEVER ALLOWING US TO FULLY TRUST GOD, THEREBY KEEPING US FROM THE RIGHTEOUS FEAR OF GOD. IN THIS TENUOUS POSITION, WE ARE INCAPABLE OF FULLY TRUSTING HIM AND BEING FAITHFUL DURING FAITH-DEFINING MOMENTS OF OUR LIVES.**

Our "quantum moment" comes to us as we learn to use the Word of God to manage and regulate the forces of fear that rush in when we resolve ourselves to push back against the evil and the manipulative intimidation of men. The righteous fear of God keeps us covered in grace and not crushed in the disgrace of failing and falling one more time during those critically significant moments of life where faith is more than required - it is our only way through.

**9.24.23**

**...Now I Know**

**(Faith, Faithfulness, and Learning to Righteously Fear and Trust God)**

**Week Three - The Egyptians seize his beloved wife, Sarah, and bring her to Pharaoh.**

**Test Three - The Doctrine of Prosperity or Good Plan Gone Bad?**

Genesis 12:14-20

**When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. 15 And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. 16 And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels.**

**17 But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. 18 So Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? 19 Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife; take her, and go." 20 And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had.**

This is just a reminder of the ***four-fold promise*** God made to Abram.

**"And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."**

Here is what we see Abram do in one more critical and faith-defining moment of sojourning. In the moment of no return (face to face with Pharaoh), he chooses not to fear and trust God and His four-fold promise. He chooses his fear for himself rather than his fear and trust in God. He does this either out of his fear of man or unfavorable circumstances. He does this maybe out of sheer shrewdness and opportunity. Possibly, Abram does this out of a basic human instinct for self-preservation and survival - we do not know. What we do know is that, like Abram, we too often, in our own faith-defining moments, choose to fall captive to our fear of man and circumstances rather than fear God and trust in His promises over us. Like Abram, we appear to be seizing the opportunity to do what is best for ourselves.

**(Verses 14-16)** In exchange for his sister (wink-wink), Abram negotiates a wealth and prosperity deal with Pharaoh. Based on the Sarai lie, Abram accepted the negotiated wealth and prosperity gifts of Pharaoh in exchange for what he thought was Abram's sister.

**(Verses 17-20)** Abram keeps silent and is content to hide the truth while Pharaoh and his people endure plagues and hardship for taking the wife of

another man. It appears that God is more faithful in protecting and preserving His promise to Abram than Abram himself.

Pharaoh asks Abram the question we ask - why? Why did you do this to me and my people? Why did you do this to your wife? There is nothing ethical, moral, right, righteous, or faithful about Abram's behavior. It is evident that Abram did not fear or fully trust God.

Ironically, in the end, Abram is sent away from Egypt, the place where he sought to find remedy from the famine in the land that God promised and had shown to him. And, even though he still has faith in God, He leaves knowing that he has not been faithful in fearing or trusting God. With 3500 years of hindsight, the lingering question we are left to answer is...

**Why?**

### **Points of Significant Consideration**

It was a common strategic practice of ancient Hebrew patriarchs when confronted with the threat of a potential enemy or when needing the benevolence of an opposing Ruler to present their wives or daughters to the opposing ruler in order to save them from being killed, compromised, or enslaved.

It was also a common practice among reasonable yet forceful ancient Rulers to take everything and everyone of value from potential enemies and those seeking benevolence and protection. If the seeking sojourner had something or someone of value, they would, on some rare occasions, allow them to use that value to negotiate for life, land, livestock, or wealth.

We have already speculated about Abram's unfaithful responses and possible motives, much like the way we try to speculate and track down our own. In those critical and faith-defining moments, we know that, like Abram, we too are capable of many unfaithful responses and motives for them. Yet, for those of us who are called by God's name (children/people of God), we know that first and foremost, our faith demands of us that we fear God and Him alone - that we trust in His promises to us with all we are and all we have. This faithfulness to God should override every thought for ourselves and every earthly fear outside of the right and righteous fear of God.

Job 13:14-15

**Why do I take my flesh in my teeth, And put my life in my hands?  
Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him. NKJV**

Proverbs 2:1-5

**My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my  
commandments with you, 2 making your ear attentive to wisdom  
and inclining your heart to understanding; 3 yes, if you call out  
for insight and raise your voice for understanding, 4 if you seek  
it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, 5 then you  
will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of  
God.**

Abram leaves Egypt a wealthier man. Is this wealth the provision of God, or is it the ill-gotten gain of the unethical and opportunistic behavior by Abram? Is this the four-fold promise that God gave to Abram, or is this merely the evidence that he did not yet fear God and trust in His promises to him?

**THERE IS NO RIGHTEOUS JUSTIFICATION FOR IMMORAL AND UNETHICAL THOUGHTS, WORDS, OR DEEDS. GOD DOES NOT RANDOMLY BLESS OR REWARD US WHEN WE ARE UNFAITHFUL TO OUR FAITH. HE IS, HOWEVER, ALWAYS FAITHFUL - HE IS A REWARDER OF THOSE WHO DILIGENTLY SEEK HIM.**



## 10.1.23

...Now I Know

**(Faith, Faithfulness, and Learning to Righteously Fear and Trust God)**

**Week Four - Abraham faces incredible odds in the battle of the Four and Five Kings.**

### **Test Four - Against All Odds**

Genesis 14:8-24

**Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out, and they joined battle in the Valley of Siddim 9 with Chedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar, four kings against five.**

**10 Now the Valley of Siddim was full of bitumen pits, and as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them, and the rest fled to the hill country. 11 So the enemy took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way. 12 They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who was dwelling in Sodom, and his possessions, and went their way.**

**13 Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and of Aner. These were allies of Abram.**

**14 When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them, and**

went in pursuit as far as Dan. 15 And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. 16 Then he brought back all the possessions, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his possessions, and the women and the people.

17 After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). 18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) 19 And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; 20 and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!"

And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. 21 And the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself." 22 But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have lifted my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, 23 that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.' 24 I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me.

## **Abram's Time and Context for Test Four**

**(Verses 8-12)** The five Kings of the Valley are defeated, ironically, with many of their armies dying in the tar pits as they flee the battlefield they had chosen. However, as part of the conqueror's spoils, Lot, Abram's nephew, is captured by King Chedorlaomer and his allies as they confiscate the provisions, possessions, wealth, and select captives from their defeated enemies (Five Kings).

**(Verses 13-17)** Abram hears the news that Lot and his family are captured, and he enters the conflict by mounting a rescue mission to save Lot and his family. Against all odds, Abram takes 318 of his men, who (by the way) have only been trained in some basic warfare skills, and goes after Cherdolaomer and the armies of the other three kings. Miraculously, Abram's tiny army defeats the armies of the four Kings and recovers everything and everyone taken by Cherdolaomer. As Abram returns home, he is met near the Valley of Shevah by the King of Sodom and Melchizedek, King of Salem, who is a righteous man and a Priest of God.

**Verses (18-20)** In his welcome and greeting, Melchizedek, the King of Salem, brings to Abram bread and wine as a gesture of kindness for what Abram has done for his people. In Melchizedek's role as Priest of *EI' Elyon* (*Most High God*), he Blesses Abram. In faithful response to the blessing from Melchizedek, Abram gives him a Tenth of everything he brought back from the defeat of King Cherdolaomer (the first example of Biblical tithing).

**(Verses 21-24)** In yet another faithful response to the generational and everlasting promises of God, Abram refuses to accept any compensation of gratitude or reward from the King of Sodom for something that Abram knew only God could have done - against all odds.

*(See Abram and Four Kings Map)*

The first few tests of Abram's sojourning have been difficult and rather tough on his faith in God. His pattern has been to fear for himself more than he has feared the God of Promise. As a result, Abram has (until this moment) been unable to fully trust God in faith-defining moments. In test four, we can clearly see Abram's fear of God and his trust in God's generational and everlasting promises as they begin to impact his most intense faith-defining moments to produce more favorable and blessed outcomes.

## **Why?**

The fact remains Abram was a man of faith. His faith in God was why he was chosen for the greatest generational and everlasting promise ever given to humankind. However, like us, Abram was still learning what it takes to righteously fear God above all other emotions and notions. What we see in Abram in this particular test is that he has learned enough from his first three tests to fear God above his fear of King Cherdolaomer and the impossible odds set against him. Here is why Abram responded faithfully in a faith-defining moment. He feared God first and, as a result, was able to fully trust God's generational and everlasting promises to him.

## **God's Fourfold Generational and Everlasting Promises Made to Abram**

***I will make of you a great nation***

***I will bless you and make your name great***

***I will bless those who bless you***

***Him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed***

If Abram had feared for himself or if he was overcome by his fear of men more than his righteous fear of God, he would never have (against all odds) gone out after the four kings to rescue Lot and his family. ***His righteous fear of God allowed him to fully trust in God. As he learns to righteously fear God and fully trust Him, he begins to receive the promised blessings and walk in God's favor over his life.***

### **The Melchizedek Blessing**

***Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.***

As if it weren't enough for Abram (against all odds) to go out against the armies of the four kings with only three hundred men, there is his righteous fear of God's responses afterward. What is even more notable is his faithful response to the blessing of Melchizedek, the King of Sodom, and the wealth and possession that had been delivered into his hands. Much different than his response to the wealth and possession gained through

his deceptive and unethical encounter with Pharaoh while in Egypt. This time, Abram did not wait until he was delivered and victorious to fear God and fully trust Him. He clearly feared God and trusted Him before he was delivered and victorious - he remained faithful to God in a moment and circumstance that required great faith. Remaining faithful to God in moments that require great faith - that is the lesson for us to learn. Biblically, the righteous fear of God and fully trusting Him is ultimately what God will acknowledge, honor, and bless. God actually counts it to us faithful righteousness in our greatest faith-defining moments.

**FOR US TO BE FAITHFUL IN FAITH-DEFINING MOMENTS, WE MUST, ABOVE ALL, FEAR GOD. ABOVE ALL OF OUR EMOTIONS AND BEFORE ALL OTHER POSSIBLE OPTIONS, WE FEAR GOD, WHICH WILL, IN TURN, LEAD US FAITHFULLY FORWARD INTO FULLY TRUSTING GOD IN EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE AND OBSTACLE. IT IS OUR RIGHTEOUS FEAR OF GOD THAT ALLOWS US TO FULLY TRUST IN HIM AGAINST ALL ODDS. FAITHFULNESS THAT LEADS TO GREAT FAITH AGAINST ALL ODDS.**

**FAITH-DEFINING MOMENTS COME TO US ALL. WE NEVER KNOW WHEN THEY WILL COME, BUT WHEN THEY DO, THEY ARE MOST ALWAYS LIFE-ALTERING FOR NOT ONLY OURSELVES BUT EVERYONE CLOSE TO US. UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE AND CONSEQUENCES OF FAITH-DEFINING MOMENTS IS MONUMENTAL TO OUR CONTINUED JOURNEY OF FAITH. EACH MOMENT MUST BUILD TO THE NEXT - WHEN WE ARE FAITHFUL IN THOSE**

**MOMENTS, WE ARE BUILDING FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH.  
THE GREATEST IMPORTANCE IS THAT WE REMAIN FAITHFUL TO  
THE FEAR OF GOD AND OUR COMPLETE TRUST IN WHO HE IS.  
FINALLY, WE MUST NOT ASSUME THAT BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN  
FAITHFUL IN THE PAST, WE WILL BE FAITHFUL IN THE NEXT FAITH-  
DEFINING MOMENT BEFORE US. FAITH AND FEAR OF GOD IN EACH  
DEFINING MOMENT BUILD THE FAITHFULNESS FOR A THOUSAND  
TO COME.**

**10.22.23**

**...Now I Know**

**(Faith, Faithfulness, and Learning to Righteously Fear and Trust God)**

**Week Five - Abram marries Hagar after not being able to have children with Sarai.**

**Test Five - Life in the Back and Forth Cycle and The Conception and Harbinger of Things to Come**

Genesis 16:1-15

**Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. 2 And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. 3 So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. 4 And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. 5 And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!" 6 But Abram said to**



Sarai, "Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her. 7 The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. 8 And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai." 9 The angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress and submit to her." 10 The angel of the LORD also said to her, "I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude." 11 And the angel of the LORD said to her, "Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has listened to your affliction. 12 He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen." 13 So she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing," for she said, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me." 14 Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered. 15 And Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. 16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

## **What Preceded Abram's Faith-Defining Moment**

What happens between God and Abram before this critical decision to take Hagar (a servant of Sarai) as a wife is not only monumental to the outcome and consequences of another faith-defining moment in Abram's journey of faith, but it is also shocking. To fully understand, we have to go back to the vision God gave Abram just after the truly great and faithful response Abram had shown when learning the news that his nephew Lot and his family had been taken captive by King Chedorlaomer and the other three kings of the north. God is so pleased with Abram's immediate faithfulness, fear, and trust in Him during what could be described as a near-impossible faith-defining moment that He comes to Abram's talk. In a vision, the word of the Lord comes to Abram and says it is recorded in chapter fifteen of Genesis. Here is the context and content for that everlasting covenant promise.

**The Word of the Lord...** *I am your shield; your reward will be very great.*

**Abram to God...** *You have given me no offspring; I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus.*

**The Word of the Lord to Abram...** *This man will not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir. Look toward heaven, and number the stars; if you are able to number them so will your offspring be.*

**The Word of the Lord to Abram...** *I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur to give you this land to possess.*

**Abram to God...** *Lord GOD, how am I to know that I will possess it?*

**The Word of the Lord to Abram...** *To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."*

It is important to understand this was not just a faith-defining moment - it was then, and is to this very day, an everlasting covenant. Although history reveals that the offspring of Abram would not always fear or trust God and many times would become unfaithful to their faith, the foundations of the promise remain in place. God's generational covenant blessing made to Abram's offspring would never be broken, and the geographical boundaries for the land would be scorched onto this earth until this earth is no more.

(Map of Canaan and the Land of Promise)

## **Life in the Back and Forth Cycle**

The events of chapter sixteen reveal to us that Abram has allowed himself to be caught in a cycle of "back and forth" with his fear of God and his

complete trust in Him. Just a few years after Abram's vision and hearing once again the covenant promise of the "word of the Lord" as it was confirmed and physically defined to him, he loses sight of that vision in yet another faith-defining moment. It is a moment that would have not only immediate consequences for Abram and Sarai but would have generational consequences as well.

After ten years, Sarai has gone back on her fear of the Lord and fully trusts Him for her outcomes. She has become impatient and fearful for herself more than her fear of God and fully trusting in Him. In the ancient Near East, being unable to conceive and bear children was a married woman's greatest fear. Although the practice of a wife providing her husband with a second wife or concubine for the purpose of procreation was commonly attested in the ancient Near East for Abram and Sarai, this should not have been an option. They had a covenant promise from God.

Sarai fears that she will be forever barren or that she will become too old to have a child. This personal and deeply emotive fear overtakes her ability to remain faithful to the promises God has once again made to her husband, Abram. She imposes that self-fear on Abram, and because of his love for her, he too goes back to the fear of this world's consequences and becomes unfaithful in what has now become a "back and forth" pattern in faith-defining moments. Listen in on the faith-defining events of chapter sixteen...

Verse 1

**Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar.**

**Verse 2**

**And Sarai said to Abram, “Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.”**

**Verse 3**

**Sarai, Abram’s wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife.**

**Verse 4**

**And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress.**

**Verse 5**

**And Sarai said to Abram, “May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!”**

**Verse 6**

**But Abram said to Sarai, “Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please.” Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and Hagar fled from her.**

## **Life in the Back and Forth Cycle (Continued)**

Sarai is in the "back and forth cycle" and will not find any joy or peace in the outcomes of **her plan**. She quickly regrets her decisions because she perceives Hagar's attitude toward her as becoming disrespectful and dishonorable now that she is pregnant with Abram's child. Her fear is that Hagar will try to displace her. When Sarai complains of this to Abram, he gives her permission to treat Hagar as she wishes. At this point, Sarai can't stop or manage her fears and frustration, and her hostility toward Hagar leads the maidservant to flee into the desert, heading back toward her native Egypt. On the way, the Angel of Yahweh appears to Hagar, instructing her to return to Sarai despite the hostility. The angel reveals that Hagar will have a son and assures her that Yahweh's promise to Abram of abundant descendants will also apply to her offspring. With this encouragement, Hagar returns and gives birth to Ishmael when Abram is 86 years old. However, the consequences of faithlessness in a faith-defining moment have not yet fully been revealed.

## **The Conception and Harbinger of Things to Come**

We know, according to Scripture, that Ishmael was a son of Abraham, born of Sarah's maidservant Hagar, in an attempt to bring into the world the son God had promised to Abraham and Sarah. This plan, conceived outside of the fear and trust of God, was a harbinger of things to come. Of course, we know that Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah, and Hagar and Ishmael were driven away a second time because of Ishmael's attitude toward Isaac (Genesis 21:9–10, 14). We also know that God still had plans

for Ishmael. The name Ishmael ('God hears') (17:19) would always recall Hagar's encounter and moment with God. To her mind, lacking the questing faith of Abram, the promise to her might well offer all she could wish, though it said nothing of blessing for the multiplied generations to come not only in this world but the world to come, and of course physical boundaries of a promised land. Ishmael, as God promised, would multiply and be at nobody's beck and call. To some degree, this son of Abram would be a shadow, almost a parody, of his father; his twelve sons were notable in their times (17:20; 25:13) but not in the history of salvation; his restless existence no pilgrimage but an end in itself; his nonconformism a habit of mind, not a light to the nations. In fact, they would eventually become the opposite.

**As part of His original promise to Abram,** God also promised Hagar that Ishmael, as a son of Abraham, would become a great nation (Genesis 21:17–18). The fulfillment of that is recorded in Genesis 25:12–18—Ishmael had twelve sons who became great rulers and eventually a nation of people. That came about in this way: Hagar, who was Egyptian herself, found a wife from Egypt for her son, and Ishmael settled in the desert of Paran (Genesis 21:21). Ishmael's descendants "settled in the area from Havilah to Shur, near the border of Egypt as you go toward Ashur" (Genesis 25:18). The Bible lists Ishmael's twelve sons as Nebaioth, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah (verses 13–15).

The area of Havilah, where Ishmael's descendants lived, is in the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula; Shur is a wilderness area between Beersheba in the Negev Desert and Egypt. Isaiah 60:7 mentions the

descendants of Nebaioth and Kedar as those who raise flocks. The descendants of Ishmael became known as Arabs, which basically means “nomads.” From the beginning, the descendants of Ishmael were a warlike people, as “they lived in hostility toward all the tribes related to them” (Genesis 25:18). This fulfilled God’s earlier word that Ishmael would be “*a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone’s hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers*” (Genesis 16:12).

Later, others settled in the Arabian Peninsula as well, including the descendants of Keturah’s sons (1 Chronicles 1:32–33) and some of Esau’s descendants, among them the Amalekites (Genesis 36:12).

There is common knowledge and teaching among Muslims and most Christian genealogists that a high percentage of Arabian Muslims are the direct descendants of Ishmael. In fact, Muhammad himself was a major voice of this idea, claiming to be a descendant of Ishmael, according to the Quran. There is indeed genealogical evidence to support this thought line. According to missionary and author Kenneth Fleming, “*What we know for certain seems to support the theory that the Ishmaelites are, at the very least, a major element in the Arab genetic line. Old records clearly link the north Arabians with Ishmael’s descendants*” (“Ishmael and the Bible,” Emmaus Journal 13:2, 2004).

Although many modern Arabians could trace their lineage back to Ishmael, not all Arabians are descendants of Ishmael, as Muslims try to claim. We know from the Bible that God (according to His promise) made Ishmael into a great nation and that his descendants can share in the blessings of Abraham by putting their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. However, for centuries and generations, they have chosen to do quite the opposite.



They have put their hand to evil, their feet to war, and to aggression, hostility, and terrorism against Israel and Christianity to this very day.

**FAITH-DEFINING MOMENTS COME TO US ALL. WE NEVER KNOW QUITE WHEN THEY WILL COME, BUT WHEN THEY DO, THEY ARE MOST ALWAYS LIFE-ALTERING FOR NOT ONLY OURSELVES BUT EVERYONE CLOSE TO US. UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE AND CONSEQUENCES OF FAITH-DEFINING MOMENTS IS MONUMENTAL TO OUR CONTINUED JOURNEY OF FAITH. EACH MOMENT MUST BUILD TOWARD THE NEXT - WHEN WE ARE FAITHFUL IN THOSE MOMENTS, WE ARE BUILDING FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH. THE GREATEST IMPORTANCE IS THAT WE REMAIN FAITHFUL TO THE FEAR OF GOD AND TO OUR COMPLETE TRUST IN WHO HE IS. FINALLY, WE MUST NOT ASSUME THAT BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN FAITHFUL IN THE PAST, WE WILL BE FAITHFUL IN THE NEXT FAITH-DEFINING MOMENT THAT COMES BEFORE US. FAITH AND FEAR OF GOD IN EACH DEFINING MOMENT BUILD THE FAITHFULNESS FOR A THOUSAND TO COME.**

**11.5.23**

**...Now I Know**

**(Faith, Faithfulness, and Learning to Righteously Fear and Trust God)**

**Week Six: Sitting in God's Waiting Room / This is Going to Hurt**

**Test Six: God tells Abraham to circumcise himself at an advanced age.**

**Genesis 17:1-14**

**“When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, 2 that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.” 3 Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, 4 “Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. 5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. 7 And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. 8 And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojourning, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.**

**9 And God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. 10 This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. 11 You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. 12 He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, 13 both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. 14 Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”**

**“22 When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. 23 Then Abraham took Ishmael his son and all those born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham’s house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him.**

**24 Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.”**

## **Introduction**

Thirteen years after the birth of Ishmael, God appears to Abram again to renew His covenant with him (Genesis 17:2). He repeats the promises He has made with Abram and then changes Abram's name to Abraham. God adds circumcision as a sign of the covenant (Genesis 17:11) and instructs Abraham to circumcise every male in his household, relative and servant alike.

After establishing circumcision as the sign of the covenant, God changed Sarai's name to Sarah. He says that she will bear the son God promised in Genesis 15:2–4. When Abraham objects and asks that Ishmael be the heir to the promise, God emphasizes that Abraham will have a son with Sarah and says that they should name him Isaac. God reassures Abraham that He will also bless Ishmael but that His covenant will continue through Isaac, who will be born in one year. Abraham responds in obedience by circumcising all members of his household.

## **The Covenant Promise and the Circumcision of Genesis 17**

### **Verses 1-3**

God appears to Abram, and for a second time in thirteen years, God establishes a direct covenant with Abram (the first was in chapter 15). Verses 1-3 of chapter 17 begins with Abram's age (99 years old). Chapter 16 concluded by saying that Abram was 86 years old when Hagar (Sarai's servant) gave birth to Ishmael. If we remember, Abram was 75 years old when he left Ur (his homeland) for Canaan (Genesis 12:4). So, 24 years have passed since he first received God's Covenant promise. During that

time, God repeated various aspects of His promises to Abram several times, each time giving more specific details. In this appearance, however, God will require circumcision as a permanent outward physical act of obedience used to symbolize the spiritual significance of God's covenant promise on the heart of Abram's generational offspring. As God appears, Abram falls on His face in fear and reverent worship of God Almighty. Ironically, when God tells Abraham to be circumcised, he was past the age of bearing children and his wife, Sarah, was incapable of having children - they are old. Nevertheless, it would be through Sarah's womb that God would fulfill his promise to the generations of blessed offspring of Abraham. Important to remember, because of their age and circumstances God's covenant with Abraham could only be realized by supernatural intervention.

The miraculous nature of Isaac's birth is the key to understanding circumcision as the sign of the covenant. God's intention to reveal His righteous promise and eternal covenant had to begin with *cutting away the unrighteous flesh (heart and desire) of His people*. After God made His promise to Abraham, every male member of Abraham's household would be required to be circumcised. What God commanded Abraham was obeyed but not yet understood.

### **Verses 4-5**

*God reconfirms His blessings and favor over Abrams's offspring.* God also becomes more specific about what those blessings might produce and how they will impact a thousand generations. In verses 4-5, God says to Abram, *"My covenant is with you, and you will father a multitude of*

*nations.* " God goes on, "*You will no longer be called Abram, but your name will be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.*"

In these two verses, we can begin to understand that God remarkably intends to narrow his plan for the world to a specific family - a chosen people. As we now know, His plan would lead to blessing and covenant for all people through Abraham's offspring. In Hebrew, the name Abram [*Abrim*] means "exalted father," and Abraham [*Ahvraham*] literally means "father of multitudes/father of nations".

### **Verses 6-8**

*God Reiterates His Promises of Offspring and Land.* Though Abram has been waiting thirteen years since God's covenant promise, He is learning to fear God and trust in Him fully for all things. He goes to his face before God, and God responds with details and insight into what the future will look like under the covenant promises of God. The land, the blessing, Kings, and the patriarchal headship to his children and his children's children... By the promise of God, a blessed and chosen people.

### **Verses 9-14**

*God Commands Circumcision as the Sign of His Covenant with Abraham.*

The literal physical circumcision of the men and the subsequent male offspring of Abraham was the outward sign of the inward work of God's favor and grace. Eventually, this covenant and its requirements would be replaced in true fulfillment through *Yeshua* - Christ Jesus the Messiah. This was truly a "cut covenant." Everyone now knew that circumcision was connected to Abraham's righteous fear of the Lord, and his complete trust in His covenant promise to him. However, the physical act of circumcision

would not make any sense until Sarah became pregnant. Isaac - the son of promise. God seals and reveals to those who are willing to wait and obediently endure.

### **Verses 15-22**

*God personally promises Abraham a son by Sarah as the child of promise. Abraham and Sarai have been sitting in God's waiting room for thirteen years. Waiting on the promise - waiting on God. In the meantime, the outward sign of circumcision marked their righteous fear of God and their full and complete trust in Him. Who could or would have dared to imagine something so odd, strange, or foolish would be intentionally chosen to signify His eternal promise to Abraham, Sarah, and their offspring for a thousand generations? This was going to hurt, but the wait and the blessings and promise of God would be worth it.*

### **1 Corinthians 1:18-31**

**For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." 20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified, a**

stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 26 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

### **Verses 23-27**

Abraham Circumcises Ishmael and All the Men of His Household. Being faithful in God's command to circumcise becomes a significant threshold for Abraham to cross in order to establish **three essentials** for all those who believed and called on the Name of the Lord.

***The Fear of God - Complete Trust in God - and Unwavering Faith in God***

***Mulah [Circumcision] and 'Yada Karat B'riyt [A Cut Covenant]***



Let's start with a literal definition of circumcision.

*The practice of cutting away the foreskin of male children, usually within a short time of birth (on the 8th day for Jews). In the OT, the practice would become an outward sign of Jewish heritage and covenant belonging to the Biblical people of God. The New Testament makes it very clear that Christians are under no obligation to be physically circumcised.*

Circumcision is a topic mentioned nearly 100 times in the Bible. It is a central focus for Old Testament and New Testament theology (Romans 4:9–12; Galatians 2:1–12; 5:1–10). Before going forward there is the matter of context for the usage of the term and the application of the practice. Obviously, the literal usage and application was first attached to the outward sign which signified the covenant between God and Abraham - and Abraham's male offspring. That practice has been in place since God first commanded Abraham to do so. The figurative usage and application for the term and practice circumcision is spiritual and should be understood as the *actual inward work of God's Spirit* cutting away the sinful flesh of the human heart. This spiritual work is done through faith in God, and the righteousness and sacrifice of *Yeshua* - Christ Jesus. Christ alone is now the cornerstone of our New Covenant with God.

In the OT, the physical act of circumcision is seen, as we said, as an outward sign of one's belonging to Israel and the people of God. As part of the covenant that God established with Abraham in Genesis 17:10–14, every male living with Abraham, *“both he who is born in your house and he*

*who is bought with your money*” (17:13 ESV), was to be circumcised. In this way, the covenant was “cut in [their] flesh” (17:13 ESV). In addition, every newborn male was to be circumcised on the eighth day (17:12; also Leviticus 12:3). Circumcision was ultimately a sign of God’s covenant relationship with Abraham and his offspring and, of course, the blessing God promised with it. Carried forward, the Law of Moses specifies that males must be circumcised in order to participate in the Passover, and male slaves and resident aliens could participate in the Passover only after they had been circumcised (Exodus 12:43–49). This statute is reinforced in Joshua 5 when Joshua circumcises all the uncircumcised Israelite males prior to observing Passover in the wilderness (Joshua 5:2–12).

Any Israelite male who was not circumcised was to be “cut off” from the “kin of his father” for breaking the covenant of God (Genesis 17:14). Those outside the covenant were described as “the uncircumcised”—the godless, wicked enemies of God (Judges 15:18; 1 Samuel 17:26. Goliath and all of the Philistines are described as uncircumcised (1 Samuel 17:36; 18:25)

A word study of the Hebrew word *yada'* shows it as a common root in the Semitic languages with expansive meanings relying on the word's use and context. If you pair *yada'* with the Hebrew phrase *karat b'riyt*, it means to know (as in a relationship). *Karat* literally means to cut or make a covenant. *B'riyt* is the Hebrew word for covenant and means to select the best. So, the definition of the Hebrew word *yada' karat b'riyt*. It is fascinating how this phrase will subtly (but meaningfully) shift based on the context and intent of who, how, and when.

Amazingly, the context of the cut covenant for the relationship between God and Abraham is that of the *Yada' Karat B'riyt*.

## **Circumcision of the Heart and The New Covenant Relationship in Christ Jesus**

On its own (apart from God's promises), the physical sign of circumcision is no guarantee of finding blessings or favor in the sight of God. As the physical act of the Abrahamic covenant, circumcision was intended to be the outward sign of an inward covenant consecration and was accompanied by repentance, fear of God, and willful obedience. Under the new covenant in Christ Jesus, the apostle Paul stresses that physical circumcision brings no entitlements or special privileges upon individuals; it is faith in God, rather than any outward sign, that ensures that believers and those who fear God are standing in right relationship with Him.

### **Romans 4:7-12**

**Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; 8 blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.” 9 Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. 10 How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. 11 He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all**

who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, 12 and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

#### **I Corinthian 7:17-19**

Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. 18 Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. 19 For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God.

#### **Galatians 5:2; 5-6**

Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

#### **Colossians 2:8-15**

**See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. 11 In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. 13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.**

**THERE ARE OUTWARD PRESENT DAY SIGNS,  
MANIFESTATIONS, AND EVIDENCES OF GOD'S INWARD  
WORKING OF HIS SPIRIT, GRACE, AND RIGHTEOUSNESS IN  
US. BAPTISM, WORSHIP, AND GODLINESS SHOULD CERTAINLY  
BE CONSIDERED AMONG THOSE EVIDENCES OF A RIGHT  
RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. WE ARE LEARNING THAT IT IS OUR  
RIGHTEOUS FEAR OF GOD AND OUR LOVE FOR HIM AND ONE**

**ANOTHER THAT GIVES WITNESS TO THE WORLD OF WHO GOD IS AND WHO WE ARE AS HIS COVENANT PEOPLE. JESUS SAID, "WHAT DEFILES A MAN COMES FROM WITHIN HIS HEART." SO WE PRAY - CIRCUMCISE AND CHANGE OUR HEART O' GOD AND RENEW A RIGHTEOUS SPIRIT WITHIN US. CUT AWAY EVERYTHING THAT OUR FLESH DESIRES THAT REBELS AGAINST YOU, BRINGS SHAME TO YOUR NAME, AND IS A REPROACH TO YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS IN US THROUGH CHRIST JESUS. WE WILL FEAR AND WORSHIP YOU ABOVE ALL, AND WE WILL PUT OUR TRUST IN YOU ALONE.**

**11.12.23**

**...Now I Know**

**(Faith, Faithfulness, and Learning to Righteously Fear and Trust God)**

**Week Seven: Deja Vu All Over Again?**

**Test Seven: The King of Gerar (Abimelech) captures Sarah, intending to take her for himself.**

Genesis 20:1-18

**From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb and lived between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar.**

**2 And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. 3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife." 4 Now Abimelech had not approached her. So he said, "Lord, will you kill an innocent people? 5 Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this." 6 Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her. 7 Now then, return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you, and**

**you shall live. But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.”**

**8 So Abimelech rose early in the morning and called all his servants and told them all these things. And the men were very much afraid. 9 Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, “What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done.” 10 And Abimelech said to Abraham, “What did you see, that you did this thing?” 11 Abraham said, “I did it because I thought, ‘There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.’ 12 Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife. 13 And when God caused me to wander from my father’s house, I said to her, ‘This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, “He is my brother.”’**

**14 Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male servants and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and returned Sarah his wife to him. 15 And Abimelech said, “Behold, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you.” 16 To Sarah he said, “Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver. It is a sign of your innocence in the eyes of all who are with you, and before everyone you are vindicated.” 17 Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his**



**wife and female slaves so that they bore children. 18 For the LORD had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.**

### **Introduction / Overview**

In Genesis 20, Abraham and Sarah sojourn into the area known as Gerar. While sitting (metaphorically) with Sarah in God's waiting room, Abraham, in yet another faith-defining moment, sadly repeats an earlier mistake by claiming to Abimelech, the King of Gerar, that Sarah is his sister (compare to Genesis 12:11–13).

The account of Abraham and Abimelech in Genesis 20 is very similar to the account of Abraham in Egypt in Genesis 12:10–20. Some Old Testament critics have considered the two accounts to be duplicates, reflecting only one event. However, most OT scholars note the similarities between the two accounts but argue that significant differences in the circumstances of each story reflect a distinct series or pattern of faith-defining events in the life of Abraham. It is also evident that Abraham himself admits to this being a repeated strategy between Sarah and himself (check verse 13).

Nonetheless, this is now a least the second time Abraham has used this strategy to navigate his fear of men over his fear of God. This is not a righteous mistake - this is a "blind spot" in Abraham's faith and perhaps a blemish in Abraham's character and judgment. Clearly, this flawed decision does not reflect the righteous fear of the Lord and a complete trust in His promises that Abraham has been able to display at other times.

Abraham is struggling here to be consistent and unmovable while waiting on the fulfillment of God's promises. He is struggling to be faithful in one of life's faith-defining moments. His decision to once again claim his wife as his sister in a faith-defining moment - though he thinks it will help him - hurts him. His decision to misrepresent does not decrease the danger and threat to him and Sarah - it increases it. In his lack of fear for God and complete trust in Him and His promises, Abraham has placed at risk and in danger the Matriarch of God's generational covenant promise to him.

Taking Abraham at his word, Abimelech, the king of Gerar, takes Sarah into his harem of wives and women, but before he touches her, God appears to him in a dream. In this dream, God reveals to Abimelech that Sarah is Abraham's wife and declares that he will die for taking her. Abimelech defends his innocence and ignorance, and God affirms that He intervened to protect both Abimelech and Sarah.

God promises to spare Abimelech if he promises to return Sarah. The next day, Abimelech summons Abraham to come to him, and when he does, he asks a fair and logical question... "*Why have you lied, what have you done to us?*" "*You have done to me things that ought not to be done.*" Abraham then tries to justify and explain his actions. Abimelech returns Sarah to Abraham, and along with her, he gives an undeserved but generous gift. God had closed the wombs of the women of the king's house, but when Abraham prayed for Abimelech's house, God blessed it with children.

## **Verse 1**

### *Abraham and Sarah Go to Gerar.*

After experiencing a deep and personally affirming time in the presence and favor of God, wherein God furthers and re-enforces His promises, Abraham once again relapses into faithless scheming. This episode is chiefly one of suspense, questionable character, and one where potentially Isaac's birth story and Abraham's very Covenant Promise put at risk, traded away for personal safety. At this point, the reality is this - if the covenant promise is ever to be fulfilled, it will owe very little to the faithfulness of man - and everything to the faithfulness of God. Morally as well as physically, it will clearly have to be achieved by the word, the purposes, and the grace of God.

The first half of the verse one tells of the general area of Abraham's travels in Gerar. In Abraham's time, Gerar was near the Mediterranean coast in the land of the Philistines, about 12 miles south of Gaza and about 50 miles southwest of Abraham's home in Hebron.

### **Verse 2**

#### *Abraham presents Sarah as his sister.*

It is fair to ask why a King would want to take a woman nearly ninety as a wife or companion? Even at the age of 89, Sarah was attractive. She died at the age of 127, so at 89, she would be comparable to a woman in her fifties today, a woman who had not yet had children. But she was also regal, being the "sister" of Abraham, who was considered by Abimelech as a great prince (23:6), and this would also make her appealing to the king.

The key to the whole problem lies with the patriarchal life-span, which at the time was still approximately double our own. Abraham died at 175 and Sarah at 127; Jacob thought that 130 years was *'few and evil.'* Their continued vitality and appeal show that this was no mere postponement of death but a spreading out and slowing down of the whole life process. *For example*, Abraham, at 110 years old in chapter 22, has the vitality of a man of, at most, seventy. Sarah in her sixties would probably compare with our thirties or forties, and her 90 years at Isaac's birth with perhaps our late fifties. At this age, she was past childbearing years but not past all thoughts of attraction, appeal, or matrimony.

### **Verses 3-5**

*God Appears to Abimelech in a Dream and Abimelech defends himself before God.*

When Abimelech took Sarah, God warned him in a dream and brought barrenness to his wife and slave girls, indicating to us that considerable time had passed while Sarah was in his custody. When Abimelech assured God of his clear conscience in this matter, God told him to return Sarah and to have Abraham, the prophet, pray for him. Ironically, it was Abraham's prayer that saved the king's life and restored the well-being of his family. It was a way of teaching the king that Abraham's God was sovereign and that Abraham was God's chosen servant, even if he did not always faithfully live up to it. The warning from God was clearly received by Abimelech.

## **Verses 6-7**

### *God Exonerates Abimelech.*

Abimelech was innocent. His appeal to God sounded a familiar note, at least to the readers of these stories. He asked God, “Will you destroy an innocent nation”? Remember. Abraham had prayed that the righteous would not be destroyed with the wicked when appealing to God for Lot and his family in Sodom (18:23–32); now Abimelech’s words mirrored the same concern as he appealed to God. When Abraham heard of the king’s appeal, the rebuke and shame he felt would have been forceful.

## **Verse 8**

### *Abimelech Informs His Servants.*

God did not rebuke Abimelech, but he obviously gave him a harsh and sobering warning: He must not commit adultery with another man's wife because was considered a capital offense. This was the accepted law in the entire ancient Near East—adultery was the great sin because it destroyed another man’s family and created serious financial complications. When a man married, he had to pay a bride's family a set price and a dowry. If that marriage was violated, one’s possessions and status would be jeopardized. In ancient Eastern cultures, having children was a priority, and so on occasion, there would be more than one wife, and the same situation would apply to polygamy and harems, as well. Abimelech gathers his servants and staff and tells them what he had done carried with it a judgment of disastrous consequences - his choices were not made, nor his actions done in a vacuum. Had God not mercifully

intervened, he could have destroyed the lives of many that he loved and ruled over.

### **Verses 9-10**

*Abimelech Rebukes and Pays Restitution to Abraham.*

God may not have rebuked Abraham, but Abimelech certainly did, and rightly so. The king spoke of the great guilt that Abraham's deception had brought on him, and he spoke to Sarah of his (Abimelech's) offense against her. He realized that his plan to take her into his harem was wrong. So he made amends by giving restitution to the patriarch of livestock and slaves, allowing him to live in the region, and then additionally giving Abraham, whom he sarcastically called Sarah's "brother," a thousand shekels of silver to compensate for any wrong done to her. There is a strong case to be made for the fact that Abimelech is making restitution in his heart towards God (who had mercifully come to him) and not necessarily to the character and judgment of Abraham.

### **Verses 11-13**

*Abraham Defends Himself.*

Abraham defends himself to Abimelech, saying that Sarah is his half-sister, and he himself had asked her to identify herself as his sister whenever they traveled. Marriage to a half-sister is prohibited by later Israelite law, but during the time of the patriarchs, it was culturally acceptable.

Interesting to note that in defending himself to Abimelech, he effectively blames God for necessitating his deception because He "caused me to wander" (verse 13) into places where Sarah might be in danger.

In hindsight, it is very difficult to see Abraham's defense as a right and righteous, God-fearing, covenant-trusting man of faithful action and character. He did not consider the terrible possibilities and consequences of waiting for an unknowing man and his entire people for sinning against God's covenant - this is not right nor righteous. Abraham was the direct cause of that potential sin. He almost brought on to the house of Abimelech and his wives and servants the very thing that had caused him and Sarah to grieve over for many many years - no children. And yet, God, in His love and mercy, is faithful to Abraham - for reasons and purposes greater and more glorious than the fame, fortune, and understanding of men. We have seen that Abraham is a good man who loves God and desires to be faithful and righteous before Him. His actions bring to mind the words and wisdom of the apostle Paul, who many centuries later would write in a letter...

Romans 7:15-19

**For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. 16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. 17 So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.**

Surely, by this time in Abraham's life, he would be able to trust God with Sarah. Instead, Abraham's fear and doubt lead him to a familiar sin. And

God was again faithful. However, Abraham was learning just as we must learn - while daily and faithfully working to protect and keep our covenant relationship with God in Christ Jesus, we are being made righteous before Him - even when we fall, fail, and find ourselves sinning against the very one we love. The journey of faith is a journey of learning faithfulness in life's most faith-defining moments. Fearing God and trusting in His promises.

### **Verses 14-18**

*Abraham and Abimelech Make Things Right and Prays for the Healing of Abimelech's House.*

Although Abraham prayed and interceded for Abimelech's household, we are clearly being told that it was God's action (*and God healed*), not Abraham's intercession, that brought healing. In all reality, it was Yahweh's work that had made everyone in Abimelech's household infertile, and this was specifically because of Sarah, Abraham's wife. Once again, despite the patriarch's unfaithful behavior in a faith-defining moment, God was faithful to his promise to protect Abraham.

**SURELY BY THIS TIME IN ABRAHAM'S LIFE, HE WOULD BE ABLE TO TRUST GOD WITH SARAH. INSTEAD, HIS FEAR OF THE WRONG THINGS AND DOUBT OF THE RIGHT THINGS LEAD HIM TO A FAMILIAR SIN. SOUND FAMILIAR? AGAIN, GOD IS FAITHFUL. HOWEVER, ABRAHAM WAS CONTINUING TO LEARN JUST AS WE MUST LEARN - WHILE WE ARE FAITHFULLY INTENT ON**



**PROTECTING AND KEEPING OUR COVENANT RELATIONSHIP WITH  
GOD IN CHRIST JESUS, WE ARE BEING MADE RIGHTEOUS BEFORE  
HIM. EVEN WHEN WE FALL, FAIL, AND FIND OURSELVES SINNING  
AGAINST THE VERY ONE WE LOVE. THE JOURNEY OF FAITH IS A  
JOURNEY OF LEARNING DAILY FAITHFULNESS IN LIFE'S MOST  
FAITH-DEFINING MOMENTS. FEARING GOD, AND TRUSTING IN HIS  
PROMISES TO US.**