

As for me, being on the way, the LORD led me

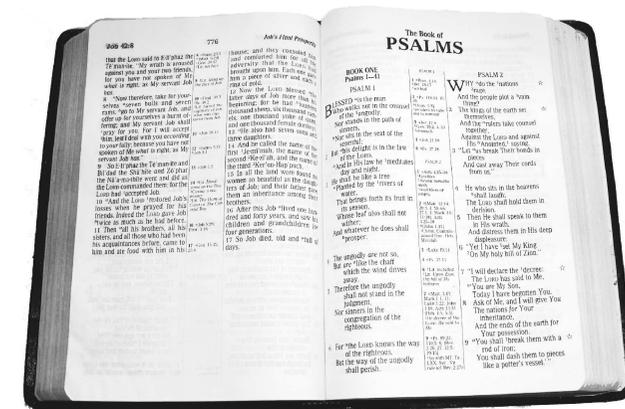
Isaac was 37 years old when Sarah died (23:1–2) and Abraham was concerned that Isaac should find a wife from his own people. He did not want his son to be married to a Canaanite, and he solemnly charged his chief servant whom he greatly trusted to go to his own country and kindred to find a wife for Isaac (1–4). The servant was fearful that the prospective bride would refuse to return with him, and in such a situation should he see that Isaac was settled there? Abraham told him that he must not consider allowing such a thing and told him that God would send his angel ahead of him (5–7). Abraham made his servant swear on oath that he would follow his instructions; he would only be released from the oath if the woman refused to return with him (3,8–9).

The servant went to the city of Nahor in Mesopotamia and on arriving at a well he committed his task to the Lord in prayer (12). He was concerned to find a woman who was thoughtful and kind and he asked God for a token to confirm his choice of a bride for Isaac. He would ask the woman to draw water for him to drink and she would not only do that but also draw water to give to his ten camels; this would involve heavy work to satisfy them (14). God answered him before he finished praying (15). He watched in silence as Rebekah, a beautiful young woman, showed herself to be the answer to his prayer (16–21). He was also surprised to discover that she was related to Abraham (24; cp. 11:27). She told him that her family had ample room to give him lodging and to feed his camels. God had wonderfully answered him and *the man bowed down his head and worshipped the LORD* (25–26).

The servant blessed God for his goodness and exclaimed, '*As for me, being on the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren*' (27). Worship and prayerful dependence upon God are essential if we would prove him in our lives (12,27). **What joy we have when we trust and obey the Lord and commit our way to him** (cp. Psalm 37:5).

PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



April 2021

Bible readings from Genesis chapters 8 to 24

Then God remembered Noah

The ark must have been surrounded by an eerie silence following the violent storms. Noah was shut up in the ark for 150 days (7:24) but we read, *'Then God remembered Noah'* (1). John Currid points out that 'the Hebrew word translated "remembered" does not denote a matter of mere recall or retention. The Hebrew word bears the additional idea of one's acting upon the remembrance. It simply results in action' (COMMENTARY ON GENESIS, Volume 1, page 202). God remembered Noah and he remembers and cares for us. **Christian, you were bought at great cost (1 Corinthians 6:20). Can you imagine that God will ever forget you? (see Isaiah 49:14–16).**

God caused the waters to recede until the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat (1–4). Noah *sent out a raven which kept going to and fro* (from the ark) *until the waters had dried up from the earth* (7). He later sent out a dove which returned to him. He sent it out again seven days later and it returned with an olive leaf in her mouth. After a further seven days he sent out the dove again and she did not return. Noah uncovered the ark to find that all the water had drained away. He left the ark only when God commanded him to do so (5–19).

Noah had taken seven pairs of clean animals and birds into the ark, and when he left, he built an altar to the Lord, sacrificing from each of them (20; 7:2–3). The Lord was pleased with the *soothing aroma* from the sacrifices and he said that as long as the earth remained, he would never again destroy every living thing. *'Seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease'* (21–22).

*Can a woman's tender care
Cease towards the child she bare?
Yes, she may forgetful be,
Yet I will remember thee.* (William Cowper)

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I am a foreigner and sojourner among you

Sarah died in Hebron thirty-seven years after the birth of Isaac. We know that our Christian loved ones go to be with the Lord when they die but we still suffer grief and sorrow. We mourn and weep just as Abraham did for Sarah (1–2). We do not, however, *sorrow as others who have no hope* (1 Thessalonians 4:13). John Currid comments, 'In death, sin is unmasked — one sees decay, corruption and rottenness. The true nature of sin is unveiled. But for Abraham there is no sense of despair: he knew that even death could not separate Sarah or himself from the love of God' (COMMENTARY ON GENESIS, Vol. 1, page 410).

The people of Hebron had such a respect for Abraham that they would have allowed him to bury Sarah in one of their own burial places. He wanted his own burial place however, and he negotiated the purchase of the field which contained the cave of Machpelah. Ephron its owner, offered it to Abraham as a gift, but Abraham insisted on paying for it. He would not take advantage of the man's generosity when he had ample means to pay for the field (4–18). After this, Abraham buried Sarah in the in the cave that was in the field that he had purchased (19).

Abraham confessed that he was *a foreigner and a sojourner* among the Canaanites (4). The New Testament refers to the testimony of Abraham and the other patriarchs. *They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland* (Hebrews 11:13–14). Our homeland is in heaven and when we depart this life, we will be brought into the presence of the Lord Jesus who has prepared a place for us of indescribable and everlasting joy (John 14:3). Our problem is that we are too prone to make ourselves at home in this world. **Are you looking forward to heaven?**

*There is a land of pure delight
Where saints immortal reign;
Infinite day excludes the night
And pleasures banish pain.* (Isaac Watts)

In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided

Following the intervention of *the Angel of the LORD*,* Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw behind him a ram which was *caught in a thicket by its horns*. Abraham took the ram and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. He called the name of the place ‘Jehovah Jireh’ which means, ‘*the-LORD-will-provide*’ (or ‘see’; 13–14).

Scripture locates Mount Moriah at Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 3:1). There is even greater significance in the words, ‘*In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided*’ (or ‘it shall be seen’ –14). There is a hill in the mountains of Moriah called ‘Calvary’. It was there that God did not spare his only begotten Son, whom he loved. – *He who did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him, also freely give us all things?* (Romans 8:32). **Christian, that is the measure of God’s love for you.** God made the provision for our salvation by giving his Son to die on the cross.

Is your faith being severely tried almost beyond endurance? Remember that God provided for Abraham and brought him through (13–14). **Are you perplexed with God’s dealings with you? Remember that he loves you and tenderly cares for you; he will provide for you.** He will bring you through.

*His love in time past
Forbids me to think
He’ll leave me at last
In trouble to sink.*

(John Newton)

The chapter ends by introducing the family of Abraham’s brother Nahor, who was the grandfather of Rebekah, the future bride of Isaac, (20–24).

* I pointed out in the notes on Genesis 16:6–16 that ‘*the Angel of the LORD*’ is more than an angel – He is God. Many Bible commentators believe that he is the Lord Jesus appearing to men before he came to earth at Bethlehem.

I will remember my covenant

God commanded Noah and his sons, ‘*Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth*’ (1, 7; cp.1:28–30). He also told Noah that he could now eat the flesh of animals, whereas before the flood, man was only allowed a vegetarian diet (2–3; cp, 1:29–30). Though animals had been killed as sacrifices (4:4), God stressed to Noah the sanctity of human life. Man is made in the image of God and murderers must be punished by death. This is the just punishment for a terrible crime (5–6).

It is a sad reflection of so-called ‘progressive thinking’ that many countries which no longer execute murderers, put to death millions of unborn children through abortion. This is wickedness! The death penalty must not be applied where there is any doubt in the evidence, any more than it was in Israel of old. The New Testament also sanctions the death penalty for murder. The apostle Paul should never have been on trial for his life but he said, ‘*If I am an offender, or have committed anything worthy of death, I do not object to dying*’ (Acts 25:11). When he wrote that the magistrate *does not bear the sword in vain* (Romans 13:4), he was referring to the death penalty for murder.

The word ‘*covenant*’ is found seven times in verses 9 and 17. A covenant is a binding agreement between two or more persons, bringing them into a special relationship with each other. The Lord made a covenant with Noah for all mankind and for all animals. The rainbow was given as a sign of this covenant in which God promised that he would never again destroy the earth by a flood (8–11; Isaiah 54:9). He said, ‘*I will remember my covenant*’ (15).

God submitted his own Son to the death penalty to save sinners, the innocent One suffering for the guilty. The new covenant was sealed in the blood of Christ and the cup at the Lord’s table speaks of this new covenant (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25). **God is totally committed to his people (Isaiah 54:9–10; Romans 8:31–39). He will always remember his covenant and he will never fail us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5–6).** Let us encourage ourselves in him.

Then he drank of the wine and was drunk

Noah became a farmer and planted a vineyard but a worthwhile occupation became the occasion of a fall into sin. He brewed wine from his vineyard, *then he drank of the wine and was drunk, and became uncovered in his tent* (21). His son Ham, discovered him naked and in a drunken stupor. Ham did nothing to cover his father but went and told his two brothers of his father's state. They were shocked and they went backwards into Noah's tent so they did not see his nakedness, and they covered him. When Noah found out what had happened he cursed Ham's son, Canaan. Why did he curse Canaan rather than Ham? We are not told, but he may have been involved with Ham in some immodest deed concerning his drunken grandfather. He was the ancestor of the wicked Canaanites, who were to be driven out of the promised land by the Israelites who were descended from Shem. Canaan became the servant of Shem as prophesied by Noah (22–27).

Noah had remained faithful and stood firm when civilisation around him was collapsing into wickedness and violence but he fell into sin through brewing his own wine. **Noah did not intend to sin, but Satan was waiting for the unguarded, careless moment.** Past faithfulness to God does not give us an immunity from sinning or from being deceived by Satan's wiles. Many respected servants of God have had their lives blighted by sin. Noah lived for three hundred and fifty years, after the flood, but we hear no more of him nor of any spiritual usefulness. Satan never sleeps! We must be vigilant; we must watch and pray (Matthew 26:41; Ephesians 6:10–18).

*Christian, seek not yet repose,
Cast thy dreams of ease away.
Thou art in the midst of foes:
Watch and pray.*

*Principalities and powers,
Mustering their unseen array,
Wait for thy unguarded hours:
Watch and pray.*

(Charlotte Elliott)

Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love

Abraham was truly outstanding in his faith and obedience. Following his sorrow over Hagar and Ishmael (21:9–12), the Lord tested him, calling on him to do the unimaginable – to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac: *'Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering'* (2). There is often a real sense of loneliness in trial when we are shut up to our own thoughts and questions. Abraham's anguish on the three-day journey to Moriah must have been almost unbearable. He must have been sorely tempted to turn back in order to preserve his beloved son.

How did Abraham triumph in testing?

- He trusted in God's wisdom, for the Lord is wise in all his ways.
- He trusted in God's promises which can never fail. The Lord had promised descendants through Isaac (21:12).
- He trusted in God's power, that to fulfil his promise, he would raise Isaac from the dead (Hebrews 11:17–19). He told the two young men who were with them to remain with the donkey, saying, *'The lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you'* (5). He was expecting to return with Isaac.

Isaac knew that they had no animal to sacrifice, and he asked where it was. His father told him that God would *'provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering'* (7–8). After Abraham had built an altar for the sacrifice, he bound Isaac and was ready to kill him when the Angel of the Lord intervened telling him not to harm Isaac (9). John Currid asks a question that may have come to your mind, and then gives his answer: 'Is the purpose of this test so that God should discover whether Abraham is a faithful follower or not? Is that the meaning of the phrase: *"I know now that you fear God"*? I think not. As a sovereign God, and one who is omniscient, he need not resort to such acts for proof one way or another. In reality, the trial is for Abraham's benefit, so that he may be reassured of the complete effectiveness of his faith in God. His actions here serve as a testimony to his reverential fear of God.' (COMMENTARY ON GENESIS, Volume 1, page 393).

The LORD, the everlasting God

Though Abraham had previously failed in his testimony before Abimelech, the king of Gerar now confessed, ‘*God is with you in all that you do*’ (22). He recognised the hand of God upon Abraham (he had no doubt heard of the miraculous birth of Isaac) and knew that Abraham could possibly pose a threat to him and his people.

Abimelech was accompanied by his army commander when he met Abraham to seek a treaty with him. He wanted Abraham to promise not to deal falsely with him. He would have remembered the deceit of Abraham on a previous occasion (chapter 20). He had been kind in his dealings with Abraham and he asked the patriarch to deal likewise with him and his posterity (23–24). There was a problem however. Abimelech’s servants had seized a well belonging to Abraham. Water was scarce in this region and wells were vital for survival. The king of Gerar denied any knowledge of this and presumably put matters right. The same problem was to arise again (26:15).

They made a covenant at Beersheba and Abraham gave sheep and oxen to Abimelech. There Abraham *called on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God* (33; Psalm 90:1–2). **In all the changes and uncertainties that we see around us, the eternal God remains sovereign. Christian, he loves you, he cares for you, and he will never forsake you. God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea** (Psalm 46:1–2).

*Our God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home.*

*Before the hills in order stood,
Or earth received her frame,
From everlasting Thou art God,
To endless years the same.*

(Isaac Watts)

He was a mighty hunter before the LORD

This chapter contains three genealogies tracing the early descendants of Noah’s sons, Japheth (2–5), Ham (6–20) and Shem (21–31). John Currid describes this chapter as ‘The Table of Nations’. He points out that the term ‘*sons*’ not only includes individuals but obvious ethnic names of people groups. ‘*Kittim*’ and ‘*Dodanim*’ or ‘*Rodanim*’ are plural words in the Hebrew (4); they speak of groups of people. The reason for the division of the nations (32) is given in chapter 11.

One of the descendants of Ham was Nimrod who *was a mighty hunter before the LORD* (8–9). Some Bible commentators believe that the words ‘*before the LORD*’ indicate that Nimrod was flaunting his own might. John Calvin takes this view, describing Nimrod as ‘the first author of tyranny’. John Currid writes that his name probably means ‘Let us rebel’ (COMMENTARY ON GENESIS, Volume 1, page 233). Nimrod was not only a great hunter but also a great ruler (10) and a great builder, who built Babel (Babylon) and other cities before going to Assyria to build Nineveh (10–11). These great cities have a history of opposition to God and his people. The Canaanites also built the cities of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim which God destroyed on account of their wickedness and gross depravity (19:24–29).

There is a welcome contrast in the line of Shem from whom descended the Semitic nations. The word ‘Hebrew’ comes from the name of Abraham’s ancestor, Eber (24–25; 11:14–26; 14:13). **Many godly people were descended from Shem, but the most important thing is that the earthly descent of Christ also came through the line of Shem** (Luke 3:34–36). We thank God that in Christ, Gentiles are also saved and brought into the family of God. Let us rejoice much in our great God and Saviour in whom there is neither Jew nor Gentile. Whatever our race, whatever our background, Christians are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

Let us make a name for ourselves

This chapter tells of the origin of languages and of the different nations. After the flood, there was a migration from Ararat in the east to the land of Shinar which was situated between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (1–2; see 10:10). God had told Noah to multiply and to populate the whole earth (9:1) but these people did not want to do this (4). They built a city and a great tower and said, ‘*Let us make a name for ourselves*’ (4). In their pride, they excluded the Lord from all of their plans (6) and he punished them by scattering them and confusing their languages (the very thing that they had feared, 7–9). *They ceased building the city* which was called ‘Babel’ (meaning ‘confusion’).

If we seek to *make a name for ourselves*, we are heading for trouble. We must shun pride and selfish ambition, remembering that *God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble* (1 Peter 5:5). The Lord Jesus calls us to lead a life of self-denial (Mark 8:34). We should have the same attitude as that of the apostle Paul who said, ‘*God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*’ (Galatians 6:14). The Lord Jesus, being *in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant ... And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross* (Philippians 2:6–8). **Dare we cultivate proud hearts and high opinions of ourselves when the Son of God humbled himself to save us?**

*Forbid it Lord, that I should boast
Save in the death of Christ my God:
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.* (Isaac Watts)

Verses 10 to 32 provide a more detailed list of Shem’s descendants than the earlier one (10:21–32). Abram is introduced to us (27–32) and from him the human ancestry of the Lord Jesus is traced (Matthew 1:1).

Cast out this bondwoman and her son

Abraham’s feast was a joyful celebration but trouble was not far away, Ishmael was now sixteen or seventeen years old and he showed his antagonism to Sarah and Isaac by laughing at them, probably in a mocking manner (9). Sarah was angry and demanded of Abraham, ‘*Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac*’ (10). Abraham was displeased (the Hebrew could be translated ‘distressed’) when he heard the words of Sarah. The Lord told him not to let this distress him but to do as Sarah wished. This may seem harsh, but the life of Isaac, the son of promise, was in danger while Ishmael was living with them. God said that he would make a great nation of Ishmael’s descendants because he was of Abraham’s seed (9–12).

Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away and she thought that they would die in the wilderness when her supply of food and water was used up. God took care of Hagar and Ishmael and promised her that he would make a great nation of him. Though Hagar and Ishmael had brought trouble upon themselves, God heard the lad’s voice and was merciful, promising to make Ishmael a great nation. God then opened Hagar’s eyes and she saw a well of water which supplied drink for them (13–21). Hagar was an Egyptian and she took an Egyptian wife for Ishmael (21; cp. 16:1).

The story of Hagar and Ishmael is used in the New Testament to illustrate the difference between those who insist that Christians should live under the bondage of the law with its ritual, and those who enjoy the freedom of the ‘*children of promise*’ (Galatians 4:21–31). Hagar represents the old covenant given at Sinai, whereas Sarah represents the new and better covenant (cp. Hebrews 8:6–7). Those who seek salvation by virtue of their own works are like Hagar, but those who trust in Christ alone to save them are the spiritual descendants of Sarah. **On whom or what are you depending to save you from your sins?** *Cast out the bondwoman and her son* (Galatians 4:30).

God has made me laugh

This chapter records the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham that Sarah would bear him a son. Notice how the fulfilment of God's promise is emphasised: *And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him* (1–2). God is faithful and he always keeps his promises (2 Corinthians 1:20). The promises of God's Word are a great comfort and encouragement. Satan wants us to doubt Scripture and thus doubt the faithfulness of God. He questioned Eve in Eden, asking her, 'Has God indeed said?' (3:1). The great missionary, Hudson Taylor, once said, 'God means what he says, and he will do all that he promises.'

God is never in a hurry, but he is never too late. He will surely work out his wise and sovereign purposes. Abraham had laughed when God had promised him a son by Sarah (17:17) and she too had laughed with unbelief and a sense of helplessness a year before Isaac's birth (18:12–13). The long years of yearning and disappointment had crushed her hopes. In the later years of life it is all too possible to sink into despair because of heartache and disappointment. Now Sarah at ninety years of age exclaims, '*God has made me laugh*' (6). The meaning of Isaac is 'he laughs' and the elderly parents were given much joy.

Abraham obeyed God's covenant command to circumcise Isaac on the eighth day from his birth (4: cp. 17:12). In ancient times, children could be nursed for two or three years before being weaned and the occasion was often accompanied by a family feast. Abraham made such a feast when Isaac was weaned (8).

We may be serious in our devotion and obedience to God but we may also go through times of sorrow and perplexity. We are pilgrims who are going to heaven, the happy home of God, of the angels, and of his people. An eternity of joyful praise and service awaits us!

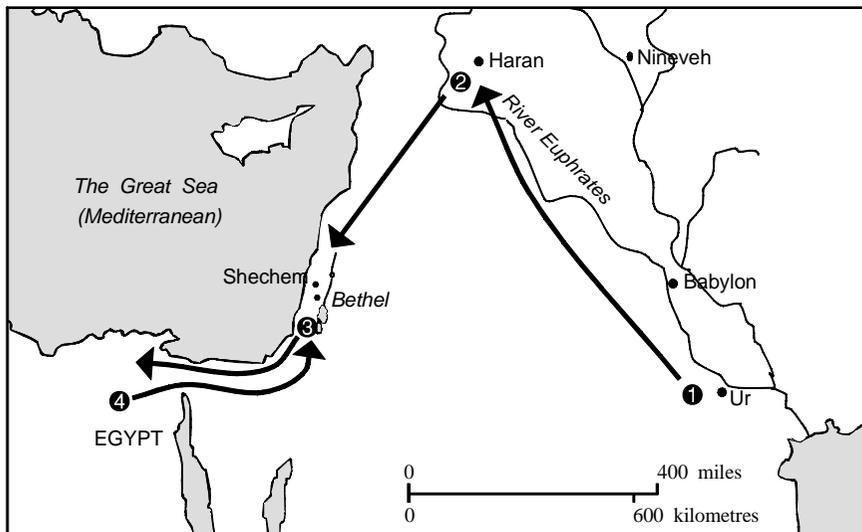
There he built an altar to the LORD

Abram's family were idol-worshippers (Joshua 24:2) but his life was radically changed after God appeared to him in Ur. The Lord told him to leave his country and his relatives and go to a land that he would show to him (1; cp. Acts 7:2–4). God promised, '*I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing ... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*' (2–3). These promises were made to a man whose wife was barren and hardly likely to bear him any children (11:30). God's dealings with Abram demonstrate his amazing grace to sinners.

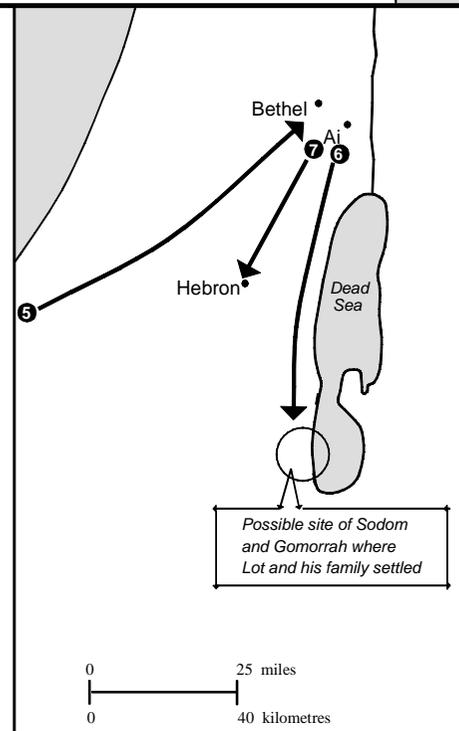
The Lord Jesus came through Abram's line and he brings blessing to all nations. We would be lost and without hope but for his coming into the world. He is the Saviour of Jew and Gentile (Galatians 3:26–29) and in him we have great blessings (Ephesians 1:3–7). **Christians are spiritual heirs of Abram and God will indeed bless those who bless us and curse those who curse us (3).** *If God is for us, who can be against us?* (Romans 8:31).

Terah took his son Abram and his wife Sarai, and his grandson Lot to go to Canaan, but they settled in Haran which is north of the River Euphrates. Notice that Abram's brother, the father of Lot, who had previously died, is also called 'Haran' (11:31–32).

Abram was so different from the men of Babel. They wanted to make a name for themselves and built a city and a tower. Abram was a tent-dweller and a pilgrim who *waited for the city ... whose builder and maker is God*; this was not a city with a tower reaching towards heaven, but a city in heaven (Hebrews 11:10, 13–16). Abram did not build cities; he built altars where he sacrificed and worshipped God. As he travelled from one place to another, we read, *There he built an altar to the LORD* (7–8). These altars were a witness to God among the heathen around him.



1. Abram and Sarai leave Ur for Canaan with Terah his father, and Lot. They settle in Haran.
2. After the death of Terah Abram leaves Haran for Canaan (about 2090 BC.). He builds altars to the Lord at Shechem and Bethel.
3. Abram goes to Egypt (about 2089 BC.) because of famine in Canaan.
- 4/5. He returns to Canaan and settles near Bethel but insufficient pasture land leads to strife between his herdsmen and those of Lot.
6. They separate. Lot chooses the fertile plain of Jordan leaving Abram with the hill country.
7. God renews his promise to Abram. He moves to Hebron and builds an altar to the Lord.



Surely the fear of God is not in this place

Abraham travelled from ‘there’ (Mamre, near Hebron; 18:1), to Gerar, a Philistine town (26:1). The Bible does not hide the failings of the godly and this chapter records a similar kind of incident to that found in chapter 12. Abraham’s faith is held up as an example to us all (eg Romans 4; Hebrews 11:8–19) but there were times when he failed to trust in God. He was again afraid that he would be killed so that a king would be free to marry Sarah. God had told him that Sarah would bear him a son. How could she do this, if she were married to the king of Gerar?

If God had not intervened, Abimelech, would have married Sarah. God warned him in a dream, of judgment, if he were to do so (2–3). He told the king, ‘I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against me; therefore I did not let you touch her’ (6). Adultery is sin against God! The Lord told Abimelech that Abraham was a prophet, who would pray for him (7). He had acted with integrity but was the victim of the deceit of Abraham and Sarah; the fear of God came upon him and his men (8).

The king rebuked Abraham and asked him why he had resorted to such deception (9–10). He replied, ‘Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife’ (11). His faith had given way to fear. The irony in Abimelech’s words to Sarah is quite apparent as he refers to Abraham as her ‘brother’ (16). God had closed every womb in Abimelech’s household because of Sarah and he heard Abraham’s prayer for them (17–18).

Abraham fell into the same sin that he had committed over twenty years earlier. He should have renounced his arrangement with Sarah to claim that she was his sister at that time (13). She was his step-sister but a half truth is a lie (12). **We must never imagine that we have the final victory over some sin because we have been free of it over a long period of time.**

He and his two daughters dwelt in a cave

Lot had pleaded with the angels to allow him to settle in the nearby city of Zoar (17–22). He did not remain in Zoar for long, however, because he was afraid; we are not told the reason for his fear. He moved on to live in the mountains which is what the angels had originally told him to do (30; see verse 17). Lot had made a selfish decision when he chose for himself the fertile plain of the Jordan (13:11) and he was now living in the mountains. He lost his wife, his home and his possessions because of his greed. *He and his two daughters dwelt in a cave* (30).

His daughters had become very corrupt in their minds. They thought nothing of getting their father drunk so that they could engage in an incestuous relationship with him. The two boys born out of these sinful liaisons were the ancestors of the Moabites and Ammonites who were to prove so troublesome to Israel several hundred years later (31–38). John Currid observes, ‘We should not be surprised to find Lot’s daughters acting this way. They had been raised in Sodom, exposed to all the wicked and vile practices of that society. They had been engaged to marry Sodomites (19:14). They had apparently absorbed the local culture; they were Sodomites to the core. Thus, one can take the daughters out of Sodom, but not the influence and ethos of Sodom out of the daughters’ (COMMENTARY ON GENESIS, Volume 1, page 356).

Lot disappears from the pages of Old Testament history at this point. He began with so many privileges, not least, that of association with godly Abraham. He ended in a pathetic and miserable state. **We must learn from Lot’s folly! Material success may lead to spiritual barrenness and disaster if we are not very careful.** We must be prayerful and thoughtful in our decision making. Satan is always looking for ways to ensnare us.

*I would not change my blest estate
For all the world calls good or great;
And while my faith can keep her hold
I envy not the sinner’s gold.*

(Isaac Watts)

Therefore it will happen ... they will kill me

Abram is set before us as an example in the New Testament because of his great faith (eg. Romans 4:1–25; Hebrews 11:8–19). There were times, however, when his faith faltered (11–14; chapter 20). He had trusted God to take a step into the unknown when the Lord told him to go to Canaan, but he did not trust in the Lord to provide for him when a severe famine struck the land.

God did not direct him to go to Egypt and he was well aware of a problem that he would face there. Though Sarai was over 65 years of age, she was a very beautiful woman (4; cp. 17:17). Abram feared that the Egyptians would kill him when they found out that Sarai was his wife and then claim her for Pharaoh (11,14). Abram said to Sarai, ‘*Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, “This is his wife”; and they will kill me, but will let you live*’ (12). Sarai was his half-sister (20:12) but the Egyptians were told that she was his sister (13). The half-truth was a lie which was intended to deceive. **Where was Abram’s trust in the almighty, sovereign God who had promised that he would make him a great nation (2)?**

Pharaoh was attracted to Sarai and he treated Abram well for her sake and took her into his palace but the Lord intervened by sending great plagues on Pharaoh and his household. When he discovered the truth about Sarai, he rebuked Abram and sent them both away (14–20). The Lord was gracious to Abram and protected him. **The purposes of the Almighty could not be thwarted by Pharaoh or by Abram’s sin.**

John Currid writes, ‘In the church today, we ought to take heart in this regard. We look around and we see the hypocrisy in the church, the pastors who fail, the members in sin — and we despair. But let us remember that God’s promises to his true church will never fail; they are rock solid. We may fail, but he does not. And let us remember Jesus’ promise in the great commission: “And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20)’ – COMMENTARY ON GENESIS, Volume 1, page 264.

He went ... to the place of the altar

The Lord was very gracious to Abram. He had failed to trust in God to protect him while he was in Egypt, but he left there as a wealthy man. Lot was with him and it would appear that Lot had been with Abram in Egypt and had also returned *with flocks and herds and tents* (4).

There is a very important lesson for us in these verses. Abraham *went on his journey from the south* ('the Negev') *as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning ... to the place of the altar ... And there Abram called on the name of the LORD* (3–4). Dale Ralph Davis comments, 'Back to Bethel, Back to the altar. Such places are important' (FAITH OF OUR FATHERS – EXPOSITIONS OF GENESIS 12 – 25, page, 27).

What should we do when we have failed to trust in the Lord and sinned? We must go back to where we were at the beginning to make a fresh start, and call on the name of the Lord. We must retrace our steps and repent of the sins that have overtaken us. If we fail to do this, we will grow cold in heart and backslide. The Lord is gracious. He will accept us and restore to us the joy of our salvation.

Is the Lord speaking to you? Have you found, like Abram, that when you are not walking with the Lord, things begin to go wrong, even though you may prosper materially? Are the words of this hymn your experience?

*Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and his word?*

*What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But now I feel an aching void
The world can never fill.*

(William Cowper)

But his wife looked back

It is really amazing that Lot remained complacent even though he was visited by angels and had seen their supernatural power in dealing with the mob (11). The word '*escape*' is found five times in verses 17 to 22. The angels brought Lot, his wife and daughters out of the city and urged them, '*Escape for your life!*' but he pleaded to be allowed to settle in the nearby city of Zoar (17–20). This is incredible! Imagine that you were divinely warned that your town was soon to be destroyed by a terrible disaster. You would seek to get as far away as possible, as quickly as possible, but the angels had to urge lingering Lot, '*Hurry, escape*' (22).

After Lot entered Zoar, the Lord rained brimstone and fire (burning sulphur) on the wicked cities of the Jordan plain (24–25). *Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD* pleading for Sodom (cp. 18:22). He saw utter devastation as he looked over the plain. God had not ignored his prayer, for he had rescued Lot from destruction (27–29). God hears our prayers but he does not always answer us in the way we may expect.

The Lord Jesus was once speaking to his disciples about judgment and he said, '*Remember Lot's wife*' (Luke 17:32). We should remember her with fear and trembling. What had she done to deserve such punishment? She had heard the angels' warning, '*Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain*' (17) but she looked back behind Lot, *and she became a pillar of salt* (26). She had greater privileges than her neighbours in Sodom because she had heard the warning of the angels concerning the destruction of the cities where she dwelt but she ignored them. Do we take seriously what God has to say to us through the Bible which warns us against loving the world (1 John 2:15–17)? How foolish to imagine that God will not punish disobedience to his Word! – '*Remember Lot's wife.*'

He lingered

The gate of an ancient city was an important place where the elders resolved legal matters (eg. Ruth 4:1–11) and markets were held. Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom when the angels arrived (1–2). He did not realise that they were angels and he urged them to spend the night in his house because he knew that the streets of the wicked city were unsafe for strangers. The depraved Sodomites were soon at his door intending to force Lot’s guests into the most vile and perverted practices. Lot felt some responsibility for his guests, but his offer to turn over his daughters to the mob reveals his backslidden state. The Sodomites paid no attention to Lot and would have broken into his house but for the angels who struck them with blindness (1–11).

The angels warned Lot that God had sent them to destroy Sodom because of its wickedness. They said, ‘*We will destroy this place, because the outcry against them has grown great before the face of the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it*’ (13). These are frightening words, especially when we see that the western world has accepted the sin of Sodom (homosexuality) as a normal way of life. God’s standards have not changed and we are ripe for divine judgment. **We need to be intercessors; we need to shine brightly in the surrounding spiritual darkness. We must devote ourselves more than ever to the work of the Lord.**

When Lot parted from Abraham and pitched his tent as far as Sodom (13:12), it is possible that he was not married at that time and that his future wife was from Sodom. The angels urged Lot to leave the city with his family. The men who were betrothed (the meaning of the words ‘*his sons-in-law*’) to his daughters thought that he was joking (12–14). As morning dawned, Lot was still in no hurry to leave Sodom. *While he lingered*, the angels took him, his wife and two daughters and set him outside the city, *the LORD being merciful to him* (15–16). Lot was unhappy in Sodom (2 Peter 2:7–9) but he wanted the best of both worlds and that is impossible.

Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan

When God called Abram, he told him to leave behind his family and his country, but it seems that Abram was unable to shake off certain family members. He first lost his father through death (11:31–32), and he now separated himself from his nephew, Lot. They had both so prospered, that there was insufficient pasture land for their livestock which led to contention between their herdsmen. Godly Abram, became the peacemaker giving Lot first choice of the land (5–9).

Dale Ralph Davis writes, ‘There seems to be a certain irony in verse 10, when it says that “Lot lifted up his eyes and saw...” No, that’s the problem. He really didn’t see. He saw the advantages (v10a) but not the dangers (v.13). He saw the perks but not the perils’ (FAITH OF OUR FATHERS – EXPOSITIONS OF GENESIS 12 – 25, page, 30).

Lot could not resist taking the very best of the land, the well-watered, rich and fertile plain of the river Jordan. *Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of the Jordan ... and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom* (11–12). After Lot had departed, the Lord spoke to Abram and promised that he would give him and his descendants all the land that he could see (including the plain of Jordan). Abram moved his tent to Hebron where he built an altar to the Lord (14–18).

We all have choices to make. Do not be like Lot who selfishly opted for material blessings to the detriment of his soul. We shall be seeing just how disastrous that choice was for Lot and his family. Lot chose to go to Sodom where the people *were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the LORD* (13). Satan has ensnared many Christians with material things so that they have grown lukewarm in their devotion to the Lord. God says elsewhere in his Word, ‘*Those who honour me I will honour, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed*’ (1 Samuel 2:30). **Are you seeking to honour the Lord in all the choices that you make?** Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, ‘*But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you*’ (Matthew 6:33).

Lot, Abram's brother's son who dwelt in Sodom

Lot was soon to discover that he had made a very foolish decision in his selfish choice of the fertile Jordan plain. He first *pitched his tent even as far as Sodom* (13:12) but we now read of *Lot, Abram's brother's son who dwelt in Sodom* (12). He was now living in that wicked and depraved city and he paid a high price for his materialism:

- He lost his peace. *He was oppressed with the filthy conduct of the wicked, for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds* (2 Peter 2:7–8). If we neglect our walk with God to gain worldly comforts, we will lose his peace in our lives.
- He lost his possessions. God is gracious and was about to teach him that it is foolish to *trust in uncertain riches* (1 Timothy 6:17). Sodom and its neighbouring cities had been paying tribute to the king of Elam (Persia) for 12 years. When they rebelled against paying this tribute, the king and his allies attacked and defeated these cities, capturing all the people and seizing their possessions. Lot lost his freedom and all that he possessed.

Abram, a gracious and godly man, bore Lot no malice, despite his nephew's past selfishness. When he heard of Lot's plight, he hastily assembled an army to rescue him. He pursued the king of Elam and his allies to the north of Damascus. Abram was at this time staying in Mamre (Hebron; 13; 23:19). John Currid points out that the distance between Hebron and Dan is approximately 110 miles (175 kilometres). Abram and his allies continued to pursue the king of Elam's army to Hobah, north of Damascus. He rescued all the captives of Sodom and their goods were recovered. Lot had been shabby and selfish in his treatment of his uncle and he had surely reaped what he had sown (Galatians 6:7–8).

If you had been Abram would you have come to the aid of selfish Lot? Are you prepared to do good to those who have hurt or mistreated you? (see Matthew 5:44).

Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

One of Abraham's great rewards (15:1) was friendship with God (2 Chronicles 20:7; James 2:23). Friends share secrets! God had told that he would destroy the earth (6:13) and now he told Abraham that he would destroy wicked Sodom and Gomorrah (17–19; cp. Psalm 25:14; Amos 3:7). The evil deeds of these cities caused an outcry for punishment which reached to God and he sent the two angels to destroy Sodom (20; cp. 19:1,13). Abraham's descendants were to be different and the Lord wanted him to teach his children and his household to *keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice* (19).

Abraham came near to God and pleaded with him to spare Sodom if fifty righteous people could be found there. He was confident that a just God would surely refrain from destroying the righteous with the wicked. He asked, '*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*' (22–25). We are presented here with a very moving and challenging picture as Abraham interceded with God for selfish Lot and his family. After several more pleas, God promised that he would spare Sodom for the sake of just ten righteous people (26–32). The events that follow reveal that there were not even five righteous people in Sodom when God brought only Lot, his wife and two daughters out of the city.

Though Abraham was bold in his intercession, he was also humble (27, 30–32). There is all the difference in the world between friendship with God and a casual approach to God which is lacking in reverence. When we come to the Lord in prayer, we must trust in his righteous character. The Judge of all the earth will always do right, even if he does not answer our prayers in the way we expect (cp. 19:29). **There is no injustice with God and he never makes mistakes! To understand this makes all the difference when our faith is tested.**

*God shall alone the refuge be
And comfort of my mind;
Too wise to be mistaken, he,
Too good to be unkind.*

(Samuel Medley)

Is anything too hard for the LORD?

As Abraham was sitting in the door of his tent the heat of the day, he had three visitors (1–2). Two of them were angels (22; cp. 19:1) and the other Person was God himself (13, 17–22). Sarah hurriedly made some cakes and Abraham had a calf killed in order to feed his visitors. As they ate with Abraham, Sarah eavesdropped on the conversation and heard God repeat his promise that she would bear a son. She laughed within herself in unbelief and was embarrassed and afraid when the Lord challenged Abraham about her laughter (3–15). God asked Abraham, *‘Is anything too hard for the LORD?’* (14). Dale Ralph Davis points out that ‘it teaches that God will do what he has promised though it seems incredible’ (FAITH OF OUR FATHERS – EXPOSITIONS OF GENESIS 12 – 25, page 30). Humanly speaking, Sarah could not possibly bear a child, but all things are possible with God.

Are you discouraged or perplexed? Is your faith being sorely tried? Are you at a low ebb in your Christian life? Are you losing heart in prayer? Christian, remember that you belong to the almighty God. We can come with confidence in prayer to our heavenly Father because:

- He is able to do what to man seems impossible. The Lord Jesus said, *‘The things which are impossible with men are possible with God’* (Luke 18:27).
- He delights in his people and he will supply all our needs, spiritual and material (Romans 8:32; Philippians 4:19).

Come now to his throne of grace and spread your needs before him. Pour out your heart to the Lord as you bring your requests to him. He will not fail you. *‘Is anything too hard for the LORD?’*

Now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

(Ephesians 3:20–21)

God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth

Abram was met by two kings on his return from his military victory: The king of Sodom came to express his gratitude to him for rescuing him and his people (17). He was king over a wicked city, but the other king was Melchizedek, *‘king of righteousness’* (Hebrews 7:1–2).

- The king of Sodom asked Abram to return to him all the people but to keep for himself everything that he had recovered from their enemies. Abram had lifted up his hand to God (that is, he had made a vow) not to keep any of these things. He said to the king, *‘I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, “I have made Abram rich”’* (23). Abram honoured the vow that he had made to God. If we make promises to God, we must remember to keep those promises. The only recompense that Abram would accept was to cover the expenses of his young men and a rightful portion for his allies (24). Abram was a good steward of his wealth and he willingly tithed his income. Are you a good steward of all that God has given you? Are you generous in your support of the work of the Lord?

- Melchizedek was king and priest of Salem (Jerusalem; Psalm 76:2), which under his rule acknowledged the true God. Scripture has little to say concerning him but he described God as *‘God Most High’* (‘El Elyon’), *Possessor of heaven and earth’* (19). Abram went on to use the same title (22) which speaks of God as the supreme and omnipotent Creator, who is absolutely sovereign over the universe. Melchizedek blessed Abram and gave him bread and wine.

Abram gave tithes (one tenth) of all the spoil to Melchizedek whose priesthood is greater than that of Levi (Hebrews 7:1–10); **this is important, for the Lord Jesus was not from the tribe of Levi.** Jesus is *a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek* (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 6:20). He has an eternal and unchangeable priesthood and is able to save completely *all those who come to God through him, since he ever lives to make intercession for them* (Hebrews 7:14–27).

Do not be afraid

The Lord spoke to Abram in a vision following his victory over Chedorlaomer and his allies (14:17). God reassured his servant, ‘*Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward*’ (1). It would seem from Abram’s response that he was troubled because God had promised him when he was 75 years old that in him all the families of the earth would be blessed and that his descendants would be given the land of Canaan (12:3–4,7). Ten years later, he was still childless (16:3).

Abram was reverent in bringing his questions to God whom he addresses as ‘Adonai Yahweh’ (2). Dale Ralph Davis comments, ‘So Abram brings these questions and this bewilderment and this impatience and casts it all at Yahweh’s feet. Only faith would do that! Unbelief spits on promises, only faith struggles over them; unbelief dismisses promises, only faith debates them — with God. This very struggle over God’s word is the beginning of assurance’ (FAITH OF OUR FATHERS – EXPOSITIONS OF GENESIS 12 – 25, page, 50). True faith looks beyond the promises to trust in the Promiser.

God promised Abram that he would father a child who would be his heir and confirmed his promise by covenant (4,18–19). The Lord brought Abram outside his tent and told him to look up to the heavens and count the stars in the vast universe if he were able. God promised, ‘*So shall your descendants be*’ (5). Though he was an old man, Abram believed God’s promise and trusted in the Lord who *accounted it to him for righteousness* (6). The apostle Paul quotes this verse to show that salvation is not of works, but comes from trusting in the Lord Jesus who died and rose from the dead for our forgiveness and justification (Romans 4:1–4, 19–25).

Are you being tormented by fear or anxiety? **Remember, God does not change.** He still speaks kind words of comfort to his discouraged saints as they read his Word or hear it preached. Cast *all your care upon him, for he cares for you* (1 Peter 5:7).

I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant

God had changed the name of Abram (5) and now told him that Sarai’s name should be changed to ‘*Sarah*’ (both names mean ‘princess’). The Lord had been promised Abraham a son and he said that Sarah would bear this son. She would be a mother of nations and kings would descend from her (15–16; cp. verses 5 and 6).

Abraham fell prostrate on his face in response to the words of God and laughed (17; cp. verse 3). John Currid comments, ‘It is, however, not a deed of total resignation: as Abraham bows before Yahweh, he also laughs. It is difficult to know what type of laughter this is, whether it is of joy, disbelief or confusion. Mixed emotions on Abraham’s part may in fact be the correct interpretation (COMMENTARY ON GENESIS, Volume 1, page 317). Matthew Henry writes in his commentary, that this was ‘a laughter of delight, not of distrust’. He links this verse in Genesis with John 8:56 where Abraham is seen as rejoicing to see Christ’s day (‘he saw Christ in the promise of Isaac’). He also points out that Abraham *did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief* (Romans 4:20).

Abraham said in his heart, ‘*Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?*’ He then said to God, ‘*Oh, that Ishmael might live before you!*’ (18). The Lord knew what Abraham was thinking and told him that Sarah would indeed bear him a son who was to be named *Isaac* (meaning ‘he laughs’). He promised, ‘*I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him*’ (19) and that Isaac would be born the following year. Isaac was the child of the covenant but Ishmael would not be forgotten. God had blessed him and a great nation would descend from him, but the Lord repeated that he would establish his covenant with Isaac (20–21).

Abraham obeyed the command of God and circumcised himself and all the males in his household (23–27). **Obedience to the Word of God is a vital evidence of faith in God.**

I am Almighty God; walk before me and be blameless

There is a gap of thirteen years between the birth of Ishmael (16:16) and the Lord's appearance to Abraham when he was ninety-nine years old. The Lord said to Abram, '*I am Almighty God; walk before me and be blameless*' (1). The Hebrew 'El Shaddai' translated '*Almighty God*' is a very old word which is shrouded in obscurity. It is linked with the Hebrew verb 'Shadad' meaning 'to devastate'. God has devastating power! Others point out that 'Shaddai' in its singular form 'Shad' is used for a woman's breast. H.F. Stevenson observes, 'El Shaddai is a very tender title, used of God only in relation to his children. To her baby, the mother is the all-sufficient one. At her breast he nestles, warm and secure, and there finds his sustenance. God is the Succourer and Satisfier of his people' (TITLES OF THE TRIUNE GOD – published 1955, Marshall Morgan & Scott).

The word '*covenant*' is found thirteen times in this chapter. The Lord confirmed his covenant and repeated his promises that he would give Abram many descendants and be God to him and to them; he would give them the land of Canaan (4–8). The Lord changed his name from Abram (meaning 'high father') to Abraham (meaning '*a father of many nations*') and gave circumcision as the sign of the covenant (5, 10–11).

Some Jewish believers in the early church insisted that Gentile Christians must submit to the rite of circumcision in order to be saved. Such teaching was a perversion of the gospel. The important thing is spiritual circumcision which is a work of grace in the heart (Romans 2:28–29; Galatians 5:1–6).

We too have a special relationship with God through the new covenant. The Almighty is our God (8) and he lovingly cares for us and watches over us. The Lord also lays great responsibilities upon us and his word to Abraham is also for us: '*I am Almighty God; walk before me and be blameless*' (1). **It is the Lord's will that our lives are beyond reproach so that we shine as lights in this crooked and perverse world** (Philippians 2:14–15).

The LORD made a covenant with Abram

The Lord not only promised Abram that he would have an heir in his old age, but also that he would give him the land of Canaan as an inheritance (7). Abram asked, '*Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?*' (8). The Lord assured him by making a covenant with him. He told Abram to bring a three year old heifer, goat and ram, a turtledove and a pigeon to him as a sacrifice. He cut in two the carcasses of the animals (10); this was the normal way of sealing a covenant (cp. Jeremiah 34:18).

At sunset, Abram fell into a deep sleep and *horror and great darkness fell upon him* (12). God then told him of the terrible bondage and affliction that his descendants would suffer in Egypt, and that he would judge their oppressors, and bring out his people with great possessions. The four hundred years (12–14) is a round figure; the precise period was four hundred and thirty years (Exodus 12:40–41). The Lord promised Abram that he would die in peace at a good old age (15). His descendants would go to Canaan from Egypt, once the wickedness of the Amorites who inhabited Canaan had to run its course (16). God would use his people as an instrument of judgment to destroy them. When the sun went down and it was dark, the Lord in a smoking fire-pot and a flaming torch, passed between the divided carcasses of the animals that had been sacrificed (17).

God deals with us by covenant; he made a covenant with Noah (chapter 9). We now read that *the LORD made a covenant with Abram* (18). **Every Christian is joined to God by a better covenant which is sealed with the precious blood of Christ (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:6)**. We live in evil times but let us remember that God is in control of all things. The Lord Jesus Christ will put an end to all wickedness when he comes again as King and Judge.

*A debtor to mercy alone,
Of covenant mercies I sing;
Nor fear, with thy righteousness on,
My person and offering to bring.* (Augustus Toplady)

Abram heeded the voice of Sarai

Abram had been ten years in Canaan and was now eighty-five years old (3; cp. 12:4). God had promised him a son but Sarai had not conceived and she was becoming impatient. She reasoned that if Abram took her maidservant Hagar as a wife, this would give her a child. This was a grievous mistake! Though she sounded spiritual when she acknowledged that God had restrained her from child-bearing, her reasoning was carnal (2).

Abram was foolish when he *heeded the voice of Sarai* (2). We must be prepared to listen to any advice given to us, but always judge that counsel in the light of the teaching of the Bible. We must never take any advice that would lead us into doing anything that is sinful. Abram did not follow God's pattern for marriage (2:24) which rules out polygamy and there is no indication that he called on the Lord as was his usual practice.

Once Hagar had conceived, she began to despise Sarai and there was strife in the home (4–5). It is very sad to observe the indifference of Abram to the heartlessness of Sarai in her dealings with Hagar (6). When believers stray from the Lord, they are quite capable of behaving in the most appalling manner.

We may feel impatient when Heaven appears to be silent or indifferent to our prayers. We cannot manipulate God and we must not attempt to do so. **Have you become impatient? Listen to what God says to you:** *The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD* (Lamentations 3:25–26). – *Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord ... You also be patient* (James 5:7–8).

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.* (William Cowper)

You-Are-The-God-Who-Sees

Hagar fled from Sarai, going in the direction of Egypt on *the way to Shur and the Angel of the LORD found her* (7).^{*} God is far kinder than his people. He sent his angel to speak to the dejected and distraught Hagar. He did not give her an easy way out of her trouble. She was to return to her mistress and submit to her. He then told her that he would multiply her descendants so that it would not be possible to count them. He also said to her, *'You shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael* (which means 'God hears') *because the LORD has heard your affliction'* (11). It appears that she told Abram that God had said that her son was to be named Ishmael: *Abram named his son whom Hagar bore, Ishmael* (15).

Ishmael became the father of the Arab race and there is still animosity between the Jews, who are descended from Isaac, and the Arabs. If we belong to the Lord, we are *all one in Christ Jesus*. The racial barriers and divisions are broken down (Galatians 3:26–29; Ephesians 2:11–16). We are first and foremost citizens of heaven, belonging to the kingdom of God (Philippians 3:20; Colossians 1:13).

There are times when affliction may be so great that we do not know how to pray but our very suffering cries out to God (cp. Exodus 2:23–25). God told Hagar, *'The LORD has heard your affliction'* (11). Grateful Hagar called the name of the Lord, *'You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees'* (13). *The eye of the LORD is on those who fear him* (Psalm 33:18). Have you been hurt by the shameful treatment of another person? Have you suffered the unkind words of another Christian? **The Lord hears your affliction and your sighs (11) and he sees you through eyes of great love.** He will give you grace to endure these trials and he will bring you through them if you trust in him and cast your burden upon him (Psalm 55:22).

^{*} *'The Angel of the LORD'* is more than an angel – He is called God elsewhere in Scripture (Judges 6:11–16; 13:3,21–22). Many Bible commentators believe that *'the Angel of the LORD'* describes the Lord Jesus as he appeared to men in Old Testament times before he came to earth at Bethlehem.