

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

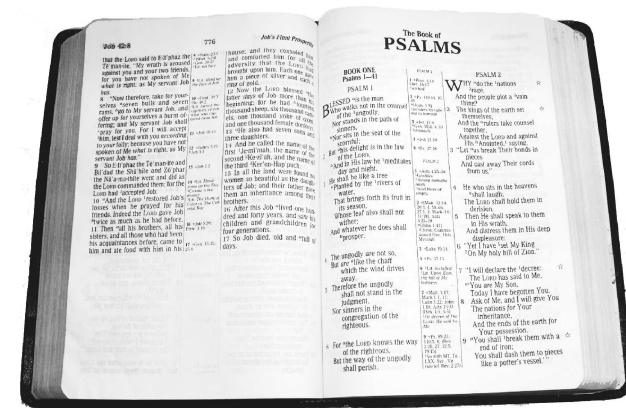
After the death of Sarah Abraham was concerned that Isaac, now approaching forty, should find a wife from his own people (1-4). He did not want his son to be unequally yoked with a Canaanite. This vital principle still holds – we must not marry an unbeliever (2 Corinthians 6:14; cp. 1 Corinthians 7:39 – *only in the Lord*). Abraham solemnly charged his chief servant in whom he had great trust to go to his own country and kindred to find a wife for Isaac. The servant was fearful that any prospective bride would refuse to return with him, but Abraham was confident that God would send his angel ahead of him (2-8).

The servant went to the city of Nahor in Mesopotamia (Haran – 27:43; 29:4) and arriving at a well he did the essential thing; he prayed for God’s success in his venture (12). He also asked for a token to confirm his choice of a bride for Isaac (14). Notice that he wasn’t so much concerned to look for someone with outward beauty, but for someone with a thoughtful and kind character. God answered him before he finished praying (15). He watched in amazed 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 Rebekah was related to Abraham (24; cp. 11:27). God had wonderfully answered him and *the man bowed down his head and worshipped the LORD* (26).

Worship and prayerful dependence upon God are essential if we would prove him in our lives (12,27). Isaac was also involved in spiritual exercise when he first met Rebekah (63). 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). **Oh, the joy and happiness that God bestows on those who walk in the way of trust and obedience!** The servant’s journey was successful because he had committed his way to the Lord (cp. Psalm 37:5). May we do likewise.

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 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).**

In what way did God remember Noah and all the living creatures in the ark? He caused the waters to recede until the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat (1–4). Noah sent out a raven which did not return to the ark. He later sent out a dove which returned to him. Seven days later it was sent out and returned with an olive leaf in her mouth. The dove was again sent out after a further seven days and it did not return to the ark. 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* (21). These verses foreshadow the great offering of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross which was a pleasing aroma to God (Ephesians 5:2). His sacrifice was a propitiation for sin which appeased the wrath of God against sinners to bring us peace and reconciliation (Romans 3:24–26; 5:1, 8–11). Let us give thanks for our great salvation.

*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 believing loved ones go to be with the Lord when they die but this does not exclude 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 the land and the cave to him as a gift, but Abraham insisted on paying. He was not a man to take advantage of a neighbour’s generosity when he had ample means to pay for the things that he needed (4–18).

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. He has prepared a place for us where there will be indescribable and everlasting joy (John 14:3). Our problem is that we are too prone to make ourselves at home in this world and we do not long for heaven and lay up treasures there. **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 saw 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.* The patriarch named 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 those 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 in 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 just how much he loves you. He tenderly cares for you and he will provide for you.** He will bring you through the darkest night in your experience.

*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 to 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*’ (1–3, 7; cp. Genesis 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 it was permitted to kill animals, God stressed to Noah the sanctity of human life. Man is made in the image of God and murder is an offence which 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. We know that 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.

The word ‘*covenant*’ is found seven times between 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 the animal kingdom. The rainbow was given as a token of this covenant in which God promised that he would never again destroy the earth by a flood (8–11). 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

These verses make very sad reading. Noah took up farming and planted a vineyard. A worthwhile occupation became the occasion of sin in the life of Noah. 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. They were shocked and they went backwards into their father's tent so as not to 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 Israel who were descended from Shem. Canaan became the servant of Shem as prophesied by Noah (22–27).

Noah 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 another three hundred years, 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* (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 that lonely 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 believing that God knew what he was doing with him.
- He trusted in God's promises which can never fail (God 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 to remain with the donkey, saying to them, *'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 to God and he asked where it was. His father replied 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).

God is with you in all that you do

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 no doubt remembered the deceit of Abraham recorded in 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 (though the same problem was to arise again (see 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). God is the everlasting God who will never be toppled from his throne. What a marvellous privilege it is to have the Lord with us in all that we do just as he was with Abraham! How wonderful to enjoy his smile upon our lives! Are you seeking to serve God and to please him? **Are those in your home or at your place of work able to see that the Lord is with you in all that you do?**

*How blest is life if lived for thee,
My loving Saviour and my Lord;
No pleasures that the world can give
Such perfect gladness can afford.*

*All day to walk beneath thy smile,
Watching thine eye to guide me still,
To rest at night beneath thy care
Guarded by thee from every ill.*

(author unknown)

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 in his commentary on Genesis 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; they speak of groups of people). The reason for the division of the nations (32) is given in the next chapter.

One of the descendants of Ham was Nimrod. *He 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 such a view and describes him as ‘the first author of tyranny’. John Currid writes that his name probably means ‘Let us rebel.’ Nimrod was not only a great hunter but also a great ruler (10) and a great builder, founding the cities of Babel (Babylon) 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

The end of this chapter contains a more detailed list of the descendants of Shem (10–32) but we are going to concentrate our thoughts on the first nine verses. The people of Babel built their city and great tower saying, ‘*Let us make a name for ourselves*’ (4). Like many sinners, they did not feel secure and they were fearful of being scattered. The tower of Babel was probably used for the worship of pagan deities. 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). Pride was their undoing! Satan fell through pride when he tried to usurp the place of God (Isaiah 14:12; 1 Timothy 3:6). Pride was also the undoing of Adam and Eve when the devil promised, ‘*You will be like God*’ (Genesis 3:5). God hates pride (James 4:6); it is the spirit of the antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:4).

We must shun selfish ambition, wanting to make a name for ourselves. 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).

*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)

Abram is introduced to us in the closing verses of this chapter (27–32) and from him the human ancestry of the Lord Jesus is traced (Matthew 1:1). The Lord Jesus, *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?**

Cast out this bondwoman and her son

In Bible times children were normally weaned at the age of two or three years and the occasion was often accompanied by a family feast. Abraham made such a feast when Isaac was weaned (8). Trouble was not far away, however. Ishmael was now sixteen or seventeen years old and he showed his antagonism to Sarah and Isaac by laughing, probably in a mocking manner.

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). The patriarch was displeased (the Hebrew could be translated ‘distressed’) when he heard the words of Sarah. The Lord told Abraham not to let this distress him but to do as Sarah wished in this matter. 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 but she thought that she 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 was merciful and heard Hagar’s prayer and the voice of Ishmael (13–21).

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. *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). It is impossible for God to lie (Titus 1:2). The promises of God's Word are always 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. Sarah had laughed with unbelief and a sense of helplessness a year earlier (18:12–13). The long years of yearning and bitter 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. Here is Sarah at ninety years of age exclaiming, *'God has made me laugh'* (6). The meaning of Isaac is 'he laughs' and the elderly parents were given much joy.

Christians should not be miserable. We may be serious in our devotion and obedience to God; we may go through times of sorrow and perplexity, but we will come through it all with laughter. We are pilgrims who are going to heaven, the happy home of God, of the angels, and of his people. We can look forward to a bright tomorrow when there will be no more sorrow, pain, death or tears (Revelation 21:3–5). The Bible urges us, *'Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say rejoice!'* (Philippians 4:4). We will have more joy if we learn to count our blessings and seek a closer walk with God.

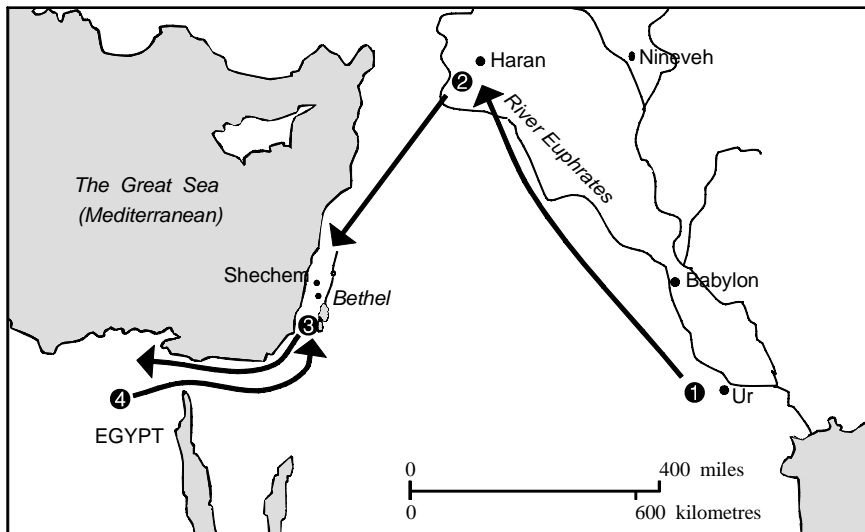
There he built an altar to the LORD

Abram was a worshipper of false gods (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.

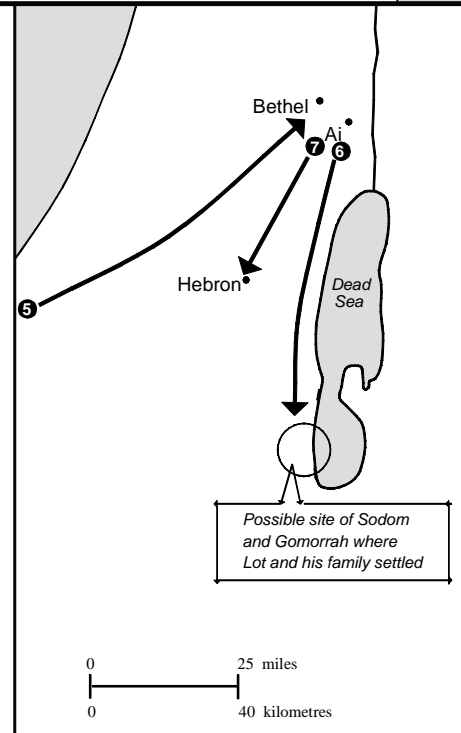
The Lord Jesus came through Abram's line and he brings blessing to all nations. We would be lost and without hope but for his coming into the world. He is the Saviour of Jew and Gentile (Galatians 3:26–29). What great blessings we have in him (Ephesians 1:3–7)! Christians are spiritual heirs of Abram 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).

It seems that Terah, Abram's father, insisted on going with him and they settled in Haran (11:31–32). God had to remove Terah (through death) before Abram was able to do exactly as the Lord told him (1–4). **We must never allow human relationships to come between us and obedience to God's will.**

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 a city not with a tower reaching to 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 testimony which proclaimed the name of the Lord to 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 moved on from ‘there’ (Mamre, near Hebron; 18:1), travelling to Gerar, a Philistine town (cp. 26:1). The Bible does not hide the failings of the godly and this chapter contains 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 did not trust in God in God. He was again afraid that he would be killed so that a king would be free to take Sarah as a wife.

If God had not intervened, Abimelech, king of Gerar, would have married Sarah. God warned him in a dream, of judgment, if he were to marry Sarah (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 king 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 and he obeyed the Lord.

Abraham must have felt very ashamed as the king rebuked him and asked him why he had resorted to such a deception (1–10). 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 but he now saw that God does intervene in the affairs of men. The irony in Abimelech’s words to Sarah is quite apparent as he refers to Abraham as her brother (16). Abraham prayed for Abimelech because God had closed every womb in his household because of Sarah and God heard his prayer ((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.** We must always be on our guard against the wiles of Satan who will attack us when we least expect it (Matthew 26:41).

He and his two daughters dwelt in a cave

Lot had pleaded with the angels to be allowed to settle in the nearby city of Zoar (17–22). He did not remain in Zoar for long, however, because he was afraid to dwell there. 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; cp. verse 17).

Lot's life is an illustration of the warning in 1 Timothy 6:10: *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.* Lot had made a selfish choice when he chose for himself the fertile plain of the Jordan (13:11). He had 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). 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. Lot had exposed his family to the evil influences of Sodom in his quest for prosperity and he reaped a bitter harvest. We must be prayerful and thoughtful in our decision making. Satan is always looking for ways to ensnare us. Let us always *make it our aim ... to be well pleasing to him* who loved us and gave himself for us (2 Corinthians 5:9).

*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 was a time, however, when his faith faltered. He had trusted God to take a step into the unknown when the Lord told him to go to Canaan. We may wonder why Abram did not trust in the Lord to provide for him during the severe famine that struck Canaan.

God did not direct him to go to Egypt and Abram was well aware of a problem that he would face there. Sarai was a beautiful woman (11,14) he feared that the Egyptians would kill him if they found out that Sarai was his wife and then claim her for Pharaoh. Abram reasoned, *'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 stepsister (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?** God had promised that he would make him a great nation (2). The purposes of the Almighty cannot be thwarted by Pharaoh or by Abram's sin.

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 diseases on Pharaoh and his household. When the king discovered the truth about Sarai, he rebuked Abram and sent them both away (14–20). Abram did not build an altar in Egypt. Had he forgotten the faithfulness and promises of God?

Let us always be alert! If we fail to believe God's promises and are ashamed to confess Christ to those around us, we too will fail. If you are a Christian, your faith will be tested. Do not reason about the things that might or might not happen to you if you make a stand for Christ. Trust in God who controls everything that will happen to you. *The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe* (Proverbs 29:25).

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 Egypt as a wealthy man. There is another very important lesson for us in these verses. Abraham *went on his journey from the south 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). What should we do when we have backslidden and failed the Lord? We must retrace our steps and repent of the sins that have overtaken us. We must go back to where we were at the beginning to make a fresh start, and call on the name of the Lord. 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).

Is the Lord speaking to you? Have you grown cold in your love for him? Do you recognise that you are a spiritual ‘has-been’ and that this is a terrible and miserable state in which to find yourself? 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)

Call on the name of the Lord and repent of your backsliding. The Lord is gracious. He will accept you and restore to you the joy of your salvation.

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 nuclear explosion. You would seek to get as far away as possible, as quickly as possible.

After Lot entered Zoar, the Lord rained down brimstone and fire (burning sulphur) on the wicked cities of the Jordan plain (24). *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 his wife looked back behind him, and she became a pillar of salt* (26). She had greater privileges than her neighbours in Sodom because she knew what God expected of her. Her heart was taken up with the things of the world and she defied God and rebelled against his word of warning. God’s Word warns us against loving the world (1 John 2:15–17). How foolish to imagine that God will not punish disobedience! Let me ask you, ‘Is your heart right with God, or are you careless and disobedient to his Word?’ ‘*Remember Lot’s wife.*’

He lingered

Lot was now living in the heart of Sodom (1–2). He did not realise that the two men who had arrived in Sodom were angels. He urged them to spend the night under his roof 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. They 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.

The angels urged Lot to leave the city with his family. He did not have a very convincing testimony before the men who were betrothed to his daughters (the meaning of the words '*his sons-in-law*'). His warning of judgment was taken as a joke (12–14). As morning dawned, Lot was still in no hurry to leave Sodom. As *he lingered* the angels took him with his wife and two daughters and set him outside the city, *the LORD being merciful to him* (15–16). Lot lingered in Sodom. He wanted the best of both worlds but that was impossible. We know that Lot was unhappy in Sodom (see 2 Peter 2:7–9). The things of this world cannot bring lasting satisfaction. **Are you lingering in a spiritual wilderness?** Have you lost the joy which you had when you first knew the Lord? Oh, return to him! He is merciful and he will restore to you the joy of your salvation.

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 could not shake off certain members of the family. He first lost his father through death, and he now separated himself from his nephew, Lot. Both of them had so prospered that there was insufficient pasture land for their livestock and there was contention between their herdsmen. Godly Abram, the senior partner, became the peacemaker and gave 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 and built another 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 a Christian 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 your choices?** 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 materialistic attitude:

- 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 refused to continue to pay this tribute, the king and his allies attacked and defeated these cities. They captured all the people and 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 which was by Hebron (13; 23:19). John Currid points out that the distance between Hebron and Dan is approximately 175 kilometres (110 miles). Abram and his allies continued to pursue the invaders 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?

The two men were angels (16; 19:1) and they departed for Sodom. The other 'man' was God himself (18:2). 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 Noah that he would destroy the earth (6:13) and now he shared a secret with Abraham, telling him that he would destroy wicked Sodom and Gomorrah (17–19; cp. Psalm 25:14; Amos 3:7). The evil deeds of the cities caused an outcry which reached to God and he sent the two angels to Sodom to destroy it (20; cp. 19:1,13). The Lord also wanted Abraham to teach his descendants 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 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 relaxing in the heat of the day, he had three visitors (1–2). Who were they? 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 a question, ‘*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, Abraham and Sarah were in an impossible situation, but all things are possible with God.

Are you perplexed or discouraged? Is your faith receiving a battering? Are you at a low ebb in your Christian life? Are you losing heart in prayer? Oh, remember that you belong to the almighty God. We can come with confidence to our heavenly Father in prayer 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 victory. The king of Sodom came to express his gratitude to him for rescuing him and his people. Melchizedek, king of Salem, came to bless him. One was king over a wicked city, the other was the ‘king of righteousness’ (the meaning of ‘Melchizedek’ – Hebrews 7:1–2). Melchizedek was also a priest who refreshed Abram and those with him with bread and wine. Scripture has little to say concerning Melchizedek but there is a prophecy of Christ in the Psalms who is *a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek* (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 6:20). The Lord Jesus 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).

Notice the title that Melchizedek uses to describe God: ‘*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. What a great encouragement it is to know that we belong to him and that he is for us (cp. Romans 8:31).

Abram gave tithes (one tenth) of all the spoil to Melchizedek. He refused the king of Sodom’s offer that he should keep everything that he had recovered from their enemies. He had lifted up his hand to God (that is, he had made an oath) and had vowed, ‘*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 when we need his help, 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). He had such a different attitude to wealth compared with Lot who sought to be rich and prosperous. Abram was also 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?**

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 ten years earlier that in him all the families of the earth would be blessed and that his descendants would be given the land of Canaan ((12:3,7) but he was still childless and God’s promise had not yet been fulfilled (2–3).

The promises of God are great and very precious to the Christian (2 Peter 1:4), but at times these promises seem to be remote and unreal. The Lord has promised never to leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), but he seems distant from us; he promises his surpassing peace (Philippians 4:7), but we are torn apart by trouble and distress. God will fulfil his promises and we need to be patient and to cast ourselves on the Lord as Abram did. There are many promises that we will not receive while on earth but we are to embrace them and rejoice in them (Romans 8:18; Hebrews 11:13).

God promised Abram that he would father a child who would be his heir and confirmed his promise by covenant (4,18). The Lord took Abram outside and told him to look toward heaven and count the stars in the vast universe which too numerous for him to do so. 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. *Casting 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 the patriarch that Sarai’s name should be changed to *Sarah* (both names mean ‘princess’). Abraham had been promised a son and the Lord told him that Sarah would bear this son. She would be a mother of nations and kings would descend from her (15–16).

Abraham fell prostrate on his face in response to the words of God (17; cp. verse 3); this reflects submission. 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.’ In his commentary, Matthew Henry differs, writing 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 had established 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

Thirteen years had passed since the birth of Ishmael (16:16) and now the Lord again appeared to Abram when he was ninety-nine years of age. Both Sarai and himself were much older and Sarai was still childless. 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. This title links it 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 promise that Abram would have many descendants. The Lord changed his name from Abram (which means 'high father') to Abraham (meaning '*a father of many nations*') and gave circumcision as the sign of the covenant (5–14). Some Jewish believers in New Testament times 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 instructed Abram to bring clean animals and birds as a sacrifice. He cut in two the carcasses of the heifer, goat and ram, but not the two birds. The dividing of the animals (10) 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 Abram of the terrible bondage and affliction that would befall his descendants in Egypt and how he would judge their oppressors and bring out his people with great possessions. The four hundred years is a round figure; the precise period was four hundred and thirty years (12–14; cp. Exodus 12:40–41). The Lord promised Abram that he would die in peace at a good old age (15). His descendants would return to Canaan after their bondage in Egypt, once the iniquity of the Amorites was complete (16). The Amorites are the various tribes who inhabited Canaan and their wickedness had to run its course before God would use his people as an instrument of judgment to destroy them.

God deals with us by covenant. He made a covenant with Noah (chapter 9). We read in this chapter, *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 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. It will be a wonderful day for those who love him, but a day of terror to those who do not know him. Are you ready (Matthew 24:44)?

*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. Sarai reasoned that she could have children by giving her maidservant Hagar to Abram as a wife. Hagar could then become a surrogate mother to give her children. This was a grievous mistake and though her conversation sounded spiritual as she acknowledged that God had restrained her from child-bearing, her reasoning was carnal.

And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai (2). He was foolish to do so! This reminds us that Adam also heeded the voice of Eve and ate the forbidden fruit with disastrous consequences (Genesis 2:17). We must be prepared to listen to the advice of others, but always judge that advice 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. There is no indication that Abram called on the Lord as was his usual practice. The neglect of prayer made him more vulnerable to sin. 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 and headed 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 find the depressed and dejected Hagar and he listened to her complaint. He did not give Hagar 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). Have you been hurt by the shameful treatment of another person? Have you suffered the unkind words of another Christian? **The Lord hears your sighs and your affliction (11) and he sees you through eyes of great love.** Do not despair but trust in your Saviour who loves you and watches over you. He will give you grace to endure these trials and he will bring you through them. *The eye of the LORD is on those who fear him* (Psalm 33:18).

* *'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.