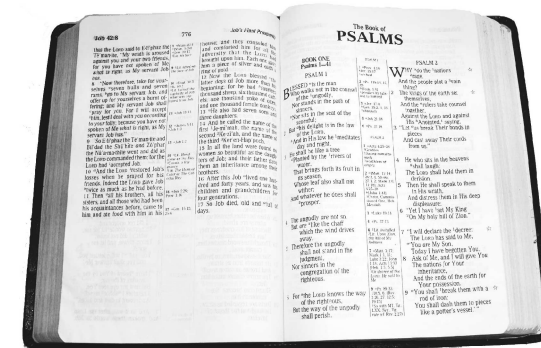


PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



December 2013

Genesis chapters 14 to 29

Book	Date
Joel	July 2010
Amos	November 2010
Obadiah	November 2010
Jonah	July 2011
Micah	July 2011
Nahum	July 2011
Habakkuk	August 2011
Zephaniah	December 2011
Haggai	January 2012
Zechariah	February 2012
Malachi	June 2012
Matthew	March to August 2012
Mark	February to April 2009
Luke	October, November 2013; February, March 2014
John	January to March 2011
Acts	June to August 2009
Romans	October to December 2009
1 Corinthians	February to April 2010
2 Corinthians	June, July 2010
Galatians	October 2010
Ephesians	May, June 2011
Philippians	September, October 2011
Colossians	December 2011
1 Thessalonians	October 2012
2 Thessalonians	November 2012
1 Timothy	December 2012
2 Timothy	March 2013
Titus	March 2013
Philemon	June 2013
Hebrews	June, July 2013
James	April, May 2008
1 & 2 Peter	July 2008
1, 2 & 3 John	September 2008
Jude	September 2008
Revelation	November, December 2008

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Regular notes began publication in 1990. Following the completion of notes for the whole Bible, there have since been two revisions to improve the notes.

'Through the Bible in a year' (selected readings from every book) was published in 1989 and 1996.

Bible Reading Notes Index 2006 to 2013

Book	Date
Genesis	November, December 2013; January 2014
Exodus	September to November 2006;
Leviticus	August to October 2012
Numbers	July, August 2007;
Deuteronomy	October to December 2007
Joshua	October & November 2008
Judges	January, February 2009
Ruth	February 2009
1 Samuel	August to October 2009
2 Samuel	January, February 2010
1 Kings	May, June 2010
2 Kings	August, September 2010
1 Chronicles	August, September 2011
2 Chronicles	October, November 2011
Ezra	January 2012
Nehemiah	May 2012
Esther	May, June 2012
Job	March to May 2011
Psalms 1–41	June 05; July 2006 November, December 2012 (Psalms 1–16) March, May, June 2013 (Psalms 17 to 23)
42 to 72	July, Dec 2006; March, April, Dec 2007; January 2008; June 2008
73 to 89	June 2008; April, May 2009; Dec 2009
90 to 106	December 2009, April, May 2010
107 to 119	September, November, December 2010
120 to 150	July, December 2011; January, February, June 2012
Proverbs	January, February 2013
Ecclesiastes	March 2008
Song of Solomon	April 2013
Isaiah	April, May; August, September 2013
Jeremiah	January to March 2007
Lamentations	April 2007
Ezekiel	April to June 2008
Daniel	August 2008
Hosea	May 2009

1 DECEMBER

Genesis 14:1–17

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

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?**

When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved

Leah had *delicate* eyes (17; ‘weak’ – margin); this may indicate a soreness of her eyes which disfigured her. John Currid understands this differently, pointing out that the Hebrew word indicates that Leah had pretty eyes, but Rachel was beautiful in her whole appearance. Jacob’s affection and love was centred on Rachel who was very beautiful (17,30). Can you imagine the heartache and misery of Leah? Jacob had never intended to marry her and he showed her little affection or care. She rightly felt unwanted and unloved. The Lord is very gracious and good. He loved Leah! *When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb* (31; Hebrew word translated ‘unloved’ = ‘hated’). John Calvin comments, ‘Moses here shows that Jacob’s extravagant love was corrected by the Lord’ (COMMENTARY ON GENESIS, Banner of Truth reprint, page 134). John Currid adds, ‘Leah deserves honour from her husband. And if he will not give it to her, then Yahweh will bestow glory on her because it is from her progeny that the chosen seed (i.e. the Messiah) will come’.

A grateful Leah acknowledged the Lord’s goodness to her in giving her children (32–33,35; 30:17–20). Her unhappiness in marriage certainly brought her closer to the Lord and she found happiness in her children (30:20). We must not imagine that unhappy marriages are only found among non-Christians. There are Christians who would identify with Leah in feeling unloved by their spouse and some have even been deserted by them. The Lord’s word is quite clear – *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it* (Ephesians 5:25). We have no excuses for disobeying God’s word. Husbands must always remember their promise to love their wives that they made in the presence of God at their wedding, **Satan is working hard to destroy Christian marriages. Let us be determined not give him any opportunity to do so with us.**

If you are no longer loved by your husband (or wife), remember that the Lord sees that you are unloved. He loves you with an eternal, unchanging love. Trust in him through your tears.

Why then have you deceived me?

God had promised to be with Jacob (28:15) and Jacob soon found this to be true in the way that the Lord led him to Rachel. When he arrived in Padan Aram, he stopped at a well and met some shepherds who were waiting to water their flocks. When he discovered that they were from Haran, he asked them if they knew *Laban the son of Nahor* ('the descendant of Nahor'; 5).

As he spoke to them, Rachel, who was a shepherdess, arrived to water her sheep. The shepherds told Jacob that the young woman was the younger daughter of Laban and on her arrival Jacob rolled the stone from the mouth of the well and gave water to her sheep. He wept with joy as he introduced himself to Rachel and embraced her. God had led him to the very well where Rachel watered her sheep! **There are no 'chance' happenings in the life of a child of God.** He leads and directs us in all our ways, in joy and in sorrow.

Jacob was welcomed into Laban's home and spent a month working for him. He fell in love with Rachel and offered to serve Laban for seven years for her hand in marriage. Laban readily agreed but at the end of the seven years he tricked Jacob into marrying her elder sister, Leah. Jacob reproached Laban saying, '*Why then have you deceived me?*' (25). Jacob who had deceived his own father when his eyes were veiled with blindness (27:35) was now deceived by his own father-in-law into taking a bride whom he could not distinguish from her sister because she was veiled.

Laban asked Jacob to fulfil Leah's week (27; – that is the seven days of marriage festivities, cp. Judges 14:12). If Jacob did this, he would be allowed to marry Rachel quietly without ceremony at the end of the week and then serve Laban a further seven years. Jacob was appeased by this promise and submitted to the wretched and degrading situation which Laban had forced upon him. **Jacob was reaping what he had sown! He discovered that though the Lord freely forgives our sins, we may still suffer the consequences of those sins.**

Do not be afraid

Abram had just enjoyed a great victory (chapter 14), but it appears that after this he was troubled by fear (1). Satan often attacks us following times of blessing, for it is at such times that we are least on our guard. It was after his great victory over the prophets of Baal that Elijah experienced an attack of the devil (1 Kings 19:1–4). God reassured his servant, '*Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward*' (1). God was his protector ('*shield*'); why should he fear? We all have fears from time to time and need the Lord's assurance (eg. Joshua 1:9; Luke 1:13,30; Acts 18:9).

*A sovereign protector I have,
Unseen, yet for ever at hand,
Unchangeably faithful to save,
Almighty to rule and command.
He smiles and my comforts abound;
His grace as the dew shall descend
And walls of salvation surround
The soul he delights to defend.*

(Augustus M. Toplady)

Abram may have been afraid because he was still childless and God's promise had not yet been fulfilled (2–3; cp. 12:1–3). The Lord told him that he would father a child who would be his heir and confirmed his promise by covenant (4–5). 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).

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. We saw earlier this month that 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 in the new covenant which has many precious and wonderful promises from God who is totally committed to all who belong to him (Hebrews 8:6).** We live in evil times but the Lord 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)?

How awesome is this place!

Isaac readily agreed with Rebekah’s wish to send Jacob away to find a wife from her own family and he blessed Jacob before sending him on his journey (1–5). Esau realised that his marriage to Canaanite women had upset his parents and heard his father instructing Jacob that he must not marry a Canaanite. He hoped that by marrying a daughter of Ishmael (who was descended from Abraham) he would please Isaac, but it was too late to reverse his previous folly (8–9).

Jacob not only left home to find an acceptable wife (1–2, 6–7) but also to escape Esau’s wrath and revenge (27:42–43). The Lord appeared to him in a dream and repeated the covenant promises made to Abraham and to Isaac. He told Jacob, ‘*Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go*’ (14–15; cp. 22:17–18; 26:3–5). Jacob did not deserve such kindness from God, but the Lord is full of grace and he bestows on us favour which we do not deserve. Among our great privileges as Christians is the promise that God is with us and that he watches over us (Hebrews 13:5–6).

True spiritual experience brings with it a reverent fear of the Lord. Jacob exclaimed, ‘*How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven*’ (17). Oh, that we reminded ourselves more often of this whenever we worship the Lord. Do we feel that we are on the threshold of heaven when we come to the house of God? (cp. Hebrews 12:22–24, 28–29).

Jacob made a vow that if the Lord would be with him to keep him and provide for him, then he would serve him and give him back a tenth of everything that God gave him (22). Should Christians tithe (give a tenth of their income) to God? If Jacob tithed as a token of his love to the Lord, dare we give less? (cp. Malachi 3:8–10). If we rob God of our tithes and offerings, we impoverish his work and deprive ourselves of the blessings that he so freely gives to those who are bountiful. **Is the Lord waiting for you to prove him in this matter? God loves a cheerful giver** (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Have you only one blessing, my father?

Jacob had hardly left his father when Esau returned from his hunting. Isaac was greatly troubled when he discovered what had happened and an angry and bitter Esau reflected that Jacob's behaviour was true to his name. *'Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!'* (30–36).

Isaac could no longer give the intended blessing to Esau who wept with anguish and cried out, *'Have you only one blessing, my father?'* (37–38). Esau by his past carelessness in disposing of his birthright had forfeited his entitlement to the blessing, but Isaac gave him a blessing of sorts. We saw yesterday that Esau had also grieved his parents by marrying ungodly women (46; compare 26:34–35; 28:8). There is only one way to blessing. We must obey God's word.

Esau was burning with hatred for Jacob and he said in his heart that he would kill him after his father's death. It is obvious that Esau made known the thoughts of his heart because Rebekah heard that he planned to kill Jacob once Isaac died. She urged Jacob to leave home in order to escape his brother's fury and revenge (41–42). She also told Isaac of her desire to see Jacob marry a wife from her own people because of the sorrow that Esau's ungodly wives had brought to the family (46).

She thought that Jacob would only be away from home for a short time until his brother's anger subsided. She would then be able to send word for him to return home (43–45). The short time became twenty years (31:41) and there isn't any evidence that Rebekah ever saw Jacob again. Rebekah learned the hard way that it is foolish to resort to ungodly scheming to achieve our desires. Are you growing impatient or discouraged? Beware of disobedience to God because it will bring you much sorrow and regret. **Trust in the Lord who is absolutely sovereign and commit your way to him (Psalm 37:4–5,7).**

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! He must have known that God had given Adam only one wife at creation and that polygamy was sinful. 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 told her that the son she was bearing should be called *'Ishmael'* which means 'God hears' (11).

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? 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, child of God, 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.

I shall seem to be a deceiver to him

Chapter 26 ends by reporting Esau's polygamy. He took two Canaanite wives who made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah (26:34–35; 27:46; 28:8 – see English Standard Version). When Isaac was old and blind he was determined to give his blessing to Esau, despite the disobedience of the elder twin. This blessing was important because the son receiving it ruled over his brothers (see verse 29). Isaac and Rebekah knew that God had decreed that Esau would serve Jacob (25:23). Isaac was wrong to go against the revealed will of God in his plan to bless Esau. When we disobey the word of God we invite trouble into our lives. We should always keep in mind the admonition, *'Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding'* (Proverbs 3:5–6).

Rebekah overheard Isaac making his plans with Esau and she hastened to involve Jacob in a scheme of deception to obtain the blessing. Their behaviour was inexcusable and they should have waited on God and trusted him to work out his wise purposes for Jacob. We must never use sinful means to justify the end. Jacob had serious misgivings but was more troubled at the possibility of being found out rather than being guilty of the sin of deceit. He said to his mother, *'Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be a deceiver to him; and I shall bring a curse on myself and not a blessing'* (12).

Jacob was to pay dearly for his sin, being forced to leave the home he loved and worse was to follow. God's word warns us, *'Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap'* (Galatians 6:7). Jacob the deceiver was himself to become the victim of cruel deception – in marriage (29:25); in work (31:7,41) and by his own sons (37:20,31–35). **Let us be careful of the things that we sow. If we resort to sinful scheming, we too will reap a bitter harvest.**

Rehoboth

Abraham had made a covenant of friendship with the Philistines even though some of them had seized a well of water which belonged to him (21:22–26). After Abraham's death they stopped up his wells but Isaac dug them again and called them by the names given to them by his father. The Philistines envied Isaac for his prosperity and their king asked him to go away from them (13–16).

Isaac moved to the Valley of Gerar where his servants dug out another of his father's wells. The Philistine herdsmen claimed this well and the next that Isaac dug. He called them '*Esek*' and '*Sitnah*' (meaning 'contention' and 'hostility'). There was no quarrel over the next well which Isaac called '*Rehoboth*' (which means 'enlargement' or 'spaciousness'). When he named the new well, he said, '*For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be made fruitful in the land*' (22). You may have wondered why some chapels are called 'Rehoboth'. The faithful souls who pioneered the work in those towns and villages expected God to make their witness fruitful. Do you have the same expectation in your work for the Lord?

Isaac later moved to Beersheba where the Lord again appeared to him. God encouraged him not to fear, reassuring him that he was with him and would bless him. *He built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD* and his servants dug yet another well (23–25). Abimelech came to visit Isaac to make his peace with him. He realised that God was with him and that Isaac's increasing power could pose a real threat. Isaac had a feast prepared for them and they made a covenant.

On the same day his servants told him that they had found water in the well that they had dug (26–33). **God blessed and vindicated Isaac who had shown remarkable restraint in the face of repeated provocation.** God honoured him for his self-denying conduct and his adversaries had to admit, '*We have certainly seen that the LORD is with you*' (28). How do you react when others annoy you or provoke you?

I am Almighty God; walk before me and be blameless

The Lord again appeared to Abram when he was ninety-nine years of age, and thirteen years after the birth of Ishmael. Those were years of great tension in his household as Ishmael grew up and Sarai grew older and 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. Our Bible 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 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). The word '*blameless*' is elsewhere translated '*perfect*' (6:9). We must aim to be perfect even though we are aware of the remains of sin within us (Matthew 5:48). **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).

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.**

And the LORD blessed him

Famine drove Isaac to Gerar in the land of the Philistines where the Lord appeared to him and told him not to go down to Egypt. The names of kings in those days were often used by their successors and it is unlikely that the Abimelech here is the same man with whom Abraham had dealings. Currid points out that the Hebrew for the name in this chapter is slightly different.

God appeared to Isaac and gave him the same promises that he had given to Abraham his father (3–5; cp. 12:2–3; 15:5; 17:19). Though Isaac lived to be 180 years old, the Bible has less to say about him than about Abraham (175 years old), Jacob (147 years old) or Joseph (110 years old). Isaac was a godly man like his father, but like his father he was also guilty of the sin of deception. He too, pretended that his wife was his sister, because he feared that Rebekah would be taken from him and that he would be killed.

One day Abimelech, king of Gerar, saw Isaac caressing Rebekah and he realised that she must be his wife. He rebuked Isaac and warned his people that anyone who touched Isaac or Rebekah would be put to death (11–12). The king was a pagan but he was fearful of one of his people becoming (unwittingly) guilty of adultery (10). We live in evil times when sexual immorality is considered by many to be perfectly acceptable. Even more alarming is the evidence that this wicked thinking has influenced the behaviour of some professing Christians.

Isaac must have felt profoundly ashamed of his sin of deception but God was very gracious to him! We read: *And the LORD blessed him* (12). Isaac prospered so greatly that Philistines envied him (13–14). You may have failed God and you know that you cannot excuse yourself. Come to the Lord, confess your sin, repent of it and forsake it. The Lord will not cast you off but he will restore you and he will bless you as you seek to honour him in your life. **How kind, how wonderful, how good is the Lord! Let us worship him and praise him.**

Esau despised his birthright

The younger twin was born clutching at the heel of his brother, struggling as if to prevent his brother being born first. The conflict between the twins that began in the womb was to continue. Jacob's name means 'one who takes the heel' or 'supplanter'. They were very different from each other in appearance and in personality. Esau was covered in hair and very red in complexion, but Jacob was smooth-skinned (cp. 27:11, 23; Hosea 12:3). Esau became a skilled hunter who delighted his father. Home-loving Jacob was his mother's favourite (24–28).

Esau, being the first-born, possessed the birthright which entitled him to be the head of the family at his father's death and laid on him the responsibility for their spiritual welfare. One day, Esau returned from a hunting trip very weary and hungry. We cannot believe his dramatic claim that he was about to die (32). John Currid writes, 'In the Hebrew, Esau demands "red stuff, red stuff" — a reiteration like this is a powerful way of emphasising the object. Esau wants the stew and he wants it now! The Hebrew term for "red stuff" is *'ādōm*, and that is why Esau is named Edom. He receives this additional name because of this incident of gluttony and impatience. His name is "Red Stuff"!' (COMMENTARY ON GENESIS, volume 2, page 20).

Scheming Jacob refused to give him some of his lentil stew and *Esau despised his birthright* by selling it for some of that stew and a morsel of bread (29–34). Esau turned his back on his spiritual privileges and responsibilities and he is described as a '*profane person*' (that is 'godless' – Hebrews 12:16). Esau was willing to sacrifice the future to satisfy a craving in the present. Many a professing Christian has ruined his testimony and his enjoyment of God because he has yielded to temptation and fallen into sin. **The devil makes sure that we do not have an eye to the future when he dangles temptation before us.** The Lord has given us great blessings but he has also given us great responsibilities. Let us be strong in God and pursue holiness, *without which no one will see the Lord* (Hebrews 12:14).

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). Humanly speaking, Abraham and Sarah were in an impossible situation, but nothing is impossible with God. He is well able to perform all that he has promised (Luke 1:37; Romans 4:21).

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 your 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).

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 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. 19:13). The Lord also wanted Abraham to teach his descendants to *keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice* (19).

After the two angels departed for Sodom, 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 the 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)

Now Isaac pleaded with the LORD for his wife

Abraham lived for a further thirty-five years after the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah. He married again and his wife Keturah bore him six sons. He also had sons by his concubines and the Bible has little to say on these closing years of his life (1–6). There is no problem in a widower re-marrying, but for Abraham to have concubines was sinful. He had been ill-advised by Sarah to take Hagar as a concubine and his conscience no longer appeared to trouble him in his matter. We must never let conscience be our guide if we propose to do anything that is contrary to the teaching of God's word. Our conscience may be faulty in certain matters and the Bible must always be our guide.

Abraham was careful to give gifts to his other sons and to send them away from Isaac on whom he bestowed all that he had. He was buried by Isaac and Ishmael in the grave which he had purchased for Sarah (5–10). The genealogy of Ishmael is recorded in verses 12 to 18.

God blessed Isaac (11), but not with children. He was forty years old when he married Rebekah and they had to wait until he was sixty before the birth of Jacob and Esau. The twenty years of childlessness had been a sore trial for the couple and Isaac did what every believer should do when troubled; he took the matter to God in prayer. – *Now Isaac pleaded with the LORD for his wife ... and the LORD granted his plea* (21). He was aware that God had promised that a great nation would descend from him (cp. 17:19), but God's promise did not make him complacent. *He pleaded with the LORD*. When Rebekah was troubled by the struggling of the unborn twins in her womb, *she went to enquire of the LORD* (22). **Prayer was a way of life for Isaac and Rebekah. Is it a way of life for you?**

The Lord answered Rebekah's enquiry by revealing that she was bearing twins from whom would descend two nations, the one being stronger than the other and that *the older would serve the younger* (21–23). The apostle Paul uses this incident as an illustration of the doctrine of election (Romans 9:10–13).

Do not hinder me, since the LORD has prospered my way

The servant was welcomed into Rebekah's home and he acknowledged the hand of God upon him as he recounted his story to her father Bethuel and brother Laban. He told them about God's blessing upon Abraham (35–36) and how the Lord had answered his own prayers (42–48). Do you readily speak of the Lord's hand in your life to encourage your fellow-Christians and in your witness to unbelievers? Bethuel and Laban saw that God was in the proposed marriage of Rebekah to Isaac (50–51) but they wanted Rebekah to remain with them for *a few days, at least ten* before she should depart (54–55).

The servant was very single-minded in his mission and he begged of them, '*Do not hinder me, since the LORD has prospered my way.*' Rebekah readily consented to go with him and they blessed her before she departed (56–61). The man's single-mindedness is also seen in his insistence that he told Bethuel and Laban of his mission before he sat down to eat (33). He would not be sidetracked from his task. If we wish to be useful in the service of the Lord, we too must be purposeful and trust God in all our work for him.

When Rebekah first met Isaac, he was meditating (63–64). **The whole of this chapter is a thrilling account of spiritual people being led and blessed by God.** Are you about to make some important decision? Have you prayerfully thought things through with a desire to honour God? Seek first his kingdom and righteousness (Matthew 6:33). *In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths* (Proverbs 3:6).

*When we walk with the Lord
In the light of his word,
What a glory he sheds on our way!
While we do his good will,
He abides with us still
And with all who will trust and obey.*

(James H. Samnis)

He lingered

Lot 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 spiritual 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.

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.***

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.

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 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 rotteness. 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.

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).

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 incestuous 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)

Surely the fear of God is not in this place

Abraham moved on from ‘*there*’ (Mamre, near Hebron; 18:1), travelling to Gerar which was 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 showed a lack of faith 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 Abimelech in a dream, of judgment, if he were to marry Sarah. 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 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.

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

(Charlotte Elliott)

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 us to Rebekah, the future bride of Isaac, who was a granddaughter of Abraham’s brother Nahor (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.

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 called 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 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* (1). 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.’

Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him (2). **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. Israel experienced a similar joy after release from seventy years of captivity in Babylon (Psalm 126:1–3).

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.

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 as an illustration of the difference between those who insist that Christians should live under the bondage of the law 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 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)