

ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

A Patriarch in Panorama

Genesis 11:27–32; Acts 7:2–4



LET'S BEGIN HERE

The man first known as Abram was born in a culture that had long ago replaced worshipping the God of Noah with worshipping the pagan gods of the rivers, stars, and wood. And yet, this man left his idols and came to know the one, true Creator so intimately that he was called the “friend of God” (James 2:23).

As we study this man of God, we'll discover much about the God he served. Abraham's fantastic journey of faith reveals a God who *loves* us infinitely, *guides* us unpredictably, and *blesses* us astonishingly. God loved Abraham by choosing him, guided him by calling him to a new land, and showered blessings on him through a special covenant.

Like Abraham, we don't have many assurances on our journey . . . save one: we can always depend on the grace of God. We don't deserve God's love, can't imagine His plan, and may not immediately see His blessing, but we know our divine Friend is with us . . . every step of the way. So, fellow pilgrim, are you ready to move forward your journey of faith? Let's go!



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

In this study, we're going to put into practice the basics of Bible study methods, beginning with observation.



Observation: Taking a Closer Look

Observation answers the question: What does it say? As we observe the text, we look for words, names, places, events, repetitions, comparisons, and contrasts. The chart on the following page lists the key events in Abraham's journey from God's covenant with Abraham to Abraham's death and burial. Take a few minutes to read the chart, noting anything that stands out to you.

Quotable

The great thing about studying the life of a man of God is we discover so much about the God of the man.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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A PATRIARCH IN PANORAMA—THE LIFE OF ABRAHAM

Genesis 12–25

Acts 7:2–3
Joshua 24:2
Genesis 11:27–32

| Events | Ch. | Age | Covenant | People | Location |
|---|-----|---|--------------------------|--|---|
| The Covenant The Departure The Famine | 12 | 75 (12:4) | Affirmed (12:1–3) | Abram Sarai Lot | Ur Haran Shechem Moreh Bethel Ai Egypt |
| Return from Egypt Separation from Lot | 13 | | Reaffirmed (13:14–17) | Abram Sarai Lot | Between Bethel & Ai Hebron |
| War Declared Lot Delivered Reward Refused | 14 | | | Various Kings Lot Melchizedek | Siddim Valley Hebron? Sodom Valley of Shaveh |
| Abrahamic Covenant Reaffirmed | 15 | | Reaffirmed (15:1–21) | Abram God | |
| Birth of Ishmael | 16 | 86 (16:16) | | Abram Sarai Hagar Ishmael | Hebron? |
| Names Changed Circumcision Instituted Isaac and Ishmael Discussed | 17 | 99 (17:1) | Reaffirmed (17:1–14) | Abraham God | |
| Promise of a Son Plans for Destruction of Sodom | 18 | | | Abraham 3 Men (Angels) Sarah | Hebron (Plains of Mamre) |
| Sodom Destroyed Lot Spared | 19 | Abraham 100 | | 2 Angels Lot & Family Sodomites Abraham | Sodom & Gomorrah Mountain Cave |
| Abimelech | 20 | Sarah 90 | | Abraham Sarah Abimelech | Gerar |
| Isaac Born Ishmael Cast Out Abimelech Reproved | 21 | (17:17; 21:5) | | Abraham Sarah Isaac Hagar Ishmael Abimelech | Hebron Beersheba Paran |
| Isaac Offered Covenant Reaffirmed | 22 | | Reaffirmed (22:15–18) | Abraham Isaac Angel of the Lord | Moriah |
| Sarah's Death & Burial | 23 | Abraham 137 Sarah 127 (23:1) | | Sarah Abraham Sons of Heth | Hebron Field of Machpelah |
| Isaac's Bride | 24 | "Old and advanced in age" (24:1) | | Abraham Eldest Servant Rebekah Isaac | Mesopotamia City of Nahor |
| Abraham's 2nd Marriage Abraham's Death & Burial | 25 | 175 (25:7) | | Abraham Keturah Family Isaac | Cave in Field of Machpelah |

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SEARCHING
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STUDY

Did you notice in the preceding chart Abraham's age when he began his journey and his age when he died? Remarkable! Write down in this space other observations from the chart.

Having surveyed Abraham's life, get to know him better by reading the following passages. Write down what you observe. List names and places, and look for interesting details about Abraham's family and background. Note when and where God first appeared to Abraham.

Genesis 11:27–32

Joshua 24:2

Acts 7:2–3



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

A Patriarch in Panorama

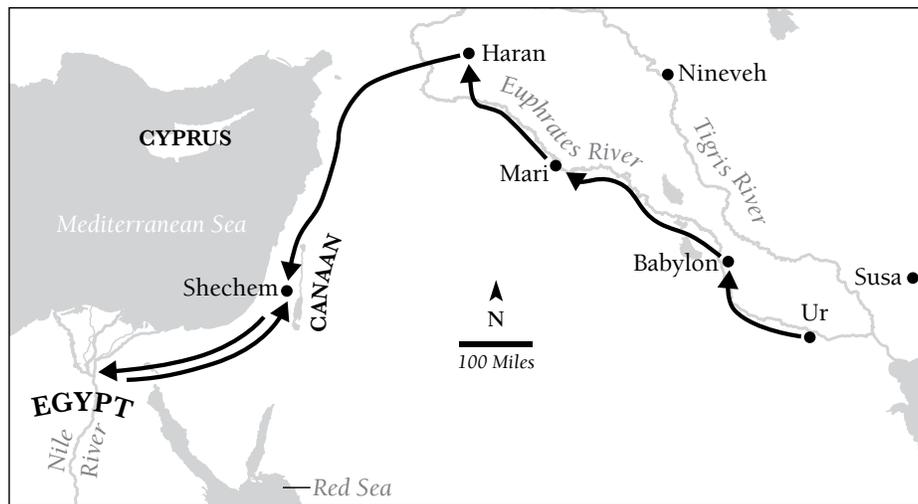
Genesis 11:27–32; Acts 7:2–4



Helpful Tools

Bible study tools make digging into the text easy. A Bible dictionary, Bible atlas, and concordance are available for purchase at the Insight for Living Ministries [online store](#). For a complete list of recommendations, read Chuck Swindoll's article "[Basic Bible Study Tools](#)" on our Web site.

Below is a basic map with which you can visualize Abraham's travels beginning in Mesopotamia, moving to Haran and then southwest to Canaan as he followed the Fertile Crescent around the vast desert to the west of Ur. This route from Ur to Canaan via Haran is about 1000 miles.



If you own a Bible atlas, find the map that traces Abraham's journey and includes historical information about Mesopotamia. Look up *Ur* in your Bible dictionary to discover what Abraham's life was like as an idolater living in this wealthy ancient metropolis. Record your findings.



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The *New Unger's Bible Dictionary* paints a picture of idolatrous Ur with its massive ziggurat, an ancient pyramid-shaped temple complex:

As a result of archaeological excavation, the city of Ur is now one of the best-known sites of southern Babylonia. Woolley in his *Abraham: Recent Discoveries and Hebrew Origins . . .* gives a description of the worship of the city god of Ur, the moon god Nannar and his consort Ningal. Woolley describes in minute detail the sacred *temenos* of the city in which were the famous ziggurat and the various buildings erected to the moon god and his consort, with a description of the moon god ritual.¹

When Abraham converted from polytheism to monotheism, he launched a spiritual tidal wave that is still washing over the earth. Through Abraham came Isaac then Jacob and his sons. This small ripple grew and grew into the Hebrew nation from which came Jesus, the Savior of the world . . . and through Him, billions of worshipers of the one, true God.

In the coming studies in this series, we'll take a closer look at the following:

- The covenant that God affirmed and reaffirmed with Abraham that promised him descendants, a blessing, and land (Genesis 12:1–3; 13:14–17; 15:1–21; 17:1–14; 22:15–18)
- The flight to Egypt and Abraham's lie that almost led to disaster (12:10–20)
- The birth of Ishmael and the consequences of Abraham's sin (16:16)
- The birth of Isaac, the miracle son born to aging Abraham and Sarah (21:5)
- The offering of Isaac on the altar and the provision of the ram (22:9–13)
- Isaac's search for a bride to continue Abraham's line (24:1–67)
- And many other milestones on Abraham's inspiring journey of faith



Interpretation: Finding the Meaning

Now we'll take the next step in Bible study: *interpretation*. Interpretation is digging for meaning, and to do so, we'll use an additional tool of Bible study, *correlation*—which is the process of comparing Scriptures. Let's spade into the theology of Paul in the book of Romans, where we find Abraham as a prototype of “faith counted as righteousness”—a key doctrine of our salvation. Read Romans 4:16–22.



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What does Paul mean by saying, “Abraham is the father of all who believe” (Romans 4:16)?

Paul concluded, “And because of Abraham’s faith, God counted him as righteous” (4:22). Abraham was righteous through faith, not by obeying the law. What is the implication for us? Read Romans 4:23–25 to find the answer.

Abraham played a central role on the divine stage of redemptive history. He was the patriarch not only of the vast Hebrew nation but also of our faith—our spiritual father!

Application: Bringing Home the Lessons

The final step of Bible study is *application*: “What does all this mean to me?” Begin answering this question by returning to our initial comments about God’s love, guidance, and blessings at the beginning of our study.

Like Abraham, we don’t earn God’s infinite love—we accept it. God knew us even before we were aware of Him, and He seeks us in our own godless Ur. Have you personally responded to God’s love? How can you surrender right now to His choosing and loving you? If you are not certain what it means to know God, read the article “[How to Begin a Relationship with God](#)” on our Web site.



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A Patriarch in Panorama

Genesis 11:27–32; Acts 7:2–4

SEARCHING
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Like Abraham, we follow God's unpredictable guidance. When we follow God, we often later marvel at the unexpected ways God has led our life. You may be standing at the trailhead of a whole new path with God. Remember how God has led you this far—remember how God led Abraham! Are you ready for the next adventure? What adventure might that be? Write down how you desire to follow God wherever He leads.

Like Abraham, we anticipate God's astonishing blessings. At the center of blessing is closeness with God your friend, as you walk side-by-side with Him. Use the space below to express in prayer your desire to be close with God along life's journey and the steps you will take to build your relationship with Him.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for seeing value in me and knowing me so much better than I know myself. Thank You for lovingly choosing me as You chose Abraham, guiding me as You guided Abraham, and blessing me with blessings so wonderful I can hardly imagine them! Help me on my adventure of faith to trust You and to draw nearer to You each step of the way. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, rev. and updated ed., ed. R. K. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1988), 1320–21.



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A Patriarch in Panorama

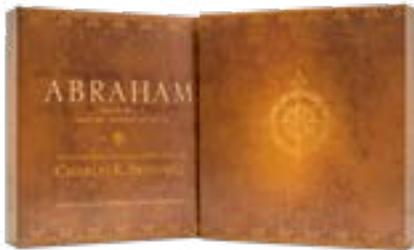
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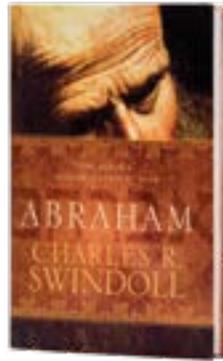
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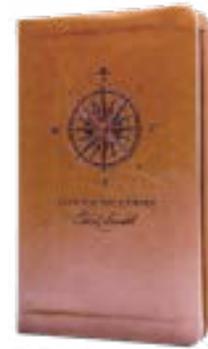
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For the 2017–2018 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Searching the Scriptures Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Going . . . Not Knowing

Genesis 12:1, 4–6; Hebrews 11:8–10



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Moving isn't easy, especially when we've lived in the same place for a long time. Besides all the packing and loading, we face saying goodbye to those we love and leaving the familiar. Moving is always challenging . . . and it can be downright frightening.

Even when we know where we're going, we feel anxious about moving. Imagine, though, the fear of moving and *not* knowing where we're going! This was Abraham's situation when God surprised him with the command: "Leave your native country . . . and go to the land that I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). Despite his fears, Abraham obeyed because, even though his *destination* lay beyond the horizon, his *God* was with him and promised to point the way.

God often leads in the form of faith-testing surprises. He surprised Noah with a plan to build an ark; Moses, with a command to liberate his people; and Joshua, with an astonishing scheme to bring down Jericho's walls. How Mary must have been surprised and afraid when God told her that she would bear the Christ child. Even so, she—as so many faithful people before her—willingly submitted. Faith always responds obediently to God's surprises.

How about you? Has God delivered to your doorstep an unexpected change? If not now, it's likely He will in the future. Let's take a closer look at God's surprise for Abraham and learn the way of obedience from his example.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Begin by reviewing the chart, "A Patriarch in Panorama—The Life of Abraham," in the previous study. Notice the flow of events in Abraham's life, and find where the Genesis 12:1–6 passage in this study fits. You may wish to print the chart and refer to it often as you progress through future studies.

As we turn to this passage, we'll use the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study to observe, interpret, correlate, and apply the text. Chuck Swindoll's book, *Searching the Scriptures*, explains these methods in more detail, and you can purchase a copy at Insight for Living Ministries online store.

Quotable

*God loves
surprises
because He
knows what
is best for us.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Going . . . Not Knowing

Genesis 12:1, 4–6; Hebrews 11:8–10

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STUDY



Observing God's Commands and Abraham's Obedience

Genesis 12:1–3 records God's message to Abraham, which includes two parts: *commands* and *promises*. In this study, we'll look at the first part—God's commands; and in the next study, we'll focus on God's promises which comprise the framework of His covenant with Abraham.



Searching the Scriptures Tools

Observation is a critical beginning technique to put together the pieces of a passage of Scripture. Read the passage carefully, noticing features such as contrasts, comparisons, repeated words, cause-and-effect, and emphasized words. Particularly notice imperatives (commands) and verbs (action words), which are like tree limbs. All the ideas in the paragraph, like branches and leaves, connect to these words.

Read the passage below using your cursor to highlight the imperatives, such as the word *leave*, and verbs, such as the word *departed*.

The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you.” . . . So Abram departed as the LORD had instructed, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all his wealth—his livestock and all the people he had taken into his household at Haran—and headed for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in Canaan, Abram traveled through the land as far as Shechem. There he set up camp beside the oak of Moreh. At that time, the area was inhabited by Canaanites. (Genesis 12:1, 4–6)

Let's build on the imperatives, *leave* and *go*. God commanded Abraham to leave his *native* country. The word implies that Abraham had lived there since birth. His roots sank deep into the soil of his culture and community. Put yourself in Abraham's place, and consider what it would be like for God to pull up *your* roots. List the things you take for granted that you would have to leave forever if you had to pick up and leave like Abraham did.



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Going . . . Not Knowing

Genesis 12:1, 4–6; Hebrews 11:8–10

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Now explore the implications of Abraham *going* to a foreign land. What hardships and dangers await if God commanded you to move your family and business to an unfamiliar and unwelcoming country? Write down what thoughts and fears must have been going through Abraham's mind.

God told Abraham to go to “the land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1). How might this promise have calmed Abraham's fears?

Not everyone in Scripture responded to God's commands like Abraham. Moses *protested* at the burning bush (Exodus 3:11). Saul *hid* at his own coronation (1 Samuel 10:22). Jonah *ran* the opposite direction from Nineveh (Jonah 1:3)! Notice in the text the verbs that describe Abraham's actions: *departed*, *went*, *took*, *arrived*, and *set up*. What qualities do you see in the faith-filled obedience of seventy-five-year-old Abraham? Don't forget the faith of his family and servants who went with him!

Craft your observations into principles. For example, “When God tells us to go, He goes with us.” What other principles do you glean?



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Going . . . Not Knowing

Genesis 12:1, 4–6; Hebrews 11:8–10

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Helpful Hint

A *principle* is a statement of truth emerging from the biblical text that is as true now as it was in Bible times. Principles bridge the past to the present, the ancient culture to modern times. Although God's specific commands to Abraham are not for us, the principles we learn about God and His leading are still true today.



Interpreting God's Commands and Abraham's Obedience

Interpretation answers the question, "What does this passage mean?" To clarify the meaning of a text, first view it through the eyes of the original audience. How did Moses intend his readers to understand this passage? Let's think through the answer together.

At the time Moses wrote Genesis, the Hebrew people had just exited Egypt and were on their way to inhabit the land God had promised Abraham. Old Testament scholar Allen P. Ross points out the significance of God's call of Abraham to these people:

Israel would learn by this that her very existence was God's work through a man who responded by faith and left for Canaan. It would be a message to convince Israel of the divine call they were facing, and their need of faith for their move from Egypt to Canaan.¹

The entire Hebrew nation was on a journey of faith! How might this story of Abraham's call and response have inspired them?

Abraham's faith inspired the Israelites as well as future generations of believers. Let's look at two passages in the New Testament that build on Abraham's obedience to God's commands.



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Going . . . Not Knowing

Genesis 12:1, 4–6; Hebrews 11:8–10

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Correlating God's Commands and Abraham's Obedience

Read the opening lines of Stephen's speech to his accusers in Acts 7:1–4. Abraham was in Mesopotamia when God first told him to *leave* and *go*. According to Genesis 11:31–32, the family led by Abraham's father, Terah, made it as far as Haran and stopped. Why do you think they stopped in Haran?

After stopping in Haran, Abraham completed his journey to Canaan (Acts 7:4). Stephen's point to his accusers was that they should fully obey God just as Abraham did—but by rejecting Christ, they were stopping short.

Read Hebrews 11:8–10. What insights does this passage add to your understanding of Abraham's faith and complete obedience?



Application: Bringing Home the Lessons

Abraham's example of obedience knocks on our door with the reminder that we're never too old or too limited to obey when God calls and empowers. We're never "has-beens" when we have God! And we should never stop short in obeying Him.

To conclude his message, Chuck asks three probing questions:

- *Are you seeking God's will deliberately, genuinely, and passionately?* Do you need to reaffirm your desire to pursue God and His will?
- *Are you willing to go just as much as you desire to stay?* Are you open to change?
- *Are you making the decision simpler or more complicated?* Can you loosen your roots a little by finding ways to simplify your life?



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Going . . . Not Knowing

Genesis 12:1, 4–6; Hebrews 11:8–10

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As you ponder these questions, write your reflections in the space below. Is God calling you to *leave* and *go*? To another place? A new lifestyle? A fresh ministry?

Once Abraham took off, he never looked back. God had an adventure awaiting him just beyond the horizon . . . and He has one for us too!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, sometimes I wrestle with Your surprises. Enable me to respond with faithful obedience when You call. Thank You for being patient with me along the way, for seeing me as a work in progress, and for guiding me with Your hand of grace wherever my journey of faith leads. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Allen P. Ross, "Genesis," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Old Testament ed., ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, SP Publications, 1985), 46–7.



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Going . . . Not Knowing

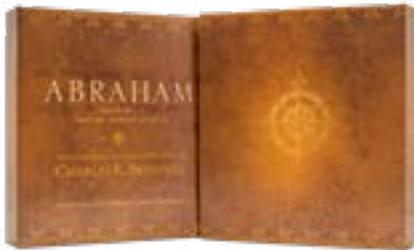
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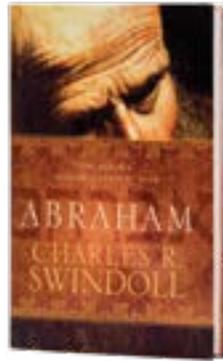
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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Never-to-Be-Forgotten Promises

Genesis 12:1–6; 15:1–6



LET'S BEGIN HERE

God never forgets His promises. He doesn't back out of agreements. He never breaks covenants. Though He may not fulfill His promises according to human timetables, we can always count on this: *God keeps His word.*

Some of God's covenants were *conditional*, such as the Mosaic covenant in which God promised the Israelites security and blessings in the land if they kept the whole Law (Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 28:1–29:1). The formula was “If you will, then I will.”

Other covenants were *unconditional*, like God's promises to Abraham. God guaranteed the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant with a pledge in three parts: “I will, I will, I will.” No *ifs* in this formula.

We saw in the previous study God's command to Abraham: “Leave your native country . . . and go to the land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1). In faith, Abraham “departed as the LORD had instructed . . . and headed for the land of Canaan” (12:4–5). What motivated Abraham to launch into a perilous journey that would take him a thousand miles from his homeland, never to return? He obeyed because *He trusted God* to keep His irrevocable, unconditional promises.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Let's study God's covenant with Abraham using our *Searching the Scriptures* skills of observation, interpretation, correlation, and application. Observation is the necessary beginning point of any Bible study, and we'll start with examining the covenant up close.



Observation: Viewing the Covenant Up Close

Imagine yourself as Abraham receiving God's command to take his family to a faraway and unfamiliar land. Your natural curiosity might wonder, *Why should I go? What is waiting for me there?* God answered Abraham's curiosity by listing the blessings in store for Abraham. Let's open this covenantal pot of gold and *observe* what the Lord had awaiting Abraham at his rainbow's end.

Quotable

*If you're
sitting in God's
waiting room,
the message today
is to trust Him.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Never-to-Be-Forgotten Promises

Genesis 12:1–6; 15:1–6

Read Genesis 12:2–3 below, and use your cursor to highlight the phrase “I will.” In the space that follows, write out God’s promises.

I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.”

“I will _____.”

“I will _____.”

“I will _____.”

What else do you observe about these “I will” statements?

The promise contained in each blessing is unconditional. God most certainly will do as He says . . . but not right away. And there’s the rub! Abraham was to wait for God to fulfill His promises, and as he waited, his faith was tested. Let’s examine the *meaning* of each blessing as well as the *obstacles* that challenged Abraham’s faith.



Interpretation: Explaining the Covenant

The first blessing is “I will make you into a great nation” (Genesis 12:2)—the national blessing.

National Blessing—Genesis 12:2

This blessing means that Abraham’s family tree will grow into a mighty race of people who, like limbs and branches connected to a single trunk, can trace their origin to one set of parents, Abraham and Sarah.



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Never-to-Be-Forgotten Promises

Genesis 12:1–6; 15:1–6

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What did God say to Abraham to affirm this promise (see Genesis 13:14–17)? And what promise did God add regarding land for Abraham's descendants to inhabit?

Obstacle One

What obstacle stood in the way of this blessing coming to pass? Read Genesis 11:30 for the answer.

According to Genesis 15:1–6, God reaffirmed His promise. How did Abraham respond? He believed God, even though he and his wife were advanced in age and had no children. In what remarkable way did God honor Abraham's faith (15:6)?



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Correlation: A New Testament Truth

Abraham's faith would bear more than the fruit of family. It would bear *the fruit of redemption*. Abraham's spiritual lineage includes all those whose faith God counts as righteousness. How did the apostle Paul describe Abraham's faith and link it to our faith in Christ? Read Romans 4:20–25.

What a wonderful legacy for which we can all be grateful!

Personal Blessing—Genesis 12:2

In addition to generations of descendants, God promised personal blessings. Based on Genesis 13:2; 23:6; and 24:1, what blessings did Abraham enjoy regarding wealth and acclaim?



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Obstacle Two

The fulfillment of the second blessing was jeopardized when “a severe famine struck the land of Canaan” (Genesis 12:10), threatening Abraham’s livelihood and forcing him to flee to Egypt. In the next study, we’ll examine Genesis 12:7–20 and see how God provided for Abraham while in Egypt, despite Abraham’s failures.

International Blessing—Genesis 12:3

God’s final promise included blessing the whole world through Abraham and cursing nations who disdain him. As a result, “all the families on earth will be blessed through you,” God assured Abraham (Genesis 12:3).

What does this verse mean?

By promising to protect Abraham and his family, God will safeguard His plan to redeem the world through Abraham’s messianic line. Through Christ, the whole world will be blessed! Those who are not Abraham’s offspring will be grafted in to Abraham’s spiritual family tree, so that we “receive the blessing God has promised Abraham and his children” (Romans 11:17). Along with Abraham’s offspring, hope is born for every person!



Application: We Thank God, Trust God, and Wait for God

Three reminders from Abraham’s example emerge from our study.

We thank God for His promises to us. Just as Abraham and Sarah must have thanked God for the promise of a son, we also can thank Him for the promises we claim in Christ. Thank God for these blessings right now—just as the apostle Paul wrote:

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. (Ephesians 1:3)



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We trust God to keep His promises. What good is a promise if we can't trust the giver to keep it? In this moment, declare your trust in God as you read the following promises.

Hebrews 4:14–16

Hebrews 6:10

We wait on God to fulfill His promises. Promises, like seeds in the ground, don't produce fruit in an instant. Abraham was 75 years old when God promised him an heir, but Isaac wasn't born until 25 years later! Are you waiting for a seed to sprout—perhaps a prayer that hasn't been answered yet? What prayer are you waiting on God to answer?

Sometimes, God uses periods of waiting as opportunities for us to change and mature. During this waiting period, how have you grown? How can you grow?



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As you conclude this study, take a moment to give thanks, declare your trust, and resolve to wait as you pause in prayer.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the Seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ, who bore our sin on the cross and bloomed eternal when He rose from the dead. I trust in Him as my Guide and Protector, who will lead me home to You. Soothe my anxious mind and help me to rest . . . and wait. Give me the faith and patience of Abraham and Sarah, and until You fulfill all Your promises, fill my heart with joy for the journey. Amen.



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Never-to-Be-Forgotten Promises

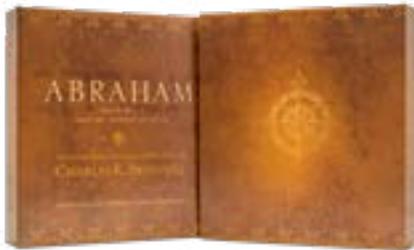
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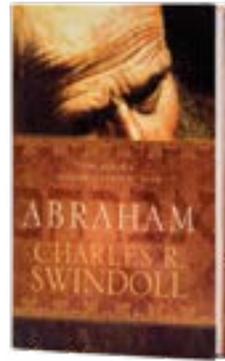
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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

When the Faithful Fail

Genesis 12:7–20



LET'S BEGIN HERE

After Abraham pulled up anchor in his homeland of Ur, his ship of faith sailed strong and true toward the land God promised. In Haran, he took shelter for a while until the death of his father, Terah. And then he launched out again:

He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all his wealth—his livestock and all the people he had taken into his household at Haran—and headed for the land of Canaan. (Genesis 12:5)

His first stop in Canaan was Shechem, where “he set up camp beside the oak of Moreh” (12:6). From this scenic overlook, Abraham set his eyes on Canaan’s verdant valleys and rolling hills, and “the LORD appeared to Abram and said, ‘I will give this land to your descendants’” (12:7). Basking in the nearness and blessing of God, Abraham built an altar and worshiped.

Then Abraham traveled south and set up camp at a spot between Bethel and Ai. “There he built another altar and dedicated it to the LORD, and he worshiped the LORD” (12:8). Then he continued south into the Negev . . . where Abraham encountered his first crisis.

So far, Abraham’s faith sailed with the favorable winds of blessing and worship, but how seaworthy would his faith be when tested? Far from a safe harbor, the Negev proved to be a dry and sun-scorched place, and it was here that Abraham’s ship of faith ran aground.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

In this study, we’ll discover what happened to test Abraham’s faith and reveal a weakness in this godly man’s character. Yes, the *Abraham whose faith we pedestalize was as human as the rest of us*. Fear undermined his faith when “a severe famine struck the land of Canaan” (Genesis 12:10).

Pray as you begin your study, and open yourself to hear God’s voice through the words of Scripture. Ask the Lord to search your heart for weak spots and to strengthen your trust in His love. The best fear cure is resting in God’s perfect love that “expels all fear” (1 John 4:18).

Quotable

*The good and the
godly are still weak
and imperfect.*

*The powerful and
influential still
have feet of clay.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Observation: Overview of Abraham's Failure

As we turn to Genesis 12:7–20, we'll use the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study to observe, interpret, correlate, and apply the text. Chuck Swindoll's book, *Searching the Scriptures*, explains these methods in more detail, and you can purchase a copy at Insight for Living Ministries online store.



Searching the Scriptures Tool

A Bible map can be your handiest tool in digging into a passage of Scripture. This link takes you to a set of maps at Bible.org. Find “Old Testament Map 2—The Travels of the Patriarchs,” and follow Abraham's route after he arrived in Canaan. Locate **Shechem** and **Bethel**. Two other cities will be mentioned in coming narratives: **Beersheba** and **Hebron**, which are in a region known as the **Negev**. These locations set the stage for the patriarchal saga as it unfolds in the book of Genesis. The route between them, known as the “patriarch's highway,” was a well-traveled road for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Pinpoint these locations on the map, and keep them in mind. We'll return to them throughout our studies.

Read Genesis 12:10–20, and notice the shift in tone from the first half of Genesis 12. In the first half of the chapter, God speaks to Abraham and blesses him; in the second half, He allows a severe famine and sends plagues! What other differences do you find between the first half and the second half of Genesis 12? Specifically, take note of Abraham's actions in the first half compared to the second.

Abraham's faith-based obedience and worship in verses 1–9 degenerated into fear-prompted scheming and selfishness in verses 10–20. Why the shift? Abraham did what all humans tend to do when threatened; he took matters into his own hands rather than trust the goodness of God and rest in His promises.



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Genesis 12:7–20

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Next outline Genesis 12:10–20 by answering the following questions:

What was the divine test?

What was the human reaction?

What were the complicated consequences?

What was the ultimate outcome?



Interpretation: Uncovering the Meaning of Abraham's Failure

God often tests the faith of those He calls, as Abraham discovered when the hot winds of drought blew into Canaan.



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Genesis 12:7–20

The Divine Test: A Severe Famine

The land was particularly susceptible to droughts that could reduce greenery to brittle twigs and riverbeds to cracked earth. Wells dried up, dust storms stirred up, and frequently people gave up. The pagan Canaanites deified the rivers, the wind, and the rain, believing the people were victims of these fickle and unfriendly “gods.” But Abraham, a servant of the one, true God, should have known that God alone was in control of nature. Abraham’s God could (and still can!) turn on the rain as easily as we turn on the faucet.



Correlation: A New Testament Truth

The text states that the severe famine *forced* “Abram to go down to Egypt” (Genesis 12:10). Harsh circumstances often force rash reactions. Based on James 1:2–5, what spiritual advice would you have given Abraham amid his trial?

The Human Reaction: A Quick Escape

When Abraham chose to escape to Egypt rather than seek God’s counsel and trust His leading, he set an unhealthy precedent that his descendants would follow in the future. Centuries later, the prophet Isaiah warned Israel: “What sorrow awaits those who look to Egypt for help . . . instead of looking to the LORD” (Isaiah 31:1).

By looking to Egypt for help, Abraham chose to:

- Walk by sight rather than _____.
- Rely on self-effort rather than _____.
- Turn to the schemes of the flesh rather than _____.

When Abraham’s perspective shifted from vertical to horizontal, from God-oriented obedience to self-focused deviousness, the result was a carnal mess!



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The Complicated Consequences: A Carnal Mess

Human to the core, Abraham followed sin's well-worn path familiar to us all. As you reflect on Genesis 12:11–17, identify the steps that led Abraham astray.

Step one: What emotions do you perceive in Abraham?

Step two: What negative thoughts did his emotions generate?

Step three: What scheme did his thoughts concoct?

Step four: What godly values did his scheme violate?

Step five: Who suffered because he violated God's values?



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Genesis 12:7–20

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Abraham convinced Sarah to tell a half-truth. She was his *step*-sister (Genesis 20:12). That half-truth led Pharaoh to assume beautiful Sarah was unmarried and available to take into his harem—which, to Sarah's dismay, he did! Abraham's sinful scheme to protect himself put Sarah at risk. Chuck Swindoll elaborates:

How *dare* he treat his wife like that! How dare Abraham not protect this lovely woman who trusted him as she left Ur with him and stood alongside him as he built the altar at Bethel . . . and then suddenly she's in Pharaoh's court and he's making plans for a night of lovemaking. I wonder how *she* felt. And then the Lord says, "That's enough. That's it! If you, Abraham, are not going to protect her, I will!"

The Ultimate Outcome: A Personal Offense

Read Genesis 12:18–20. What harm could a little white lie cause? Plenty! The sin not only hurt Sarah but also Pharaoh and his household when the Lord afflicted them with plagues. In addition, how did Abraham's lie jeopardize the covenant that God made with him, which included God's plan of redemption?

The disgraceful story concludes with Pharaoh expelling Abraham from Egypt with an escort to make certain he left for good!



Application: Lessons Learned from Abraham's Failure

In the somber aftermath of Abraham's sin, we glean five practical take-aways from this unsavory stretch in this godly man's journey. Don't rush through these points. Take time to meditate on each application.

There are famines in every life. As you recall recent events in your life, can you identify hot winds sent to test your faith? Likely, a host of trials have dotted the radar. Have you struggled like Abraham to trust God and stay true to God's values? What happened and how did you respond? What would you like to do differently going forward?



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There is a lie in every carnal escape. It's better to go through our trials by trusting God than trying to lie our way out of tight corners. How does this lesson apply to you now?

There is a weakness in every Abraham. We tend to put people we admire on pedestals, which leads to unrealistic expectations and heartbreaking disillusionment when they fail. How can you adjust your perspective in this area?

There's a Sarah in every compromise. We never travel alone across the bridge of compromise, and those we love often pay the highest toll. How does this sobering reminder help you stay true today?

There's a Pharaoh in every Egypt. God could have met Abraham's needs in the famine, but Abraham never asked Him for help. Also, God could have blessed Pharaoh through Abraham, but instead, by operating in the flesh, Abraham set the man's teeth on edge. "Get out of here!" were the last words Abraham heard from him. The final application for us is a reminder: our trust in God during trials is the best evidence of the reality of God to a watching world.

As we close in prayer, ask the Lord for strength to stay faithful during whatever trial you may face in the days to come.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, help me to never underestimate the fallout of carnality. We live in a world in which people will do whatever is necessary to escape their trials. People lie, cheat, manipulate, and scheme every day. Help me to be different. I want to trust You through my trials because You are my God and Savior, the only one worthy of worship. You can get me through. Amen.



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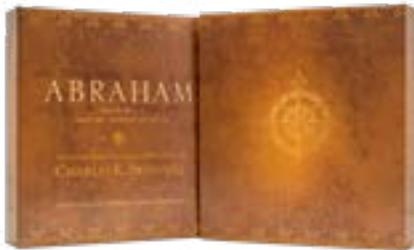
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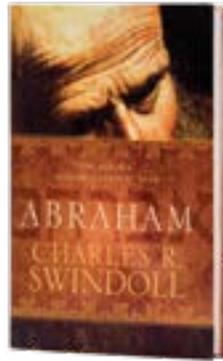
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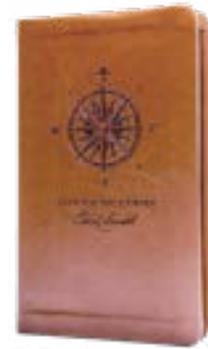
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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

A Decision That Led to a Disaster

Genesis 13:1–13

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LET'S BEGIN HERE

Tests of faith don't always come in the form of adversities—like the “severe famine” that struck Abraham and his family (Genesis 12:10). Sometimes tests come during times of prosperity when the wind is at our backs and everything is going our way. In easy, breezy days like these, we can let down our guard and allow overconfidence, greed, moral compromise, and pride to invade our character. We become less dependent on God and more distracted by worldly comforts. Staying faithful to God during periods of plenty can be much more difficult than during hardship.

Scottish essayist Thomas Carlyle once wrote, “Adversity is sometimes hard upon a man; but for one man who can stand prosperity, there are a hundred that will stand adversity.”¹ Many a soul has sunk under the weight of riches and the temptations that prosperity brings.

During the famine, Abraham failed the test of *adversity*. He acted in the flesh and fled to Egypt rather than trust in God's promise. But those days of deprivation were behind him. Now he was back in Canaan with his nephew Lot enjoying God's blessings of fame and wealth—just as God had promised (12:2). How would he respond to the test of *prosperity*? Had he learned his lesson? Would he trust in God this time?

Thankfully, the answer is yes! As we'll see in this study, Abraham stood well when tested by prosperity—but Lot, now he was a different story.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

As you begin your study, gather a few tools, such as a good study Bible with a set of maps and a Bible dictionary. We recommend *The Swindoll Study Bible* and *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, which can be purchased at the Insight for Living Ministries online store. Also, pause for a moment of prayer as you open yourself to hear God's voice through the words of Scripture.

Quotable

It's important that we realize the value of bringing the Lord, our God, into our decisions through life.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Observation: The Conflict that Required a Solution

Open your Bible and read Genesis 13:1–7. *Observation* in the *Searching the Scriptures* method is taking a close look at the words of the text. As you read, write down the answers to the following questions.

What happened? Specifically, note what Abraham did when he returned from Egypt—something he had neglected to do *before* going to Egypt (Genesis 13:4).

Where did the action take place? Name the places in the text, and locate them on your map of the time period in the back of your study Bible. Additional maps are available at Bible.org. Find the map, “*Old Testament Map 2—The Travels of the Patriarchs.*”



Searching the Scriptures Tool—Correlation

By comparing other passages about Bethel, we can gain insight into Abraham's heart for worship. Bethel is the setting of many stories in the Old Testament. Look up “Bethel” in your Bible dictionary, and note the rich history of this site. The Lord appeared to Jacob in a dream at Bethel (Genesis 28:13–19); the people of Israel came to Bethel to sit in the Lord's presence (Judges 21:2); Samuel judged the people at Bethel (1 Samuel 7:15–16). According to Bible scholar Thomas L. Constable, “Bethel receives more mention in the Old Testament than any other city but Jerusalem. This indicates its importance in biblical history.”²

Abraham's worship at Bethel left a lasting spiritual legacy to his offspring. What does this insight tell you about the role of worship in your spiritual legacy?



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A Decision That Led to a Disaster

Genesis 13:1–13

In His covenant, God promised Abraham: “I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others” (Genesis 12:2). Keeping His promise, God made Abraham “very rich in livestock, silver, and gold” (13:2). In the Hebrew text, the word for *rich* means, literally, “heavy” and is related to the Hebrew word for glory, honor, or greatness. Abraham was “heavy” with wealth, or we might say, he was *loaded*!

What other observations can you make in Genesis 13:1–7?

Abraham’s blessings overflowed into Lot’s lap. Lot became wealthy too—in fact, so wealthy that the land could not support his flocks and the flocks of his rich uncle. Abraham and Lot’s herdsmen took to fisticuffs over blades of grass! Prosperity’s test had begun.



Interpretation: A Decision of Tragic Consequences

Interpretation is digging out the meaning of a text, and in this case, we enter the inner chambers of Abraham and Lot’s character to expose the nature of *grace* versus *greed*.

Read Genesis 13:8–13, and fill in the following chart, recording evidence of grace in Abraham and greed in Lot.

| Evidence of Grace in Abraham <i>Genesis 13:8–9</i> | Evidence of Greed in Lot <i>Genesis 13:10–13</i> |
|---|---|
| | |



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

A Decision That Led to a Disaster

Genesis 13:1–13

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Abraham's *kind appeal* ("Let's not allow this conflict to come between us"), *greathearted reminder* ("After all, we are close relatives!"), *unselfish offer* ("Take your choice"), and *willingness* ("If you prefer the land on the right, then I'll go to the left") reveal his gracious spirit.

What do you think influenced Abraham to be so gracious? As you consider possible answers, reflect on Abraham's experience so far: God chose him in Ur; gave him a covenant; promised him a lineage, land, and blessing; taught him to trust Him in Egypt; and communed with Abraham through worship. How might all these experiences contribute to Abraham's expression of grace toward Lot?

On the other hand, no record exists of Lot building an altar, praying, or even asking his uncle for advice. There's no forethought or consideration of the consequences. He didn't even show gratitude to his elder uncle, who had right of first choice. Instead, Lot looked longingly at Jordan's green paradise and "chose for himself the whole Jordan Valley" (Genesis 13:11).

How Lot made his decision reveals *what* about his character?

Can you find additional insights as you reflect on Abraham's character versus Lot's character?

Could Lot have worked out a way to stay near Abraham . . . his link to God and blessing? We'll never know. Instead, he pitched his tents near Sodom. Jordan's greener grass enticed him to lead his family into the pit of evil . . . and into disaster when, later, God destroyed the twin cities of sin, Sodom and Gomorrah.



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

A Decision That Led to a Disaster

Genesis 13:1–13

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Application: When We're Faced with Similar Decisions

Every decision, at least in some way, shapes our destiny. And the consequences don't just impact us; they impact those we love who trustingly follow us. Four warning flags wave over Lot's tragic decision as lessons for us facing similar decisions.

First, *always look beyond the benefits promised by the opportunity*. Like children, who see and suddenly want, immature adults fail to consider the long-range results of their decisions. If you're making a destiny-forming decision, how does this principle of looking beyond the immediate gratification guide you?

Second, *never underestimate the impact of negative consequences*. Perhaps Lot could have been spared disaster if he had closely examined the *pros and cons* of taking his family to Sodom. Use the space below to make an honest and accurate pros-and-cons list to guide your decision.

Third, *forget about pleasing only yourself*. Self-centeredness is the twin of instant gratification. If you choose only for yourself, others will suffer and relationships will fail. Read Philippians 2:3–5, and apply its teaching to your situation.



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

A Decision That Led to a Disaster

Genesis 13:1–13

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Fourth, *remember with greater independence comes freedom and a need for stronger discipline.* Perhaps Abraham remembered his selfish actions in Egypt, and this memory influenced him to subdue his natural desires and give first choice to Lot. Wise people govern their freedoms with accountability. How about you? Are you learning from your mistakes? How can the need for accountability help you through your decisions?

The more we consider what's at stake in our decisions, particularly the major ones, the more dependent we are on God's guidance. Conclude by seeking the Lord's counsel with the hopeful words of James 1:5 in your heart: "If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you."



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, life gets so complicated, and it's difficult amid the mess to think clearly. For that reason, I'm grateful for the counsel of Your Word and the hope that it offers as I embrace Your truth. Anchor me to Your thoughts and Your will. Help me get beyond pleasing my own ego, and guide me away from the alluring but deadly valleys of this world to the lofty heights of living in Your presence. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (New York: Appleton, 1841), 223.
2. Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Genesis," in *Dr. Constable's Expository Notes*, 2017 ed., 226, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/genesis.pdf>, accessed Nov. 1, 2017.



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

A Decision That Led to a Disaster

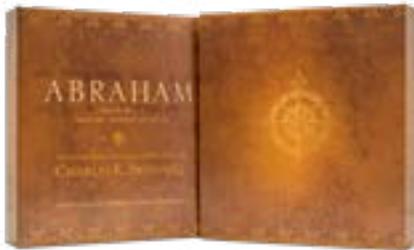
Genesis 13:1–13

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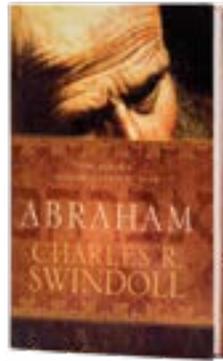
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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Abram, the Greathearted

Genesis 14:1–4, 10–17, 21–24



LET'S BEGIN HERE

At this point in the biblical storyline, Abraham's name was still Abram. Later, God would change his name to Abraham for an important reason that we'll discover when we study Genesis 17. For now, the world still knew him as Abram.

How did the world see Abraham during this period of his life? Pharaoh may have thought of him as "Abram, the Deceiver," because he deceived Pharaoh into thinking that Sarah was his sister (Genesis 12:13). Neighboring Canaanites may have viewed him as "Abram, the Big Shot," because he "was very rich in livestock, silver, and gold" (13:2).

However, his nephew, Lot, as we'll see in this study, saw Abraham as a great hero. *Hero?* Yes, this gentle, godly patriarch had another side we rarely see. When an invading army captured Lot and his family, Abraham and his men rescued them by defeating the army through a daring surprise attack. After this study, we'll forever know Abraham not only as a man of faith but also as a great and valiant commander. *Abram, the Greathearted!*



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Genesis 14 is packed with strange-sounding places and names. A set of Bible maps and a Bible dictionary will help you understand them better. An excellent Bible atlas is *The New Moody Atlas of the Bible*, which includes historical and archaeological information as well as detailed maps. We also recommend the two-volume commentary set, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament* and *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, which is available at the Insight for Living Ministries online store.

Quotable

*I've never
met a selfish
great person.
Never will.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Abram, the Greathearted

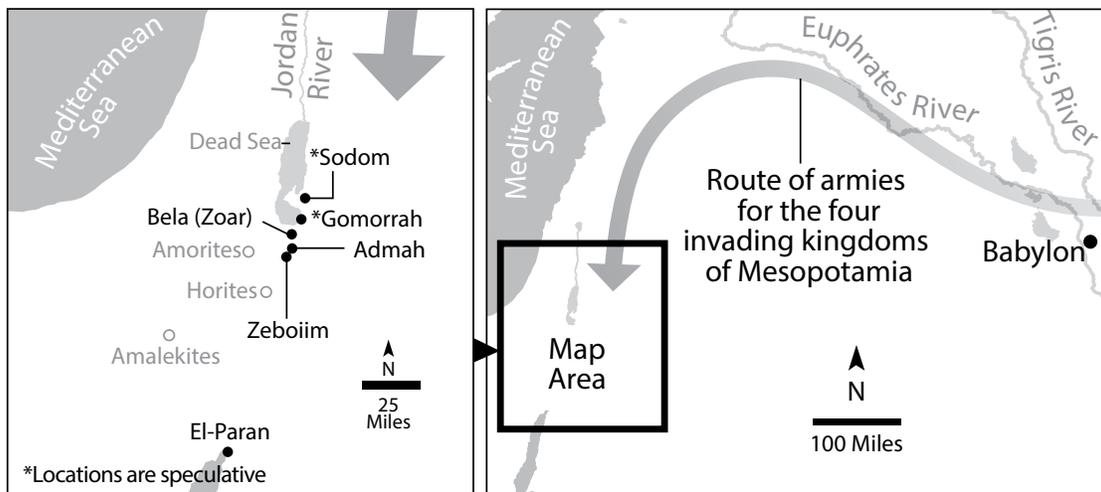
Genesis 14:1–4, 10–17, 21–24

 **Observation: Places, Names, and Events**

Begin by reading Genesis 14:1–7. The list of kings in Genesis 14:1–2 can be divided into two groups: four kings from Mesopotamia and five from the Siddim Valley (the Dead Sea region). In the chart below, write down the names of the kings and the places they ruled. (Note: the king of Bela is not named.)

| Four Kings from Mesopotamia | | Five Kings from the Siddim Valley | |
|-----------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| King's Name | Place of Rule | King's Name | Place of Rule |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

The maps below illustrate the route taken by the Mesopotamian kings to the area around the Dead Sea. Locate the cities associated with each of the kings in the Dead Sea region: Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela (Zoar).



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Abram, the Greathearted

Genesis 14:1–4, 10–17, 21–24

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What prompted the four Mesopotamian monarchs led by Kedorlaomer of Elam to invade the region (Genesis 14:4)? Interestingly, this is the first mention of a war between nations in the Bible.

The Mesopotamian armies traveled around the Fertile Crescent and then south into Canaan from Damascus. They marched along the highlands east of the Jordan Valley, taking a route known as “the king’s road” (Numbers 20:17). Locate the king’s road, which follows the modern-day King’s Highway in Jordan, on your study Bible maps or Bible atlas, or you can find a map online at “*King’s Highway and Way of the Sea.*”

Kedorlaomer and his allies vanquished city after city along the way, taking control of eastern Jordan from the Sea of Galilee as far south as the Gulf of Aqaba (Genesis 14:5–6). Then the war machine turned north and west from El-paran (modern-day Eilat), crushing the Amalekites and the Amorites who lived in the wilderness south of the Dead Sea (14:7).

Kedorlaomer’s campaign formed a tight circle around the five rebel kings in the Siddim Valley with no way of escape. All that remained was for Kedorlaomer’s armies to cinch the noose and “hang” the rebel kings. Read the account of the battle in the valley of the Dead Sea in Genesis 14:8–12. What happened? And what was the fate of Lot, his family, and his wealth?

The battle unfolded like the climactic scene of the first act of a play before intermission. Disaster had struck, but the story was not over! Just when all seemed lost, a glimmer of hope shone through. What happened after the smoke of battle cleared (14:13)?



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Abram, the Greathearted

Genesis 14:1–4, 10–17, 21–24

Don't miss a key observation: Abraham is called, "Abram the _____" (Genesis 14:13), which is the first occurrence of this ethnic title in the Bible. Apparently, by this time, Abraham was already viewed as the leader of a powerful clan, centuries before his descendants formed the Hebrew nation of Israel. Why did Moses, the author of Genesis, include this crucial title for Abraham? Let's find out as we interpret the text.



Interpretation: Four Characteristics of Greatness

Interpretation is discovering the meaning of the text and answers the question of purpose: Why did the author include this episode in the book of Genesis? As you recall, Moses' audience were the recently freed Hebrews who were en route to the Promised Land. Abraham's victory over Kedorlaomer and valiant rescue of Lot would inspire the Israelites to emulate their forefather, "Abram the Hebrew," and rise to his level of greatness as they faced their enemies.

What characteristics of greatness did Abraham model for future generations of Hebrews . . . and us? Chuck Swindoll identifies four to get us started.

Genuine Unselfishness

Lot's presence in Sodom recalls the account of Abraham giving his nephew the choice of land (Genesis 13:9). Lot chose the lush Jordan and foolishly moved to Sodom, the target zone of Kedorlaomer's wrath. Lot's selfishness contrasts the unselfishness of Abraham, who settled out of harm's reach in Hebron.

When studying Scripture, it can be helpful to use your imagination. Put yourself in the scene in which the frightened survivor, fresh from the battlefield, collapsed at the wise patriarch's feet and told him the tragic news of Lot's capture. How might Abraham have responded if he were anything other than unselfish? What would these responses have looked and sounded like?

Critical response: _____

Indifferent response: _____

Proud response: _____

What was Abraham's response (14:14)?



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Abram, the Greathearted

Genesis 14:1–4, 10–17, 21–24

Willingness to Sacrifice

Greatness begins with a selfless spirit and then it expresses itself in sacrificial deeds. Notice the elements in the text that nuance Abraham's willingness to sacrifice. Dig for meaning by drawing out the implications of the following emphasized words in Genesis 14:14–16:

- Abraham heard that “his *nephew* Lot had been captured.”
His sacrifice was based on _____.
- Without hesitation, Abraham “*mobilized*.”
His sacrifice took _____.
- Abraham mobilized “318 *trained* men.”
His sacrifice influenced others _____.
- Abraham brought back Lot and all the “*other captives*.”
His sacrifice benefited _____.

Abraham surrounded Kedorlaomer's mighty army just like Kedorlaomer had surrounded the five kings and Lot, and he attacked with a bold night raid. When the enemy soldiers fled, Abraham finished the job by chasing them beyond Damascus (Genesis 14:15). What qualities do you see in these actions?



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Abram, the Greathearted

Genesis 14:1–4, 10–17, 21–24

Absence of Greed

Abraham returned to a hero's welcome but without a hero's ego. Two kings greeted Abraham: Melchizedek, king of Salem and Bera, king of Sodom. Read Genesis 14:17–23, and write down in the chart what each king offered and Abraham's humble response.

| | Melchizedek | Bera |
|------------------------------|-------------|------|
| What did the king offer? | | |
| What was Abraham's response? | | |

Rejecting all earthly rewards and acclaim, Abraham praised the true Hero of the story—God, who, as Melchizedek acknowledged, “has defeated your enemies for you” (Genesis 14:20).

Abraham's greatheartedness shone brighter than any medal on his chest! He didn't even expect a pat on the back. Chuck Swindoll remarks on the humility of greathearted people:

There's not a word of thanks from Lot. Not a word. But greathearted people don't do it to be thanked. . . . You're greathearted when you rescue without calling attention to yourself or expecting to be written up in the paper or put in lights.



Correlation: A New Testament Truth

The mysterious Melchizedek came from Salem, later known as Jerusalem—the spiritual center of God's plan to redeem the world. A king and “priest of God Most High,” Melchizedek prefigures Jesus Himself, according to Hebrews 7:1–28. Read the article, “*Melchizedek as a Type of Christ*” on the Insight for Living Ministries Web site to find out more about this fantastic figure of the Old Testament.



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Abram, the Greathearted

Genesis 14:1–4, 10–17, 21–24

Refusal to Force Convictions on Others

Although Abraham declined the king of Sodom's reward, he didn't force his decision on the others who accepted the king's reward. "I request," Abraham said to the king, "that you give a fair share of the goods to my allies—Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre" (Genesis 14:24).

Do you see any additional insights into Abraham's amazing character?

Application: Where to Start and How to Continue

Rarely, in all the Scriptures, do we find a more remarkable example of true greatness than in this story of Abraham. Where his example leaves off, our actions should follow. How can we begin? According to Chuck Swindoll, here are two important steps:

Start by Falling before Jesus Christ

Abraham's ultimate seed, Jesus, is the ultimate model of greathearted character. Depend on Him who indwells to lead you in the path of humility.

Continue by Following Jesus Wherever He Leads

Exhibiting the qualities in this study will lead you to make choices that will set you apart. Don't be afraid to stand out from the crowd as you stand by your principles.

Is the Lord revealing specific ways that you can apply this study?

Let's close our time in the Word with prayer.

A FINAL PRAYER

Father, by Your strength and because of Your glory, I ask You to guide me as I emulate Abraham's model of great character and follow Jesus as my Lord. You rescued me from the clutches of the Enemy, not to release me again to worldly Sodom but to place my feet on the higher ground of Your plan for my life. May I rise to be all You desire for me to be. Amen.



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

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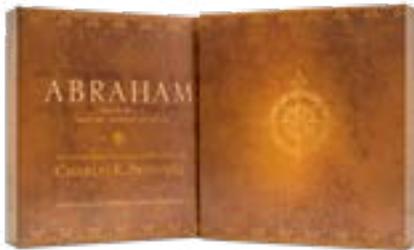
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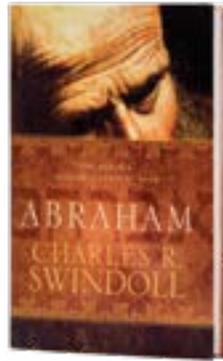
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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Can We Talk?

Genesis 15:1–6, 18–21



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Wealthy Abraham could have been known for the size of his treasury, the land he owned, or even the greatness of his fame. However, his legacy is faith . . . and not just faith in words but in action. Abraham shod his faith with shoe leather when he journeyed to a land he'd never seen. He clothed it with generosity when he divided his portion with Lot, and he paraded it as courage when he defeated Kedorlaomer's army. Regarding the outworking of Abraham's faith, James commented, "His actions made his faith complete" (James 2:22).

Etched alongside *faith in action* on Abraham's memorial is *friendship with God*—as James also noted, "he was even called the friend of God" (2:23). Abraham and his Lord spent time together and knew each other well. They shared openly, were committed to one another, and cultivated trust over time—just as best friends do.

We all yearn for an equally close relationship with God, don't we? And so, we gather under the great Patriarch's shadow to learn from his example. In this study, let's listen in on one of Abraham's conversations with his divine Friend, and we'll discover the secrets of intimacy with the Almighty.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

The goal of Bible study is to spiritually nourish ourselves. We become self-sustaining physically when we fix our own meals and feed ourselves. Sustaining ourselves spiritually requires a similar process. By following the *Searching the Scriptures* method, we feed ourselves on the Word of God. And then as we live out what we've learned from the Bible, the Spirit of God empowers and changes us.

With this goal in mind, let's follow the steps of Bible study: observation, interpretation, correlation, and the all-important final step of application.

Quotable

*God is in our past,
He is in our future,
and He is certainly
in our present.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Can We Talk?

Genesis 15:1–6, 18–21

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Observation: What Do You See?

What do you see in the text? Does the author use connecting words that offer clues about what he was emphasizing? Pay attention to details, as if you were looking for clues to solve a mystery. Look for repeated words, commands, questions, emphatic statements, images, or figures of speech. Make your notes specific as you examine the passage.

Personal Conversation—Genesis 15:1–8

Genesis 15 records a personal conversation between God and Abraham. Read Genesis 15:1–8. What do you notice about the tone of the interchange?

Best friends know when each other is up or down, relaxed or pensive, confident or concerned. When the Lord read Abraham's emotions, what did He see? What do you think prompted His heart-to-heart talk with His friend Abraham?

Notice the flow of the dialogue:

- “The LORD spoke” (Genesis 15:1)
- “But Abram replied” (15:2)
- “Then the LORD said” (15:4)
- “Then the LORD took” (15:5)
- “And Abram believed” (15:6)
- “Then the LORD told” (15:7)
- “But Abram replied” (15:8)



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

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Genesis 15:1–6, 18–21

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The Lord opened the conversation by speaking directly to Abraham's fears, "Do not be afraid," and then He reassured him, "I will protect you, and your reward will be great" (Genesis 15:1). What do these tender words reveal about the heart of God?

Like a counselor's opening comment in a therapy session, the Lord's words created a safe space for Abraham to share his deepest thoughts and feelings. Notice Abraham's frankness in Genesis 15:2–3. Keep in mind that about ten years had passed since Abraham left Haran (12:4). Abraham was now 85 and Sarah was 75—and still no children!

What was Abraham's complaint? What emotions do you sense in his words? What was really behind his offer to "fix" God's problem of not giving him an heir?

The Lord's no to Abraham was firm. The Hebrew word for *no* in Genesis 15:4 begins the sentence to emphasize it. Yet the Lord was sensitive too. What did God say and do to shore up Abraham's faith (15:4–5)? What similar object lesson did God give Abraham previously (13:16)?

As the old man gazed at the night sky, he must have imagined his offspring shining like stars and in numbers that took his breath away. And that's not all. He saw his Friend, the Creator, dazzling him with His



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

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power and glory. At that moment Abraham's fears melted, and he "believed the LORD" (Genesis 15:6). What did the Lord do in response?

This event marked a milestone in redemptive history. The moment Abraham believed, God declared him righteous ("justified"). *By grace, God credited righteousness to Abraham's account.* Hold on to this thought. We'll come back to this point when we interpret the passage.

Next, God restated His promise to Abraham of a homeland: "I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as your possession" (15:7). Although Abraham believed in God, he still could be honest with his questions . . . and so can we. What did Abraham ask (15:8)?



Correlation: Review of the Abrahamic Covenant

Here is a good place in our study to compare Genesis 15:1–8 with God's original promises in the Abrahamic Covenant. Read Genesis 12:2–3, 7. What were these promises?

Abraham had been enjoying God's blessings of wealth and fame, but ten years had passed and he still had no offspring or homeland. We can understand Abraham's questions in Genesis 15:2 and 15:8! Asking questions doesn't imply a *lapse* in faith; rather, asking questions represents a *longing* to strengthen our faith.



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Genesis 15:1–6, 18–21

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Prophetic Revelation—Genesis 15:9–21

Now let's look at the second part, Genesis 15:9–21. In this section, the dialogue shifts to a monologue with the Lord leading Abraham through a ceremony unfamiliar to us but very familiar to Abraham: “cutting” a covenant. Read Genesis 15:9–21. Write down the actions you observe, and make a mental note of the statement in verse 18: “So the LORD made a covenant with Abram that day.”

This bloody scene is dark and strange to our modern-day senses. What could it all mean?



Interpretation: What Does the Text Mean?

Take a moment to look at the chart, “A Patriarch in Panorama—The Life of Abraham,” in the first study in our series. As you can see, the Abrahamic Covenant was affirmed in Genesis 12:1–3, reaffirmed in Genesis 13:14–17 after Abraham separated from Lot, and in Genesis 15 it is reaffirmed again. How is this reaffirmation of the covenant different than the others? Why was a covenant ceremony with an oath important for Abraham?

The Hebrew words for “made a covenant,” *kharat beriyt*, literally mean “to cut a covenant,” in reference to the cutting and distribution of sacrificial meat used in the ceremony. The ceremony corresponded to the ancient custom

of slaughtering animals when concluding a covenant, and after dividing them into pieces, of laying the pieces opposite to one another, that the persons making the covenant might pass between them. . . . God condescended to follow the custom of the Chaldeans, that He might in the most solemn manner confirm His oath to Abram the Chaldean.¹

In the ancient custom, both parties walked between the sacrificial pieces to express their oath to keep their side of the covenant. However, in this ceremony, Abraham fell into a deep sleep, and only God—represented



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Genesis 15:1–6, 18–21

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by the smoking firepot and flaming torch—passed between the carcasses (Genesis 15:12, 17). What did this mean to Abraham? (Hint: Recall the unconditional nature of the Abrahamic covenant.)

An interpretation rule of thumb always involves seeking to understand the meaning that the original audience would have understood. Read Genesis 15:13–16, and write down the meaning of this prophecy to Moses' audience—the newly liberated Hebrews entering the Promised Land.

Now let's return to the theological center point of the passage, Genesis 15:6: "Abraham believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith." How does each of the following passages add meaning to this crucial text?

Habakkuk 2:4; Galatians 3:11

Romans 4:1–5



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Through our faith in Christ, God credits us with His righteousness. It's as if God writes out a check and deposits righteousness into our spiritual account—not because we've earned it but because we have faith in Jesus who bore our sins on the cross. Close this portion of the study by meditating on Paul's powerful words:

But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. (Romans 3:21–25)



Application: What Does the Text Mean to Me?

In his message, Chuck Swindoll offered the following principles—five secrets of intimacy with the Almighty—based on his *Searching the Scriptures* study of Genesis 15:

- *God calms our fears and understands our questions.* You can feel safe with your divine Friend.
- *Don't consider a delay a cancellation.* You can wait on the Lord as you rest in His arms.
- *God loves it when we believe Him.* Trust is as essential to your relationship with God as breathing is to being alive. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart" (Proverbs 3:5).
- *Even when it's dark, we can see the light.* In the middle of your darkness, focus on God who is the "flaming torch" to light your way (Genesis 15:17).
- *Our future is as clear to God as our past is clear to us.* You can rest because God knows what's ahead.

Which of these principles can you apply right away? How?



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S07
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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Can We Talk?

Genesis 15:1–6, 18–21

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STUDY

Close your study by having a talk with your divine Friend. Share your deepest thoughts and feelings, and hear His voice in the words of Scripture.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, calm my fears and quiet my heart as I rest in You, my shield and defender . . . regardless of what tomorrow may bring, I believe in You, my Father, Savior, and Friend. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1, *The Pentateuch*, trans. James Martin (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1872), 214.



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Can We Talk?

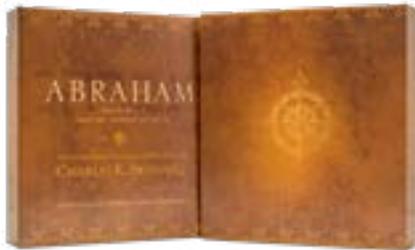
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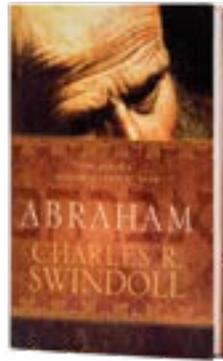
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S07
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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Running ahead of God

Genesis 16:1–8, 11–12, 15–16

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LET'S BEGIN HERE

The impatience of our flesh tends to eclipse the work of the Spirit. When God says, *Wait*, our flesh blurts out, *Now!* This tension creates the perfect condition for believers to run ahead of God. We know God has a plan, but we struggle with adhering to His timing. Instead of waiting on Him, we take matters into our own hands. And invariably, we regret it.

Genesis 16 records a classic example of running ahead of God. Both Abraham and Sarah, who were still known as Abram and Sarai at the time, should have known better. However, in an impatient moment, fueled by the flesh, they devised a scheme to “help” God fulfill His promises. Through their folly, we learn that when we try to help or hurry God, we can make a mess of things. But, thankfully, God in His grace sees us in our distress. Our patient Father helps His impatient children pick up the pieces and guides us back to His plan.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Open your Bible and read Genesis 16 to get the flow of the story. If you wish, read the chapter aloud to better focus your mind. Pray as you begin, asking the Lord to reveal His truth as you open your heart to Him.



Observation: Entering the Scenes

Now that you have a wide-angle view of the passage, read Genesis 16 again, and this time use your senses to see the characters, hear their conversations, and feel the tension. “As we learn to engage our senses,” writes Chuck Swindoll in his book, *Searching the Scriptures*, “the verses come alive in our minds . . . and ultimately in our lives!”¹

Imagine Abraham’s nomadic herdsman lifestyle in Palestine four thousand years ago. Abraham and Sarah resided in a tent, cooked over an open fire, hauled water from a stream or well, and lived off the land. As wealthy people, they hired workers and had servants do the labor. But when facing a medical problem such as infertility, they had no clinics or doctors to go to.

Quotable

Of all of life's dilemmas, none are worse than the spiritual dilemmas. Do we keep waiting on God to work or do we move ahead?

— Charles R. Swindoll



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Running ahead of God

Genesis 16:1–8, 11–12, 15–16

At this point in their lives, Abraham was in his 80s and Sarah in her 70s, and they still had no children! God had given them hope of offspring but not the reality yet. Can you identify with Abraham and Sarah's feelings of anxiety and impatience? As you read Genesis 16, find Abraham and Sarah's *predicament*, *dilemma*, *rationalization*, and the *consequences* that resulted from their actions.

- *Predicament*: a difficult, perplexing, or trying situation
- *Dilemma*: a problem involving a difficult choice
- *Rationalization*: a self-satisfying but incorrect reason for one's behavior
- *Consequence*: something produced by a cause

What was the predicament?

What was the dilemma?

What was the rationalization?



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Running ahead of God

Genesis 16:1–8, 11–12, 15–16

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What were the consequences?

Wrap up your observations of the passage by taking note of God's response to Abraham and Sarah's fleshly scheme. Write down the qualities you see in God as He related to the individuals in this account. Do you see a contrast between Sarah's harshness toward Hagar and God's compassion?



Interpretation: Understanding the Meaning

Now let's seek to interpret the meaning. What was Moses' purpose in including this episode in his book? What was he teaching his readers about faith, family, and walking with God? To answer these questions, let's examine the chapter in four parts, beginning with Abraham and Sarah's scheme.



Searching the Scriptures Tools

Just as we need tools in the kitchen to help us cook our meals, we need Bible study tools to help us feed ourselves God's Word. The tools we recommend for studying Abraham's life are a Bible dictionary, such as *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, and a commentary, such as *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*. Versions of the Bible are available at BibleGateway.com, and an excellent online Bible commentary by Thomas L. Constable is at lumina.bible.org.



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Genesis 16:1–8, 11–12, 15–16

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A Scheme of Human Origin—Genesis 16:1–4

To understand Sarah's seemingly odd offer to Abraham—that he bear a child with Sarah's handmaid, Hagar—we must examine the cultural background of the day. Read the section on Genesis 16 in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*. For an online resource, go to lumina.bible.org. At this site, find Genesis 16, select Constable's Notes on the right panel, and read his explanation.

What insight do you glean from the cultural background?

Although the “committee on morality” of Sarah's day would have stamped *approved* on her surrogate-mother plan and the highbrow society ladies would have nodded in support, God disapproved. What was wrong with Sarah and Abraham taking initiative?

What lessons was Moses teaching the newly formed Hebrew nation about letting culture guide moral decisions rather than God and taking control versus trusting God?



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

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Genesis 16:1–8, 11–12, 15–16

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Consequences and Conflict—Genesis 16:4–6

In his description of the scene, Moses parallels the account of Abraham and Sarah's sin with the sin of Adam and Eve. Compare the conflicts in Genesis 16:4–6 and Genesis 3:1–19, and write down any similarities.

Both couples doubted what God told them. They doubted His goodness. And in both cases, their sin ignited discord. The tragic scene worsened when Abraham abandoned Hagar and told Sarah, “Deal with her as you see fit” (Genesis 16:6). Unleashed, Sarah dumped on Hagar all the years of shame and ridicule she had suffered because of her infertility and released the full force of her pent-up pain. In her blind rage, Sarah abused the surrogate mother of the baby she had wanted to be her own. When Hagar could take no more, “she finally ran away” (16:6).

This raw depiction of family violence in the home of one of the Bible's greatest heroes illustrates vital lessons for families in Moses' day. What were these lessons for the Hebrews . . . and us?

God's Mercy and Grace—Genesis 16:7–14

Thankfully, God intervened. “In verses 7 through 14, we have the first account of God's dealing with an abused woman,” notes Chuck Swindoll in his sermon. The angel of the Lord found Hagar “along the road to Shur”—the wilderness boundary east of Egypt, Hagar's homeland (Genesis 16:7). Gently, the angel of the Lord asked her questions (16:8), advised her to return (16:9), and relayed to her divine promises and comfort (16:10–11).



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Genesis 16:1–8, 11–12, 15–16

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For victims of abuse and abandoned mothers like Hagar, what is the significance of Ishmael's name, "God hears," (Genesis 16:11) and Hagar's name for the Lord, "the God who sees me" (16:13)?

Humankind's Inescapable Reminder of Carnality — Genesis 16:15–16

Hagar returned to Abraham and Sarah under the protection of God's promise, and she gave birth to Ishmael, Abraham's son (Genesis 16:15). As the angel of the Lord foretold, the conflict in Abraham's home would weave itself into the fabric of Ishmael's personality and, ultimately, his offspring: "he will live in open hostility against all his relatives" (16:12).

Ishmael became the father of the Arab nations through his twelve sons (25:12–18). Given what you know about the Middle East, how has the angel's prophecy played out through the centuries?

Reminiscent of the deadly rivalry between Cain and Abel would be the long-lived hostility between Ishmael and his yet-to-be-born half-brother, Isaac, and their descendants. The Arab-Israeli conflict is a sober reminder of the consequences of sin. So the next time we're tempted to run ahead of God, we should . . . **WAIT!**

Application: The Next Time We're Tempted to Run ahead of God

Walk a little slower. When faced with family-altering decisions, we should do what Abraham and Sarah did not do. We must slow down until we can think things through. Hasty decisions are rarely good decisions. Pray about the solutions, and seek the Lord's will.



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

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Genesis 16:1–8, 11–12, 15–16

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Ask God for patience. As we said earlier, the impatience of the flesh will eclipse the work of the Spirit. True patience, a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), comes only from God. He will give us patience when we ask . . . and peace as we wait.

Imagine the worst-case scenario. Just as Eve saw the delicious fruit, Sarah pictured a baby cooing in her arms. However, like we all do at times, Sarah and Abraham turned a blind eye to the warning flags signaling conflict ahead. Humans are a creative bunch—we can justify *any* sin to get what we want. Be realistic about consequences!

Think about how others will be impacted. Our sin can damage loved ones who had nothing to do with our choice. Consider the innocent victims who get run over when we run ahead of God.

Here is some space for you to follow the steps in the acronym **WAIT**. Take your time as you wait on the Lord for His guidance.

Thankfully, God's grace was as present in Abraham and Sarah's story as was their presumption. If you've recklessly barged ahead of God and need to repair some damage, welcome the Father's compassion as Abraham and Sarah welcomed Hagar back into their home. He will help you mend relationships and restore peace. Pray to Him now.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, teach me patience. You have a plan, and I have a need. Help me adjust my pace to Yours. Grant me restraint and a willingness to wait. And fill my anxious soul with confidence that, as I wait, You are present, working deep within me and my circumstances. Thank You for Your peace and healing in my heart and in my home. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2016), 94.



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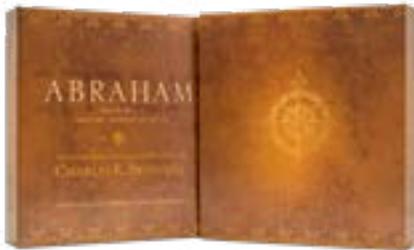
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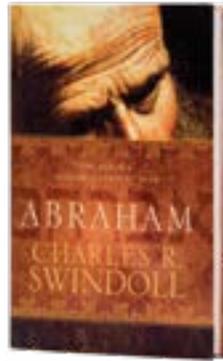
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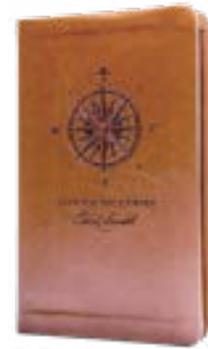
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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Deepening Our Roots with God

Genesis 17:1–5, 9–10, 15–19, 21–22

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LET'S BEGIN HERE

A certain wise old proverb begins with a question: “When is the best time to plant an oak tree?” The answer quips: “A hundred years ago . . . or today.” The point is this: we can't go back in time and change the past, but we can change our future by what we choose today. Today is the best time to plant good seeds that benefit us later. But we must be patient. Like slow-growing oaks, humans mature over the seasons, not overnight. Chuck Swindoll states,

Maturity and depth do not come quickly. They take time. If greed is the demon of money, if lust is the demon of sex, if pride is the demon of power, speed is the demon of depth.

In our hurry-up, high-tech culture, we assume we can acquire anything of value with a tap on a screen. We want rapid transit, fast computers, instant meals, speedy service, and immediate success. We lack patience for a careful cultivation of character that includes being quiet, waiting, and listening for God's “gentle whisper” (1 Kings 19:12).

Sometimes, to give our faith and character time to mature, God must slow us down and lead us into a long dormant season—similar to the season of barrenness that Abraham and Sarah experienced as they waited on God to give them a son. For years, nothing appeared to be happening. But under the soil, out of sight, their roots of spiritual maturity were deepening.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

As we begin our study on deepening our roots, let's enter a period of quiet prayer.

- Invitation: Invite the Lord into your study time, and ask Him to guard you from distraction.
- Openness: Open your heart as David prayed, “Search me, O God, and know my heart” (Psalm 139:23).

Quotable

Maturity and depth do not come quickly. They take time. If greed is the demon of money, if lust is the demon of sex, if pride is the demon of power, speed is the demon of depth.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Deepening Our Roots with God

Genesis 17:1–5, 9–10, 15–19, 21–22

- **Attentiveness:** Ask the Lord to help you hear His “gentle whisper” (1 Kings 19:12).
- **Examination:** Let your mind drift through past decades of your life. Where were you ten years ago? Twenty? Thirty? Acknowledge to the Lord the ways you’ve seen His hand guiding you.
- **Thanksgiving:** Conclude with giving thanks for His presence and for the truths you are about to study.

Now open the Word and read Genesis 17. As you read, notice the focus on God in verses 4–8 (“As for Me” [17:4 NASB]); Abraham, in verses 9–14 (“as for you” [17:9 NASB]); and Sarah, in verses 15–16 (“as for Sarai your wife” [17:15 NASB]).

From your initial reading, what stands out to you?

As we dig deeper into this chapter, we’ll apply our *Searching the Scriptures* skills of observation and interpretation.



Observation and Interpretation: Waiting on God, Listening to God, Talking with God

Observation is the necessary beginning point as we look for action words, details, places, events, repetitions, comparisons, and contrasts. *Interpretation* is deciphering the meaning of the text—based on the author’s intended meaning to his original audience. As we interpret, we form *principles* which we can apply to our lives.

Waiting on God—Genesis 17:1–2

Read Genesis 17:1–2. The opening two verses of Genesis 17 form a bridge from the birth of Ishmael (Genesis 16:15) to the promised birth of Isaac (17:19), from Abraham and Sarah’s running ahead of God to their waiting on God.



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Deepening Our Roots with God

Genesis 17:1–5, 9–10, 15–19, 21–22

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Observation

What do you notice about Abraham's age in Genesis 17:1, compared to his age in Genesis 16:16? What is the significance of this passing of time?

Thirteen years of silence lie sandwiched between Genesis 16 and 17. However, *don't mistake God's silence for His absence*. Through each passing moment, God was near. And don't assume that nothing of significance happened. Although God gave Abraham no vision, voice, or visit, He did give Abraham something equally precious—time to deepen his faith as he waited on God.

Let's continue by contrasting the events recorded in Genesis 16 with the opening lines of Genesis 17. What was Abraham and Sarah's assumption in Genesis 16:1–3 in contrast with God's reassurance in Genesis 17:1–2?

What were God's expectations in 17:1, and how had Abraham and Sarah come short of these expectations in Genesis 16:4–6? Why might God state these expectations here?



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Deepening Our Roots with God

Genesis 17:1–5, 9–10, 15–19, 21–22

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Interpretation

What is the meaning of God's name in 17:1, *El Shaddai*? What do you think this name teaches Abraham and Sarah—and the original readers of Genesis—about trusting God?¹ For added insight into *El Shaddai*, note that this name appears in Scripture 48 times, of which 31 times are in Job. Like Abraham, Job also wrestled with trusting God. What is it about the meaning of *El Shaddai* that inspires faith in those who struggle with doubt?

Principles

What principles about waiting on God emerge from observing and interpreting the text so far?

Abraham and Sarah learned not to run ahead of God but, as God instructed, to “walk before Me and be blameless” (17:1 NASB). As they trusted Him and rested in His promises over the long haul, their roots with God deepened until, *finally*, God announced that their growing season was over and the fruit of their faith was about to appear.

Listening to God—Genesis 17:3–16

Read Genesis 17:3–16. In this section, God does all the talking, as Abraham reverently bows and attentively listens.



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Observation

In the first part of this section, God reaffirmed His unconditional covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:3–8). Refer to the chart, “A Patriarch in Panorama—The Life of Abraham,” in the first study in this series. Review the passages in which God previously affirmed or reaffirmed the Abrahamic covenant. As you read, make mental notes of the many times in these passages in which God used the phrase, “I will.” Note also the ways in which each passage builds on and expands the previous one. What is new in Genesis 17:3–8?

The *seal* of God’s promise—“I will guarantee to give you countless descendants” (17:2)—was Abram’s new God-given name, *Abraham*, which means “father of multitudes.”

What is the *sign* that future generations would be included in the covenantal blessings (17:9–14)? List the specifics of God’s instructions.

The next part addressed Sarah’s role (17:15–16). Although “long past the age of having children” (18:11), Sarah would bear Abraham’s heir. What specifics do you observe in God’s promise to Sarah (17:16)?

Highlighting the promise that “kings of nations will be among her descendants” (17:16), Sarai’s new name, *Sarah*, means “royal princess”—a regal name for the mother of future kings!



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Interpretation

The apostle Paul interprets the Jewish rite of circumcision in light of our spiritual union with Christ. Read Colossians 2:11–12, and write down the meaning of Christ's "spiritual circumcision."

Circumcision symbolized purification and membership in the covenant community. The coming birth of Isaac represented the hope of new life—the next generation in fulfillment of God's promise of a family line. For Christians, we receive purification, identification, and hope of new life through our union with Christ (Colossians 3:3–4).

Principles

What principles about listening to God emerge from observing and interpreting this text?

Talking to God—Genesis 17:17–22

Until now God did all the talking, but when Abraham heard that Sarah would become a mother in her old age, incredulous Abraham had something to say!

Observation

What do you observe about Abraham's reaction (Genesis 17:17–18)?



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Deepening Our Roots with God

Genesis 17:1-5, 9-10, 15-19, 21-22

Abraham's objection and offer of an alternative heir sounds familiar, doesn't it? In Genesis 15, Abraham offered Eliezer as his heir. In the following chart, compare Abraham's offer of Ishmael as his heir with his similar offer of Eliezer.

| | Offer of Eliezer Genesis 15:2-5 | Offer of Ishmael Genesis 17:17-22 |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Abraham's Objection | | |
| Abraham's Idea | | |
| God's Response | | |
| Abraham's Obedience (15:6; 17:23) | | |

Interpretation

Despite Abraham's objections, God insisted that Abraham's heir would be through Sarah. What lesson do you think the author of Genesis was teaching his readers about God's ways?

Principles

What principles about talking to God emerge from observing and interpreting this text?



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Deepening Our Roots with God

Genesis 17:1–5, 9–10, 15–19, 21–22

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Application: Responding to God

After God finished speaking, Abraham obeyed God's command to circumcise, "on that very day" (Genesis 17:23). He obeyed immediately because he trusted God to know what was best. Wholehearted trust leads to *total obedience* and characterizes people with deep spiritual roots.

Ninety-nine-year-old Abraham deepened his roots with God through years of waiting on God, listening to God, talking with God, and responding to God. Which of the *principles that you wrote down in this study* can you "plant" right away in your life? What choices can you make today that will deepen your roots and mature you?

Close your study as you began by inviting the Lord to slow you down to take life step-by-step as you walk with Him in deeper faith.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, slow me down. Quiet my spirit. I want to eliminate distractions so I can listen only to You. There is a quietness in Your presence and a beauty in Your plan. Like Abraham and Sarah, I wait patiently for Your will and trust completely in You through all the seasons of my life. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. "This is the first OT occurrence of the title 'God Almighty' . . . which is used several times in Gen. [17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; cf. 49:25]. Some scholars suggest that *sadday* is related to the Akk. word *sadu* that means breast or mountain or both. . . . So *sadday*, when used of God, refers either to His ability to supply abundantly ["the Abundant One"] or to His majestic strength ["the Almighty One"]." Allen P. Ross, "Genesis," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Old Testament ed., ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, SP Publications, 1985), 58.



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Deepening Our Roots with God

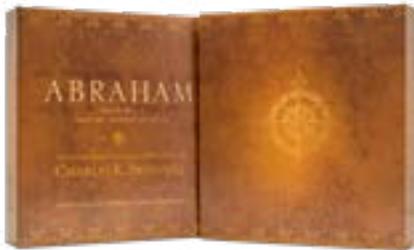
Genesis 17:1–5, 9–10, 15–19, 21–22

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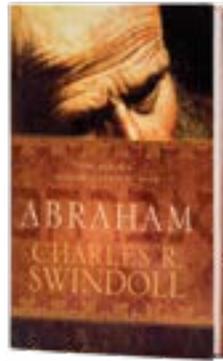
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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

One of Those Upper-Downer Days

Genesis 18:1–5, 9–16, 20–22



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Genesis 18 opens with a familiar phrase, “The LORD appeared again to Abraham” (Genesis 18:1). This is the sixth account of God appearing or speaking to Abraham. Can you recall the previous five? Fill in the blanks, and if you need help find the answer in the references with each statement.

- *Ur of the _____.* God gave Abraham the initial covenant (12:1–3; 15:7).
- *Beside the oak of _____.* God promised to give land to Abraham’s descendants (12:6–7).
- *Between _____ and Ai.* God restated the promises of land and descendants (13:3, 14–16).
- *After rescuing _____.* God reaffirmed His promises through the ceremony of “cutting” the covenant (14:14–16; 15:9–21).
- *When Abraham was _____ years old.* God reaffirmed the covenant, instituting the rite of circumcision (17:1–14).

Either through vision or voice God conversed with Abraham as a close companion, for the Lord knew Abraham as “my friend” (Isaiah 41:8). However, the appearance in Genesis 18 was the most intimate of them all. In this instance, the Lord donned flesh and bone and came to Abraham and Sarah in the form of a man—a divine manifestation known as a *theophany*. Accompanying Him were two angels also dressed in human garb (Genesis 18:22; 19:1). Let’s take a closer look at this most amazing event.

Quotable

Be confident that nothing is too difficult for the Lord. Please keep that in mind! It’ll boost your attitude through life.

— Charles R. Swindoll



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

One of Those Upper-Downer Days

Genesis 18:1–5, 9–16, 20–22

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YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

The scene unfolded in three parts: an unexpected visit (Genesis 18:1–8); a surprising promise (18:9–15); and a judgment revealed (18:16–33). Pause to pray, and then read each section. As you enter the scene, open your heart to worship. Take in the wonder of our God who took on human form and stepped onto the arid landscape of Abraham's world to share a Bedouin's meal under the shade of an oak tree.



Searching the Scriptures Method

The goal of Bible study is to spiritually nourish ourselves. We become self-sustaining physically when we fix our own meals and feed ourselves. Sustaining ourselves spiritually requires a similar process. By following the *Searching the Scriptures* method, we feed ourselves on the Word of God. And then as we live out what we've learned from the Bible, the Spirit of God empowers and changes us. With this goal in mind, let's follow the steps of Bible study: observation, interpretation, correlation, and the all-important final step of application.

The scene displays the heart of God who yearns to fellowship with His beloved creation on our level. Let's follow the action as it unfolded, with three strangers arriving without warning.

Unexpected Visit — Genesis 18:1–8

Read again Genesis 18:1–8, and look closely at the characters in the story. In the first verse, the author of Genesis whispers in the reader's ear the secret identity of one of the three men: "The LORD," in Hebrew, *Yahweh* (Genesis 18:1). Abraham, however, didn't recognize his divine Friend; he saw only three strangers "standing nearby" (18:2).

Observation

In the following space, write down *where* the action took place, *when*, and *what* happened.



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One of Those Upper-Downer Days

Genesis 18:1–5, 9–16, 20–22

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Even though Abraham didn't recognize the heavenly luminaries, still, he rolled out the red carpet. He offered his guests water to wash their feet, fresh-baked bread, a choice calf, and yogurt and milk. And he waited on them, most likely standing while they ate—a sign of highest honor. This was no ordinary afternoon lunch!

Interpretation

Why did the author of Genesis go to such great lengths to describe this meal? A clue to the meaning might be in the contrast between the graciousness of Abraham and the disgracefulness of the Sodomites. Read ahead to the scene when the two angels arrived in Sodom later that night (Genesis 19:4–5).

Abraham's hospitality models proper fellowship with God. What qualities do you see that we can emulate?

What does the contrast between Abraham's decency and the Sodomites' indecency, along with God's response to both, communicate about God our Judge?

Surprising Promise for Sarah—Genesis 18:9–15

After the meal, the visitors came right to the crux of their visit, asking Abraham, "Where is Sarah, your wife?" (Genesis 18:9). Read again this section, and look for the climactic moment when God revealed His name.

Observation

What hints suggest that the guest foretelling future events was the Lord?



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Genesis 18:1–5, 9–16, 20–22

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Correlation: The Pre-Incarnate Son in the Old Testament

Dig a little deeper into other Old Testament passages that describe appearances of the Lord by reading the online article, “*The Pre-Incarnate Son*.” Write down what you discover.

What a marvel! The Son of God appeared to personally foretell the birth of Isaac, who would continue the line of descendants leading up to Jesus’ own birth as a baby in Bethlehem.

Observe a significant repetition in this section (Genesis 18:10 and 14). What made it necessary for the Lord to repeat Himself?

The Lord’s prediction of a son seemed so impossible to 89-year-old Sarah, it was laughable! And yet, *stirring* life within Sarah’s dead womb was far from impossible for the One who *created* all life with just a word. “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” asked the mysterious guest (18:14).

God confronted Sarah for her laughter not to shame her but to expose the cynicism that had supplanted her faith. The mother of Isaac—through whom Christ the Redeemer would come—needed a touch of grace. Before God could spark life in Sarah’s womb, He had to spark hope in her heart and restore her trust in Him.



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Genesis 18:1–5, 9–16, 20–22

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Interpretation

The prediction of Isaac's birth reveals the real purpose for the meal: to reaffirm the covenant in the most personal way. Commentator Allen P. Ross explains the significance of God sharing a meal with Abraham:

To eat together was important for fellowship, peace offerings, and treaties. When the Lord was ready to specify the fulfillment of the covenantal promise, He came in person and ate in Abraham's tent. Nothing could more significantly communicate their close relationship.¹

What insight into the nature of God does this episode with Abraham and Sarah teach you?

Judgment Revealed to Abraham—Genesis 18:16–33

On the heels of hearing God's reassuring promise that he and Sarah will have a son, Abraham learned news that plummeted him from an "upper" day to a "downer" day—from the thrill of receiving God's blessing to the dread of foreseeing God's judgment on Sodom, the city of Lot and his family. Read this section again, looking for evidence of Abraham's role as an intercessor.

Observation

Just as the blood of innocent Abel cried out to the Lord (Genesis 4:10) and, later, the Hebrew slaves under the taskmasters' whips cried out to Him (Exodus 3:7), so also the "outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah" reverberated through the throne room of the King of heaven (Genesis 18:20). The screams of the violated victims had reached the ear of our just God, and He came to see for Himself whether the actions of the abusers were as wicked as He had heard (18:21).

What were Abraham's reasons for asking the Lord to spare the people of Sodom and Gomorrah? For added insight, read 2 Peter 3:9.



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

One of Those Upper-Downer Days

Genesis 18:1–5, 9–16, 20–22

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Interpretation

What is the point of God agreeing to spare the cities if he found 50 . . . 45 . . . 30 . . . 20 . . . 10 righteous people (Genesis 18:26–33)? What does this sequence teach about intercession, compassion, and justice?

Genesis 18 is full of contrasts: Abraham's respectful welcome versus Sodom's disrespectful welcome; God's initial message of love and blessing versus His message of doom; the delightful daylight meal versus the judgment clouds gathering over Sodom. Light and darkness appear side by side, an upper and downer in the same day. What can we learn?



Application: Principles to Remember

Chuck Swindoll lists four principles to apply.

- *Receive others as if they are angels.* The writer to the Hebrews makes this point: Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it! (Hebrews 13:2)
- *Be confident that nothing is too difficult with God.* This truth broke through Sarah's cynicism and restored her hope, and it can restore yours as well.
- *Stay sensitive to the Lord.* Remember, God is not only your Creator and Savior, He's also your Friend.
- *Stay passionate in prayer.* For whom are you interceding? Don't give up pleading with the Lord! When we focus on others by praying for the lost and encouraging the hopeless, our hearts will be softened and we'll experience joy that transcends upper-downer days.

Do you find other principles to apply? Write them down.



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What can you put into practice today?

Just as Abraham saw God standing nearby, look for God in everyday settings. Listen for His voice and look for His fingerprints in creation around you. Pause to hear Him as you read Scripture and sing spiritual songs. Such common occurrences reveal the Lord's plans for you. Keep your eyes, ears, and heart open to the One who steps into your world for the sole purpose of being with you.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for entering my world and giving me a fresh script to follow. Guard me from being cynical and thinking that I know everything about what can and cannot happen. I need Your perspective. I need Your presence in the ordinary events of eating a meal. Keep me soft, sensitive, open, and aware that You're doing a work in my life. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Allen P. Ross, "Genesis," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament ed.*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, SP Publications, 1985), 59.



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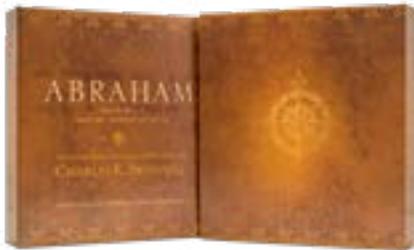
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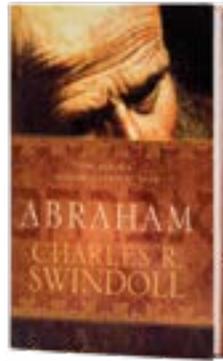
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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

What Happens When We Pray?

Genesis 18:22–33

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LET'S BEGIN HERE

We've all heard it said that we never stand taller than when we kneel before our God. But what happens when we offer our prayers and petitions to God? Does He change His mind? Can we alter His plan or reverse His course?

In this study, we'll zoom in on Abraham's passionate dialogue with the Lord about the fate of Sodom. By analyzing Abraham's prayer, we can understand the struggle that occurs between petition (*what* we ask for) and desire (*why* we ask) and gain insight into the important role prayer plays in our lives. As we do, we'll learn to pray with confidence before the throne of grace.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Reread the conversation between Abraham and the Lord, recorded in Genesis 18:22–33, that we examined in the previous study. As you read, try to discern Abraham's motive. What prompted Abraham to ask the Lord to spare the city?

With each plea to spare the righteous, Abraham's heart must have pounded with concern for Lot and his family who surely would perish in Sodom's judgment fire. Anyone who has begged God for mercy on behalf of a loved one can identify with Abraham's passionate appeal. Our hearts brim with questions such as these:

- Does God hear my cries for my loved ones' rescue?
- What if my prayers are misguided? Will God still act on their behalf?
- How should I interpret God's silence?

Quotable

Prayer is one of the deepest subjects that can ever be studied. And if you don't think that, you haven't thought deeply enough about prayer.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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What Happens When We Pray?

Genesis 18:22–33

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To answer these questions, we'll use the *Searching the Scriptures* method of *correlation* to dig deeper into the topic of prayer.



Searching the Scriptures: Correlation

Correlation is the process of comparing Scriptures to amplify the meaning of a text to gain a broader understanding. Correlating Scriptures guards us from building a doctrine on one verse and cultivates a reasonable and balanced faith. Helpful tools are a good study Bible that contains notes and cross-references. A concordance, such as *The Strongest NASB Exhaustive Concordance*, is useful. Searchable versions of the Bible are available at BibleGateway.com.

Two Major Ingredients in Prayer

All prayers include two major ingredients: *petition* and *desire*. *Petition* is the request that we present to the Lord, and *desire* refers to our motive—the deeper reason behind our requests.

What two reasons does James give to explain unanswered prayer (James 4:2–3)?

Our motives are just as important to the Lord as our requests. Often our motives are hidden, even to us; however, what does Hebrews 4:13 tell us about God's insight into the deepest parts of who we are?

We may try to hide our desires behind our fancy-worded prayers, but God sees the real *us*, with all our quirks, complexities, and secret wishes. Through the lens of these two ingredients, requests and desires, we can see four ways God responds to our prayers.



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What Happens When We Pray?

Genesis 18:22–33

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Four Ways God Responds to Our Prayers

God's yes or no depends on His response to what we pray and why we pray.

First, *God might say yes to the petition and yes to the desire*. We find an example of God's yes-yes response in an episode from Elijah's life. Read Elijah's prayer recorded in 1 Kings 18:36–37. What was his petition? What was his desire?

What indication do you see in this passage that Elijah was acting according to God's revealed will?

Read 1 John 5:14–15. How does this passage affirm the prayer principle illustrated by God's response to Elijah?



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Genesis 18:22–33

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Second, *God might say no to the petition and no to the desire*. The Bible gives numerous examples of misguided requests made with wrong motives. According to each of the following verses, why does God refuse to answer some prayers?

Matthew 6:5–7

James 1:6–7

1 Peter 3:7

Sometimes God answers no because our request and motives don't line up with His will. Other times, He wants to teach us a divine lesson or, perhaps, He wants to use us as an object lesson to teach others. It's always a soul-searching time when God says no.

Third, *God might say yes to our petition but no to our desire*. An example of God's yes-no response occurs in His dealing with the Israelites in the wilderness. Read Numbers 11:4–6. Weary of eating only manna, the people begged the Lord for meat. Though the Lord was not pleased with their ingratitude (Numbers 11:10), He provided meat just as they requested.



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What Happens When We Pray?

Genesis 18:22–33

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Read Numbers 11:31–35. What consequences did the Israelites endure when they received what they asked for with the wrong motives? Why do you think God responded as He did?

The old saying proved true for the Israelites that day: “Be careful what you ask for. You just might get it!”

Fourth, *God might say no to our petition but yes to the desire*. God’s *no-yes* response is precisely what Abraham received when he prayed for the preservation of Sodom. Abraham’s desire was pure when he asked the Lord to show mercy on the wicked city for the sake of ten righteous people (Genesis 18:27–33). We’ll see God’s answer in the next study of Genesis 19:1–26. God could not find even ten righteous people in the city, so He declined Abraham’s request and judged the city. However, God honored Abraham’s heartfelt desire by warning Lot and his family to flee.

Read Romans 8:26–28. How does this passage apply to God’s answering the right desire regardless of the petition?

Abraham’s life consisted of simple conversations with God—prayer at its purest. Through Abraham’s example, we learn that God often has something better for us even when He says no to our request.



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Application: Three Possible Answers to Any Prayer

As we conclude, let's examine three possible answers we may receive to any prayer.

- *God can (and often does) say yes!* These are magnificent moments, aren't they? Remember, though: God may go deeper than our surface-level requests and get to the heart of the matter, giving us what we really need rather than what we think we need. Can you recall a time when God answered your prayer as requested or even better than requested? Write down what happened, and express your trust in His wisdom.
- *God can (and often does) say no!* God's no is never motivated by cruelty, and He's never obligated to explain His reasons. Paul experienced God's no when he requested healing (2 Corinthians 12:7–10). However, he accepted God's answer and viewed this "thorn" as an opportunity to trust God's goodness and lean on His grace. Write down a case of God's no in your life, and, like Paul, express your trust and dependency on the Lord.
- *God can (and often does) say wait!* Abraham waited on God . . . for years! From our limited, horizontal perspective, we can't always understand why God delays blessings or postpones promises. Yet our waiting is one of God's most frequently used methods of growing us spiritually. Use the space below to record a current prayer to which God has answered, wait. Your request and motives may be right, but perhaps they don't fit into God's timing. Express your trust in God's perfect timing.



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

What Happens When We Pray?

Genesis 18:22–33

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Has this study helped you answer some questions about prayer? Record here any further questions you might have about prayer, and in the coming days seek the Lord through His Word. As you do, remember to keep trusting His wisdom, His goodness, and His timing.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, because You are my sovereign Lord, I lean on You and trust Your answers to my prayers, whether yes, no, or wait. Search my heart to know my motives, and reveal any self-seeking desires in me. May I always live in submission to Your will and way. And, Lord, please show mercy to my loved ones who need Your help. Rescue them. Draw them with Your arms of love, and lead them in Your everlasting way. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. This study was adapted from Michael J. Svingel, *Abraham: One Nomad's Amazing Journey of Faith Bible Companion* from the Bible-teaching ministry of Charles R. Swindoll (Frisco, Tex.: IFL Publishing House, 2014), 111–21.



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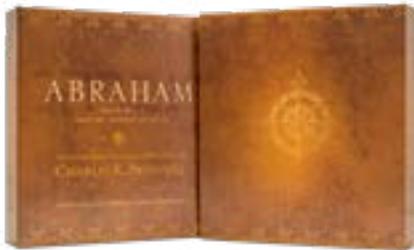
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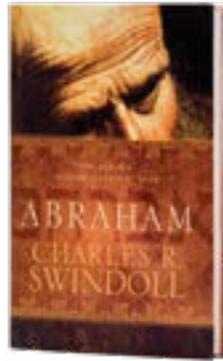
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When the Cesspool Overflows

Genesis 19:1–14

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LET'S BEGIN HERE

In some parts of the world, pollution levels are so high that people get sick simply by breathing the air. Chemical waste fouls the water; contaminants poison the food supply. How can people remain healthy while living in such a toxic environment?

Morally toxic Sodom exposed Lot and his family to pollution of a different kind—pollution of the soul. Depravity hung in the cultural air like a noxious cloud. Cesspools of sin overflowed and exposed Lot and his family to acts of savagery, unrestrained sexual perversions, and appalling forms of abuse. How could anyone remain spiritually healthy living in Sodom's sewer of sin?

Had Joshua lived in Lot's day, he would have warned Lot of the hazards of associating with evil people: "they will be a snare and a trap to you, a whip for your backs and thorny brambles in your eyes" (Joshua 23:13). Likewise, the apostle Paul would have warned: "Bad company corrupts good character" (1 Corinthians 15:33). Paul would have urged Lot:

Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey him. Don't participate in the things these people do. (Ephesians 5:6–7)

Tragically, the bad company of the Sodomites *did* corrupt Lot and his family. And the anger of the Lord *did* fall on the people of Sodom and would have consumed Lot as well . . . but for a visit by two angels who came to his rescue.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

To prepare your soul for our visit to Sodom, pause to pray for the Lord to reveal His light in this dark place. Meditate on these verses that focus on God's love, faithfulness, righteousness, and justice.

Your unfailing love, O LORD, is as vast as the heavens;
your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds.

Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
your justice like the ocean depths. (Psalm 36:5–6)

Quotable

Convictions are deep, strong, firmly rooted inner principles regarding integrity, morality, ethics, and faith. What you know is one thing, but what you do with what you know has to do with convictions.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

When the Cesspool Overflows

Genesis 19:1–14

Let's keep our eyes on our heavenly Father as we step through Sodom's gates. God is the victor in this story, not evil. Read Genesis 19:1–14 and, as you do, look for godly characteristics in the actions of the angels in contrast to the ungodly characteristics exhibited by Lot.

| The Angels' Godly Characteristics | Lot's Ungodly Characteristics |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | |

Lot's behavior showed signs of contamination: self-interest, betrayal, compromise, and corruption. What could Lot have done to protect himself from the moral pollution of Sodom? What can we do to protect ourselves from moral pollution where we live? Let's look for answers to these questions as we study the story.



Searching the Scriptures Tool

Observation is a critical beginning technique to put together the pieces of a passage of Scripture. Notice features such as contrasts, comparisons, repeated words, cause-and-effect, and emphasized words. Particularly notice imperatives (commands) and verbs (action words), which are like tree limbs. All the ideas in the paragraph, like branches and leaves, connect to these words.



Observation: An Example of Moral Deterioration

The passage reveals Lot's role in the city (Genesis 19:1) and his relationships with three groups—angelic visitors (19:1–3), immoral citizens (19:4–11), and his indifferent family (19:12–14).



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

When the Cesspool Overflows

Genesis 19:1–14

SEARCHING
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Lot's Role in the Wicked City—Genesis 19:1

Compare Genesis 13:12–13 with Genesis 19:1. A seat at the city gates implied a role of authority for Lot, a position among the governing elders who conducted business and resolved disputes. What progression do you notice from Lot's initial dwelling to his seat at Sodom's city gates? And what does Lot's civic involvement suggest about him?

Abraham and Lot shared much in common as uncle and nephew. Abraham was held in high regard among the Amorites (Genesis 14:13), and Lot was held in high regard among the Sodomites. Both Abraham and Lot were righteous. "Abraham believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous" (15:6). According to Peter, Lot also was "a righteous man" (2 Peter 2:7). However, unlike Abraham, Lot lacked *convictions*. He may have been, as Peter notes, "tormented in his soul by the wickedness he saw and heard day after day" (2:8), but it took a visit by two angels to get him to leave the foul place!

Lot with Angelic Visitors—Genesis 19:1–3

What was the angels' purpose for visiting Sodom (Genesis 18:20–21)?

What do you observe about Lot's initial meeting with the angels (19:1–3)?

The Lord had agreed to spare the city if the angels found ten righteous people (18:32). Lot passed the righteousness test by showing them hospitality. But in doing so, he revealed his hypocritical heart. His hasty ushering the angels out of the city square bore the marks of a cover-up, an attempt to put on cordiality while drawing a curtain on Sodom's horrors.



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When the Cesspool Overflows

Genesis 19:1–14

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Lot among the Immoral Citizens—Genesis 19:4–11

In this section, the author, like a prosecuting attorney, exhibits the *widespread* scale and *extreme* severity of Sodom's sins, removing all doubt that God's judgment is justified. As you read Genesis 19:4–11, list as bullet points the case against Sodom.

The evil of Noah's day had resurfaced in the minds of these depraved men: "everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil" (Genesis 6:5). Noah boarded God's lifeboat when judgment rained; Lot, however, clung to the rails of Sodom's sinking ship. In a pitiful attempt to stay judgment and preserve his livelihood, he pleaded with the vile men: "Please, my brothers . . . don't do such a wicked thing" (19:7). Which of Lot's actions betray his self-seeking motives and lack of convictions (19:6–9)?

Just as Lot could not stop the men lunging like ravenous wolves at their prey, so he could not hold back Sodom's inevitable destruction.

Lot and His Indifferent Family—Genesis 19:12–14

Whom did Lot warn, and what was their response (Genesis 19:12–14)?



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

When the Cesspool Overflows

Genesis 19:1–14

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Lot had warned the men at the door, “Don’t do such a wicked thing” (Genesis 19:7); now he warned his would-be sons-in-law, “Quick, get out of the city!” (19:14). How is the response of these two groups to God’s warnings typical in our world of people who are confronted with God’s truth?

Although the citizens of Sodom considered Lot “an outsider” (19:9), he never stood for “outsider” values. Lot was too busy making business deals at the city gate to represent God’s goodness in the city square.



Interpretation: Timeless Principles on Maintaining God’s Convictions

What meaning did the author of Genesis intend to communicate to his readers by recounting this disturbing story? First, write down what this story says about the character of God.

Next, let’s draw some principles from Lot’s behavior. Chuck Swindoll explains the root of Lot’s problems:

Lot became soiled by Sodom’s sin because he lacked convictions. *Convictions are deep, firmly rooted inner principles regarding integrity, morality, ethics, and faith.* A set of convictions helps us recognize good and evil and then prompts us to confront evil and choose good. (emphasis added)¹

What could Lot have done to protect himself and his family? What can we do in our sin-saturated culture? The answer is one word, *convictions*. Imagine: if Lot had *had* convictions, he would have stood up to evil, stood by his family, and stood for God’s values even at the cost of his own business. With this image in mind, formulate your answers to the following questions.



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When the Cesspool Overflows

Genesis 19:1–14

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How will establishing convictions protect you?

How will modeling and affirming convictions in your home protect your family?

How will holding fast to your convictions keep you focused on your values when pressure threatens you to compromise?



Correlation: Comparing Principles

What supportive principles do these verses add?

Proverbs 20:19

2 Corinthians 6:14–18



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When the Cesspool Overflows

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Application: The Personal Value of Convictions

How can we maintain our convictions while living in a morally polluted society? The answer: remember what's at stake if we compromise. Chuck Swindoll reflects on how he maintained his convictions by reminding himself what was at stake:

I hadn't been at Camp Courtney for twenty minutes before guys in my barracks began telling me where I could go to shack up at night. Not surprisingly, a majority of the forty-eight Marines in my Quonset hut had contracted a venereal disease. Meanwhile, I had a wife waiting for me at home. While I knew temptation, I knew even more strongly that one day I would have to look her in the eye and either tell her the truth or tell her a pack of lies. And I knew that what I told her would become part of the foundation upon which we would build our marriage, our life together, the home in which we'd rear our children, and ultimately . . . the ministry we would share together.

My convictions became compelling to me personally, which helped me return to her arms with a clear conscience.²

How can Chuck's thought process help you stay true to your convictions?

It's never too late to lay a foundation of love, faithfulness, righteousness, and justice on which to build your life. What convictions do you need to establish to keep your conscience clear?

Remember, like Lot, you're not alone. God is with you to strengthen, protect, and even rescue you. Depend on His power when you feel weak, and let His love, faithfulness, righteousness, and justice guide your steps.



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Genesis 19:1–14

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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I pray that You would by Your grace come alongside me and give me angelic strength to stand tall in my world. To stand for right. To stand against wrong. Give me the sensitivity to balance truth with grace and belief with conviction. Keep my eyes on Your character as the light to guide me in love, faithfulness, righteousness, and justice. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Abraham: One Nomad's Amazing Journey of Faith* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 128.
2. Swindoll, *Abraham*, 130.



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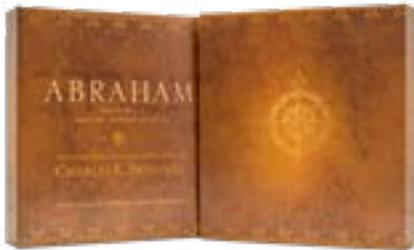
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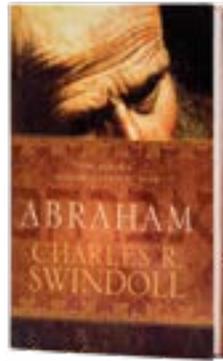
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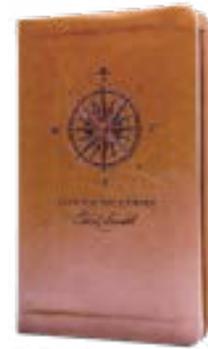
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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

A Wail of Two Cities

Genesis 19:15–29

SEARCHING
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LET'S BEGIN HERE

Charles Dickens' classic novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, opens with these memorable lines:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.¹

Best, worst. Light, darkness. Hope, despair. How could such extremes coexist? And yet, they do! Accounts of good and evil, triumph and tragedy stand side-by-side in every era from Dickens' day to our day.

The best and worst of times existed together in the ancient tale of two cities, Sodom and Gomorrah. Humanity's worst acts of wickedness cried out for justice (Genesis 18:20), and when the judgment of God finally fell, the *wail of two cities* echoed across the plain. But at just the right time, angelic hands of mercy ushered Lot and his family out of harm's way. It's a tale of God's best existing alongside humanity's worst—God's light of grace penetrating sin's darkness and hope rising from the ashes of despair.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

As you begin this study, meditate on the following verse and write down the hope it gives you:

“For the LORD will vindicate His people,
And will have compassion on His servants,
When He sees that their strength is gone,
And there is none remaining, bond or free.”
(Deuteronomy 32:36 NASB)

Quotable

*There comes a
time, finally, when
God declares, in no
uncertain terms,
“That is enough.”*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

A Wail of Two Cities

Genesis 19:15–29

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In prayer, tell the Lord that your hope is in Him, and ask Him to reveal His grace from Sodom and Gomorrah's devastation.

Read Genesis 19:15–29. Look for the angels' urgent words of hope and compassion, and write them down here.



Searching the Scriptures Tip

Read God's Word with your heart, not just with your mind. Our minds gather information when we read, but our hearts yearn for connection with God. In this story, we see who God is and what He is like by watching Him relate to Lot and his family. Even a tragic story of judgment such as the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah can bring us nearer to God, which is the ultimate purpose of studying His Word.



Observation: A Theological Truth and a Historical Event

The pages of Scripture are like windows into heaven through which we admire the resplendent attributes of God—His abilities, values, and character. Of all His attributes, observes Chuck Swindoll, we tend to “overlook the quality of divine justice.” He continues:

We prefer to avoid the theological principle that God's tolerance and patience have a limit. His mercy comes with an expiration date. There are occasions when God says, “That's enough. That's it. No more.”²

Perhaps Lot overlooked God's justice because he assumed God's patience would stay judgment indefinitely. However, would God be *truly* just if He never held evil to account? Certainly not! Sin's victims cry out for vindication, and a holy God *will* put a stop to evil. The angels knew that, and they also knew, as surely as night gave way to day, God's patience would give way to justice. Dawn would signal the day of reckoning for Sodom and Gomorrah.



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

A Wail of Two Cities

Genesis 19:15–29

Grace: An Answer to Prayer—Genesis 19:15–22

In the chart below, summarize the drama and include what you think was the *reason* each character said or did what they did. For example, why were the angels “insistent” (Genesis 19:15)? They knew that Lot and his family would perish if they didn’t leave now!

| Passage | Words and Action | Reason |
|---------------|------------------|--------|
| Genesis 19:15 | | |
| 19:16 | | |
| 19:17–20 | | |
| 19:21–22 | | |

Judgment: A Consequence of Wickedness—Genesis 19:23–26

The judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah was cataclysmic. What do you observe in the description of the scene (Genesis 19:23–26)?



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

A Wail of Two Cities

Genesis 19:15–29

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Correlation: Flood, Fire, and the End Times

What similarities and differences do you see with this judgment and the judgment of the flood in Genesis 7:1–12?

Write down what you notice about obedience in Noah's story versus the resistance in Lot's story.

How did Jesus use the story of Sodom and Gomorrah as an illustration of complacency at the end times (Luke 17:28–35)?

What does Peter teach about God's patience and the sudden nature of judgment (2 Peter 3:5–10)?

This sobering review of God's judgment past and future causes us to pause and reflect—just as it caused Abraham to do the same when he awoke that morning to smoke rising from Lot's hometown.



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Genesis 19:15–29

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Reflection: A Lesson on Holiness—Genesis 19:27–29

Where was Abraham and what did he see (Genesis 19:27–29)?

Abraham's overlook was near the place where he had built an altar to the Lord (Genesis 13:18), received word of Lot's capture (14:13), and entertained the angels (18:1). What may have Abraham reflected on as he viewed the fiery judgment of Sodom from this location?

As we leave Abraham on the crest of the hill pondering the fate of his nephew and the awesome power of God, we step into the next phase of our *Searching the Scriptures* study: interpretation.



Interpretation: The Meaning of the Story

What lessons did the author of Genesis, Moses, intend to teach God's people (including us) regarding the following elements of the account of Sodom and Gomorrah?

God's Unavoidable Justice

God's Rescuing Grace



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A Wail of Two Cities

Genesis 19:15–29

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Lot's Hesitation and Resistance

Lot's Wife's Inability to Let Go

Lot was attached to the highlife in Sodom like an addict attached to a drug. The angels had to conduct an intervention! They had to grab him by the hand and force him out of the city. “Hurry,” they urged frantically (Genesis 19:15). “Run for your lives! And don't look back!” they shouted (19:17). Still, Lot resisted and bargained like an alcoholic clinging to his bottle.

Lot's wife could not pull herself away and, as a result, was transformed into a pillar of salt—a memorial to the consequences of a hardened heart. She became an enduring illustration of Jesus' warning: “If you cling to your life, you will lose it” (Luke 17:33). Thankfully, however, Jesus offered this hopeful corollary: “If you let your life go, you will save it” (17:33).

Application: Reminders We Dare Not Ignore

The key to letting go is to *take God seriously*. God's holiness demands judgment for sin. But there is a way of escape! “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

In the space below, acknowledge to the Lord the things of this life to which you're clinging that are not of God. See these earthly distractions for the harm they cause you and those you love. Release these things in prayer, and proclaim your desire to follow Jesus without resisting, bargaining . . . or looking back.



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A Wail of Two Cities

Genesis 19:15–29

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STUDY

What other applications can you draw from the principles in this study? And how can you put into practice this week what you've learned?

Close your study thanking God, who sent His best—Jesus Christ—to rescue us from the worst of times.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I acknowledge that You are Holy God, and I stand in respect and awe of Your glory. I acknowledge, Lord, that You have every right to do with me as You please. In the me-first age in which I live, I proclaim that You are first in my life. Thank You for intervening, for saying, "That's enough," and for pulling me to safety. May You always be my Lord and Master. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1902), 3, accessed on Google Books, Dec. 18, 2017.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Abraham: One Nomad's Amazing Journey of Faith* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 134.



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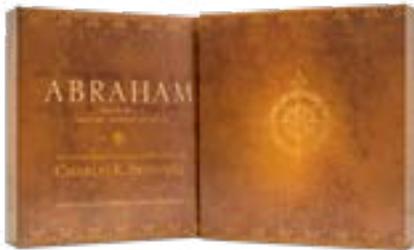
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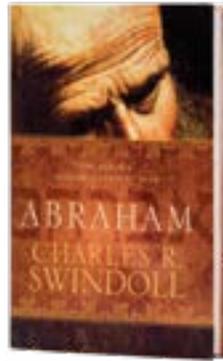
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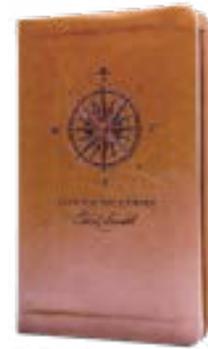
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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Overcoming Depravity's Dangerous Undertow

Genesis 19:30–38



LET'S BEGIN HERE

The deep depravity of our culture constantly threatens to sweep us away into gross indecency and shameless immorality. All around us, lives are being shattered, families ripped apart, and whole communities destroyed.

This powerful current of sin is not a modern phenomenon. The account of Lot's dysfunctional family affair that we'll study in this lesson teaches us that the tragic effects of sin have been with us since the beginning. This embarrassing scene in Genesis 19 reminds us of just how deeply an immoral culture can affect our sense of right and wrong. This story warns us against becoming indifferent and irresponsible in the wicked world we live in, prompting us to remember our weakness and reflect on how we can overcome depravity's dangerous undertow.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

The authors of the Bible spoke plainly about sin because they knew first-hand sin's disastrous effects on families and societies. They warned harshly because they cared deeply for people's souls. Perhaps you have experienced sin's undertow pulling you and your loved ones into dangerous waters. Thankfully, along with warnings, the Bible offers hope—God's rescue. As you begin this study, meditate on God's rescue of those who were drowning in the consequences of their sin—people like Jonah, who praised God who rescued him from the deep:

"I sank beneath the waves,
and the waters closed over me.
Seaweed wrapped itself around my head.
I sank down to the very roots of the mountains.
I was imprisoned in the earth,
whose gates lock shut forever.
But you, O LORD my God,
snatched me from the jaws of death!
As my life was slipping away,
I remembered the LORD." (Jonah 2:5–7)

Quotable

*You can take people
out of Sodom,
but you can't take
Sodom out of
people, especially
those who have
imbibed its lifestyle.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Overcoming Depravity's Dangerous Undertow

Genesis 19:30–38

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY



Observation: Lot's Pathetic Family

Now, open your Bible and read Genesis 19:30–38. Lot and his daughters had escaped Sodom's devastation but not the lingering fallout from Sodom's influence.

Why was Lot living in Zoar (Genesis 19:18–21)?

The people of Zoar had just witnessed the terrifying destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. What might they have done to Lot and his daughters to make Lot afraid enough to move to a cave (19:30)? Perhaps the sailors' reaction to Jonah provides a parallel (Jonah 1:7–10).

What prompted Lot's daughters to have incestuous relations with their father (Genesis 19:31–34)?

While in Sodom, Lot offered his daughters to the vile men at the door (19:8). Now, his daughters gave themselves sexually to their drunken father. What values are *missing* in Lot's family system that would permit such sins?



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Overcoming Depravity's Dangerous Undertow

Genesis 19:30–38

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STUDY

Look up the word, *pathetic*, in a dictionary, and write down how the first definition of this word is an apt description of Lot and his family.



Correlation: Tracing Family Sin through the Scriptures

Since Adam and Eve's first sin in the garden, sin's malady has plagued families. Adam and Eve's firstborn son murdered his own brother (Genesis 4:8). In Noah's day, the sin of the culture prompted a worldwide flood, and later Noah got so drunk he exposed himself to his sons (6:5–7; 9:20–23). In Isaac's family, his wife Rebekah taught her son, Jacob, to be a deceiver to steal the blessing from Esau (27:1–29). In David's family, his own children committed rape and incest (2 Samuel 13:1–20).

As Chuck Swindoll reminds us, family sin “is not something we cluck our tongues at as we think about someone else; this is your problem and this is mine. We all struggle with the characteristics of depravity.”

Our hearts break for Lot and his shattered family. This wealthy and respected man who once sat at Sodom's gate was living in a cave, driven out of Zoar and destitute. His wife was dead. His daughters were disgraced. What insight can we glean from this tragic account?



Interpretation: Lessons Learned

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, *interpretation* is the step of finding the meaning of the text. What lessons did the author intend to pass on to his original audience? Let's examine the meaning of the text through the lenses of four traits.



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Overcoming Depravity's Dangerous Undertow

Genesis 19:30–38

SEARCHING
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STUDY

The Absence of Divine Perspective

Lot's daughters were concerned about not having an heir—a legitimate problem. But they viewed their problem from a human perspective instead of God's perspective and made a terrible choice. How might they have learned this trait from their father's lack of divine perspective when he chose to live in the Jordan valley (Genesis 13:10–13)?

What *principle* can we learn from Lot's poor example?

A Distortion of Moral Discernment

Lot's daughters distorted God's moral values when they slept with their father. How might their lack of discernment have been passed to them from their father (Genesis 19:8)?

What *principle* can we learn from the daughters' example?



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A Breakdown of Parental Authority

Lot allowed himself to get so drunk that he didn't know what his daughters were doing. What led him to escape his problems through alcohol and abandon his fatherly role?

What *principle* can we learn from Lot's example?

A Buildup of Immoral Insensitivity

How might life in Sodom have contributed to the daughters' actions in the cave? Also, how might Lot's wife's disobedience in looking back at Sodom have impacted her daughters (Genesis 19:26)?

What *principle* can we learn from the influence of Sodom's culture and Lot's wife on the daughters?



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The story's unexpected conclusion drives home the final warning: *sin's consequences impact future generations*. The descendants of the babies born through incest, Moab and Ben-ammi, became the Moabites and Ammonites—Israel's relentless and implacable enemies. Unwittingly, Lot's daughters preserved Sodom's wickedness for generations to come. Chuck Swindoll sums up the hard lessons from Lot's tragic tale:

What happens in the cave near Zoar is simply a rebirth of Sodom. You can take people out of Sodom, but you can't take the Sodom out of people, especially those who have imbibed its lifestyle.



Application: Overcoming Depravity's Dangerous Undertow

Which principle that you listed previously can you apply to your life, and how can you put your application into practice?

Four lifesaving strategies for overcoming depravity's dangerous undertow emerge from this study. Which of these strategies can you begin doing today?

- *Realize no one is immune to the dangers.* Don't say, "This would never happen to me or to one of my children." Knowing your own weaknesses is the first step to guarding against them. "If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall. The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience" (1 Corinthians 10:12–13).
- *Stay alert to subtle hints.* Hints of depravity's secret invasion might include toleration of profanity and vulgarity, lowering personal standards, and making light of sacred things. Stand firm in your authority to stop sin's current. "Carefully determine what pleases the Lord. Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness" (Ephesians 5:10–11).
- *Declare and model your standard repeatedly.* Post in your home a list of biblical virtues and standards, and review them often. "Commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands. . . . Repeat them again and again to your children" (Deuteronomy 6:6–7).



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

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Genesis 19:30–38

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- *Guard against passivity.* Make godliness a big deal! Hold your children accountable to your family's standards. "Be on guard so that you will not be carried away by the errors of these wicked people and lose your own secure footing" (2 Peter 3:17).

The scorched landscape of the once-lush valley of Sodom was a fitting image of the desolation of Lot, the once-blessed nephew of Abraham. The consequences of moral compromise can be devastating, but, thankfully, God's grace can redeem the most barren soul, as we'll discover when we return to Abraham's storyline in the next study.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the blood of Christ that pays the penalty for all my sin. Thank You for the family of the Son in whom I now live. May I resist the lure of evil and flourish in Your love that is greater than my past and the foundation of hope for my future. Keep my eyes on You and my heart at home. Amen.



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Overcoming Depravity's Dangerous Undertow

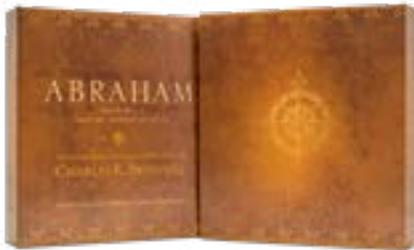
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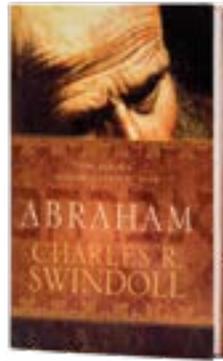
STUDY



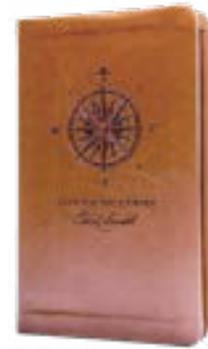
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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Disobedience Déjà Vu

Genesis 20:1–3, 6–7, 9–11, 14–18



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Wouldn't it be wonderful if the moment we trusted Christ as our Savior we experienced instant maturity? Imagine bypassing the messiness of babyhood and the temper tantrums of childhood and transforming into spiritual adults right after our new birth! In an instant, we'd be courteous and kind, willing to share, and honest. We'd have no struggles, no pain, no battles with the flesh, no arguments with others, and no repeating sins from the past. Our spiritual walk would be one direction only—upward. Wouldn't that be great?

Spiritual maturity, however, is an up-and-down learning process. Look at Abraham's spiritual-growth chart, for example. He soared in faith when he moved his family from Ur to the Promised Land. But then, not long after, he stumbled when he lied to Pharaoh to save his own skin. But then he shot up again when he displayed great-heartedness by giving Lot first choice of the land.

In this study, we'll see Abraham repeat the success-failure cycle once more. On the heels of his gracious meal with the Lord and two angels (Genesis 18:1–16) and his compassionate prayer for the people of Sodom (18:17–33), Abraham repeated a past failure when he lied to Abimelech just like he lied to Pharaoh. Abraham's actions demonstrate the tendency in all of us to struggle with the same sins. Thankfully, God responds to our repeated failure with forgiveness, again and again . . . and again!

Quotable

God has a plan that's far better than one we could ever devise, and we need to stop leaning on our own way of thinking.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Disobedience Déjà Vu

Genesis 20:1–3, 6–7, 9–11, 14–18



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Abraham's lie to Abimelech is so similar to his lie to Pharaoh that it's like Abraham is singing the same off-key song, second verse. **Read Genesis 20:1–18**, and fill in the following chart that compares the two accounts. The first blank has been done for you.

| | Genesis 12:10–20 | Genesis 20:1–18 |
|------------------|---|---|
| Setting | Abraham and Sarah moved to Egypt (12:10). | Abraham and Sarah moved south to the Negev and to Gerar (20:1). |
| Situation | They lived as foreigners (12:10). | |
| Deception | Abraham told Sarah to say that she is his sister (12:11–13). | |
| Motive | Abraham was afraid the Egyptians would kill him (12:12). | |
| Results | Pharaoh took Sarah into his palace (12:15). | |
| Judgment | God sent plagues upon Pharaoh (12:17). | |
| Response | Pharaoh rebuked Abraham and sent him and Sarah away (12:18–20). | |



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Disobedience Déjà Vu

Genesis 20:1–3, 6–7, 9–11, 14–18



Searching the Scriptures Tool—Finding Gerar

The place names in the account—“the Negev,” “Kadesh and Shur,” and “Gerar” (Genesis 20:1)—were familiar to the original readers. The Negev was an arid region in the southern part of Palestine. In the days of Moses, the Philistines had settled in the region to the west of the Negev and along the coast. When Moses wrote Genesis, his readers would have known the area as “the land of the Philistines” (21:32–33) and Gerar as a regional hub.

Find Gerar on this online Bible atlas: <http://bibleatlas.org/full/gerar.htm>. Notice its proximity to Beersheba, which is a prominent location in Abraham’s next encounter with Abimelech (21:22–34). Gerar was in foreign territory, and Abimelech was a pagan king. The lessons to the Hebrews were these: just as God protected the patriarchal family in a foreign land, so He will protect the Hebrews as they enter Canaan; and just as God blessed Abimelech through Abraham, He will show grace to those who show grace to the Hebrews.



Observation: Abraham’s Disobedience

When Abraham moved from the security of the hill country to the lowlands of Gerar, Abraham’s old enemy, fear, whispered in his ear. According to Genesis 20:11, what fearful thoughts entered Abraham’s mind?

This fear prompted an *act of disobedience*. Then came *the consequences of Abraham’s sin*, followed by *God’s response of grace*.

The Act of Disobedience—Genesis 20:1–2

What did Abraham say to Abimelech, and what did Abimelech do? Why do you think Abraham allowed Abimelech to take Sarah?



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Disobedience Déjà Vu

Genesis 20:1–3, 6–7, 9–11, 14–18

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STUDY

How did Abraham's lie and passivity put in jeopardy the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and his seed (Genesis 12:1–3)?

The Consequences of Disobedience—Genesis 20:3–13

God came to Abimelech in a dream and accused him of what evil deed (Genesis 20:3)?

What was Abimelech's defense (20:4–5)?

What was God's remedy (20:6–7)?

What do you observe in Abimelech's dialogue with Abraham about confrontation and confession (20:8–13)?



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Disobedience Déjà Vu

Genesis 20:1–3, 6–7, 9–11, 14–18

Notice the mind games that led Abraham to deal the pagan king a stacked deck of deception:

- He made a false assumption, “Surely there is no fear of God in this place” (Genesis 20:11 NASB).
- He let fear undermine his faith, “They will kill me because of my wife” (20:11 NASB).
- He rationalized his deception, “Besides, she actually is my sister” (20:12 NASB).
- He shifted the blame, “When God caused me to wander from my father’s house” (20:13 NASB).
- He selfishly used his wife to protect himself, “Everywhere we go, say of me, ‘He is my brother’” (20:13 NASB).

What do you learn from Abraham’s example about the subtle way our flesh influences our mind to sin?

God’s Response of Grace—Genesis 20:14–18

God used Abraham’s disgrace to demonstrate His bountiful grace. And pagan Abimelech became the instrument in God’s hand!

What did God do for Abraham through Abimelech (Genesis 20:14–15)?

What did Abimelech say to Sarah, the matriarch of the covenant, to vindicate her (20:16)?



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Disobedience Déjà Vu

Genesis 20:1–3, 6–7, 9–11, 14–18

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STUDY

How did Abraham respond, and how is his prayer a model for how God's people should relate with the nations (Genesis 20:17)?



Interpretation: Finding the Meaning

When we study Scripture, we should always ask, “What did this passage mean to the original readers?” Let's first take a closer look at the meaning of the link between Abraham's lie to Pharaoh and his lie to Abimelech.

Pharaoh taking Sarah into his harem jeopardized God's promise (Genesis 12:10–20), and it occurred right *after* God made His covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3. The crisis of Abimelech taking Sarah into his harem occurred right *before* the fulfillment of the promise with the birth of Isaac (21:1–8). What principle did the original Hebrew audience learn about God from these two accounts and their placement in the narrative? What principle do you learn?

As a prophet living among the nations (20:7), Abraham was called to pray for the salvation of pagan Abimelech. Abraham's intercession demonstrated how “all the families of the earth will be blessed” through him and his seed (12:3). What principle from Abraham's example did the original Hebrew readers learn about the role of God's people among the nations? What principle do you learn?



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Disobedience Déjà Vu

Genesis 20:1–3, 6–7, 9–11, 14–18

Finally, what meaning can we glean from Abraham's recurring problem of lying? Other Bible heroes repeated their failures. Moses, who killed the Egyptian early in his life and struck the rock later, had a recurring problem with anger. The wandering Hebrews, like leaky faucets, couldn't shut the flow of grumbling. Samson's lust got him into trouble again and again, and Peter often struggled with speaking before thinking.

What principle did Abraham's weakness teach the original Hebrew readers about weaknesses and recurring sins? What does it teach us?



Application: How to “Sing the Lord’s Song”

Just like Abraham and many other Bible characters, we tend to sing the same song of sin as if it's the only tune we know. How can we get this song out of our heads? By replacing it with the Lord's song. Here are three singing lessons to get you started.

Never presume on your weaknesses by going near temptation; instead, stay away. In what area are you weak? If the weakness is alcohol, stay away from the bottle; if lust, put blocks on your Internet devices; if gossip, speak only positively of those around you. How can you stay away from the temptation that exploits your weakness?

Never rely on your own crutches; instead, stay accountable. Abraham kept dealing from the same deck of deception, and Sarah played along. Find someone who will confront you when the old ways kick in. Who can you ask to help?



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Disobedience Déjà Vu

Genesis 20:1–3, 6–7, 9–11, 14–18

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STUDY

Never lean on your own understanding; instead, let God work. How can you stand by and let God work out His plan in your situation, rather than take matters into your own hands?

God truly does have a plan that's far better than one we could ever devise. Let's stop leaning on our own way of thinking, and watch Him work!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I have no one but You. I come to You, the Fount of Life, to drink deep the refreshing waters of fellowship with You. I ask You to stop me short of leaning on my own way of thinking and my tired old strategies of self-protection. Grow me. Use others to help me. And build me to be a person of authenticity, honesty, and integrity. Amen.



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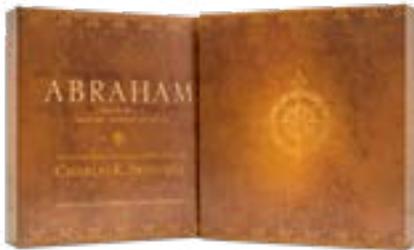
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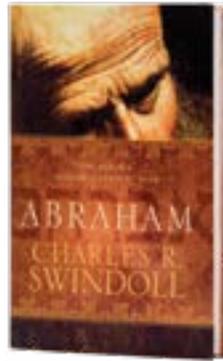
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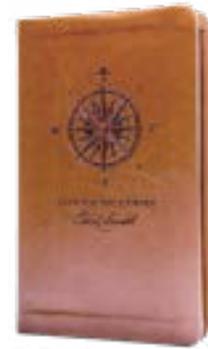
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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

It's a Boy!

Genesis 21:1–7

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Abraham's amazing journey of faith began with God's commands: "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). And so, 75-year-old Abraham went, but not empty-handed. He carried with him promises from God that were stamped with a celestial guarantee.

"I will make you into a great nation," God promised (12:2), assuring Abraham, who had no children, as many descendants as stars in the sky (15:5). God changed his name from Abram to Abraham, which means "father of many nations" (17:5). And He promised that Sarah, who "was unable to become pregnant" (11:30), would mother the child from whom Abraham's offspring would come (17:16).

Abraham's journey had now come to a pinnacle moment: Isaac was born just as God said! Hooray! Let's celebrate this miracle child who was born to a couple beyond childbearing age. And in a world of charlatans and con artists who lure us with their false assurances, let's proclaim the veracity and trustworthiness of our God who *keeps His promises!*



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Read Isaac's birth announcement in **Genesis 21:1–7**. Notice how each member of the family had a moment on stage: newborn Isaac, devoted Abraham, and exuberant Sarah. God, however, was (and still is) the star of the show. What does this passage say about Him?

Quotable

*I want to give
you four words
that I hope you
will never, ever
forget: God keeps
His promises!*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

It's a Boy!

Genesis 21:1-7

We can trace God's trustworthiness from the beginning of Abraham's story to this blessed event. Review the chart below. Look in the "Events" column and imagine a line from "The Covenant" straight to "Isaac Born"—the climactic fulfillment of God's promise.

A PATRIARCH IN PANORAMA—THE LIFE OF ABRAHAM

Acts 7:2-3
Joshua 24:2
Genesis 11:27-32

Genesis 12-25

| Events | Ch. | Age | Covenant | People | Location |
|---|-----|---|--------------------------|--|---|
| The Covenant The Departure The Famine | 12 | 75 (12:4) | Affirmed (12:1-3) | Abram Sarai Lot | Ur Haran Shechem Moreh Bethel Ai Egypt |
| Return from Egypt Separation from Lot | 13 | | Reaffirmed (13:14-17) | Abram Sarai Lot | Between Bethel & Ai Hebron |
| War Declared Lot Delivered Reward Refused | 14 | | | Various Kings Lot Melchizedek | Siddim Valley Hebron? Sodom Valley of Shaveh |
| Abrahamic Covenant Reaffirmed | 15 | | Reaffirmed (15:1-21) | Abram God | |
| Birth of Ishmael | 16 | 86 (16:16) | | Abram Sarai Hagar Ishmael | Hebron? |
| Names Changed Circumcision Instituted Isaac and Ishmael Discussed | 17 | 99 (17:1) | Reaffirmed (17:1-14) | Abraham God | |
| Promise of a Son Plans for Destruction of Sodom | 18 | | | Abraham 3 Men (Angels) Sarah | Hebron (Plains of Mamre) |
| Sodom Destroyed Lot Spared | 19 | Abraham 100 | | 2 Angels Lot & Family | Sodom & Gomorrah Mountain Cave |
| Abimelech | 20 | Sarah 90 | | Abraham Sarah Abimelech | Gerar |
| Isaac Born Ishmael Cast Out Abimelech Reproved | 21 | (17:17; 21:5) | | Abraham Sarah Isaac Hagar Ishmael Abimelech | Hebron Beersheba Paran |
| Isaac Offered Covenant Reaffirmed | 22 | | Reaffirmed (22:15-18) | Abraham Isaac Angel of the Lord | Moriah |
| Sarah's Death & Burial | 23 | Abraham 137 Sarah 127 (23:1) | | Sarah Abraham Sons of Heth | Hebron Field of Machpelah |
| Isaac's Bride | 24 | "Old and advanced in age" (24:1) | | Abraham Eldest Servant | Mesopotamia City of Nahor |
| Abraham's 2nd Marriage Abraham's Death & Burial | 25 | 175 (25:7) | | Abraham Keturah Family Isaac | Cave in Field of Machpelah |

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It's a Boy!

Genesis 21:1–7

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

How old was Abraham when he first received God's promise of descendants? How old was he when God's promise was fulfilled in Isaac's birth?

As he and Sarah aged and it became seemingly impossible to have children, Abraham proposed to God that the line could pass through his servant, *Eliezer*, or through his son by Hagar, *Ishmael*. How did God reassure Abraham that the line would pass through *Isaac*, his son by Sarah (Genesis 15:4–6; 17:17–22)?



Observation: God Finally Fulfills His Promise

Observation answers the question: What does it say? As we observe the text, we look for words, names, places, events, repetitions, comparisons, and contrasts. Record here the names that appear at the beginning of Genesis 21:1, 3, and 6.

Chuck Swindoll created an outline of the passage based on these names and the action each person took. Let's use our "observation" spade to dig into each section!

The Lord Provides—Genesis 21:1–2

What repetitive phrases in Genesis 21:1–2 emphasize God's reliability to keep His promises?



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

It's a Boy!

Genesis 21:1–7

Abraham and Sarah initially limited their view to what was humanly possible. Two tottering old fogies having a baby? What a ridiculous notion! Abraham and Sarah both laughed at the spectacle (Genesis 17:17; 18:12). What was at the root of their laughter, according to Genesis 17:17 and 18:13–15?

God's response opened Abraham and Sarah's eyes to a universe of possibilities: "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (18:14). God does whatever He wills . . . at His appointed time.



Correlation: God's Appointed Time

According to Ecclesiastes 3:1–2, God sovereignly sets the clock for human events.

For everything there is a season,
a time for every activity under the heaven.
A time to be born and a time to die.
A time to plant and a time to harvest.

The author of Ecclesiastes used a literary device known as "merismus"—extremes that emphasize everything in between. From life to death, from planting to harvesting, *all events of life* exist on God's timetable. What does this truth say about the events in our lives that we consider "unexpected" or "impossible"?

Although we long to view life in eternity's light, we "cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end" (3:11). We can't always make sense of things . . . but we can trust in the One who can. Chuck Swindoll comments:

The universe has a flow. It has a rhythmic regularity to it that is beyond our control. And wise is the one who lives with an understanding that God is the one who calls the cadence. God is at work. [Knowing] this will save you hours and hours of doubt.



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

It's a Boy!

Genesis 21:1–7

Abraham Obeys—Genesis 21:3–5

What two actions does Abraham perform, and what is the significance of these actions (Genesis 21:3–4)?

What is the significance of the name, Isaac (17:19)? You can find the meaning of Isaac's name in the notes of your study Bible.

Just as God turned an aging, infertile, childless couple into parents, so He turned Abraham and Sarah's skepticism into joy. Look who's laughing now—and for an entirely different reason than before!

Sarah Rejoices—Genesis 21:6–7

What was Sarah's response to the birth of Isaac (Genesis 21:6–7)?

What new perspective toward God transformed Sarah's laughter and restored her joy?



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

It's a Boy!

Genesis 21:1-7

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Interpretation: What We Must Remember about God's Promises

Let's interpret the birth of Isaac with regard to the fulfillment of God's promises.

Isaac was born 25 years after Abraham received the promise of descendants (Genesis 12:7). What does this delay teach us about God's timing?

What does the birth of Isaac teach us about God when we fear that He has forgotten His promise?

The promise of a son to Abraham and Sarah in their old age was *personal*. It was a promise intended for them alone, so we shouldn't claim it as a promise meant for us. Though we cannot claim God's personal promises, we can claim His *universal* promises. What do the promises in the following verses mean to you?

John 6:37-40

Romans 10:13



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

It's a Boy!

Genesis 21:1-7

The birth of Isaac signaled a new phase in Abraham's journey. God had blessed His friend with great wealth and fame. He had planted Abraham's roots in the land He promised. And now God completed His covenant by giving Abraham a son through whom his family tree would grow. How far Abraham and Sarah had come!



Application: The Next Time We Have to Wait

We celebrate the birth of Sarah's baby with praise to God for His faithfulness. Chuck offers four lessons from this scene that we can pack in our bags for our personal journey of faith.

Remember, God is never accidentally late. Are you waiting for the fulfillment of a promise? Are you hanging on for dear life, only to have the fingers of your faith pried open by skepticism or doubt? What can you do to hang on to God's trustworthiness while you wait?

Forget about your own schedule and plans. Your plans and God's timetable don't always mesh. God does not live by your appointment book. What daily habits can help you release your plans and make room for God's ways?

Ask the Lord for strength and wisdom. Strength, to keep going when you're weary of waiting. Wisdom, to avoid rash decisions when you feel impatient. Write down your prayer here, right now!



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

It's a Boy!

Genesis 21:1–7

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Finally, forgive yourself for being shortsighted. Like Abraham and Sarah, you laughed when you should have believed. You saw nothing but impossibilities when you should have opened your eyes to God's possibilities. It's okay! God forgives. Express your thanks for God's grace and desire to live in His forgiving love.

Yes, Abraham and Sarah had traveled far on their journey of faith. And yet, obstacles loomed ahead—such as a threat to younger Isaac from elder Ishmael; a challenge to Abraham's claim to the land from Abimelech; and the problem of finding a wife for Isaac! Many miles stretch ahead for this nomad's amazing journey of faith. Ready to move into the next phase? Pause for a final prayer to wrap up this study, and then, let's go!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I am shortsighted, I admit. Help me glimpse the vastness of Your universe, the wideness of Your will. Help me see that my timetable is really Your timetable. And when I try to wrestle control from You, give me rest. Gently remind me to trust You and wait patiently. Help me relax in Your promises! Amen.



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It's a Boy!

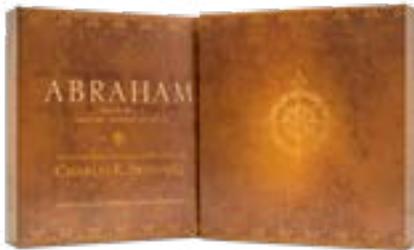
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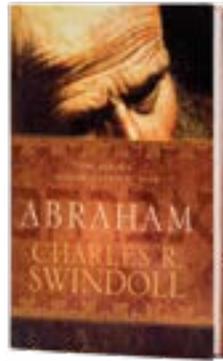
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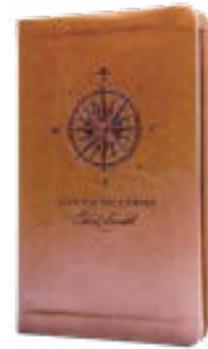
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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Forgiven Sin . . . Lingering Consequences

Genesis 21:8–21



LET'S BEGIN HERE

God's forgiveness runs through the dry desert of our sin, quenching our souls where thirst is deserved, cleansing our faces from grime of our own making, soothing our prodigal feet that are sore from running. What a relief to know that God "forgives all my sins" (Psalm 103:3)!

Through faith in Christ's atonement for our sins, we enter a secure sanctuary of grace. "We have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us" (Romans 5:1). Our sins are forgiven and our souls are secure . . . and yet the consequences of our sins can linger on.

Case in point: *David*. God washed his guilty stain "whiter than snow" after he committed adultery with Bathsheba (Psalm 51:7), *and yet* the child she bore still died. *And yet* Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, still lay cold in the grave. *And yet* aftershocks from David's sin rocked the foundations of his family for years to come.

Consequences of sin hang around like a recovering alcoholic's cravings or an abuse victim's night terrors. God removes repentant criminals' sins "as far as the east is from the west" (103:12), but the concrete walls that imprison them remain. The lesson we learn is this: *though every act of sin is forgivable, the effects of some are not erasable.*

Years earlier, Abraham sinned by running ahead of God and impregnating Sarah's Egyptian handmaid, Hagar, to produce an heir (Genesis 16:1–6). Although Abraham's sin was forgiven, Hagar's son, Ishmael, lived on as Abraham's sole heir . . . until Isaac was born, and the rivalry for the inheritance began.

In this study, we'll see how Abraham handled the rivalry between Ishmael and Isaac, and we'll marvel at God's compassion for victims who, through no fault of their own, must suffer the lingering consequences of sin.

Quotable

*Though every
act of sin is
forgivable, the
effects of some are
not erasable.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Forgiven Sin . . . Lingering Consequences

Genesis 21:8–21

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YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

As you begin, take a moment to prayerfully read the following verses:

The LORD is compassionate and merciful,
slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. . . .
He does not punish us for all our sins;
he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve. (Psalm 103:8, 10)

Thank the Lord that, because of His great, unfailing love, He does not leave us to wallow in our sin and its consequences. “He knows how weak we are” (103:14). Invite the Lord to come near you. Thank Him for forgiving your sin, and ask Him to restore you and help you pick up the pieces caused by your sin—just as He did for Abraham and for each member of his family in their crisis.



Observation: A Case of Sin and Consequences

By following the *Searching the Scriptures* method, we feed ourselves on the Word of God. Then as we live out what we've learned from the Bible, the Spirit of God empowers and changes us. With this goal in mind, let's follow the steps of Bible study: observation, interpretation, correlation, and the all-important final step of application.

Read Genesis 21:8–21. In the space below, summarize what happened. Don't focus on the dialogue for now, just the action.



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Genesis 21:8–21

In the following chart, compare this scene with a similar episode that occurred years earlier soon after Hagar discovered she was pregnant with Abraham's son.

| | First Conflict between Sarah and Hagar Genesis 16:1–16 | Second Conflict between Sarah and Hagar Genesis 21:8–21 |
|--|---|--|
| What incited Sarah's anger? | | |
| What did Sarah say to Abraham? | | |
| What happened to Hagar? | | |
| How did God show compassion to Hagar? | | |
| What blessing did God give Ishmael? | | |
| What does "water" symbolize in each story? | | |

As you reflect on these two accounts, you can see the ripple effects Abraham's sin created. Write down a list of consequences that spread in ever-widening circles from having a son through Hagar.



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Forgiven Sin . . . Lingering Consequences

Genesis 21:8–21

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Ishmael hindered the covenant from passing to Isaac. Sarah was right—Ishmael and Hagar had to go (Genesis 21:10). And yet, Sarah was *wrong* to allow her emotions to rage out of control. What characteristics of unrestrained anger do you see in Sarah's words (16:5; 21:10)?

Compare Abraham's response in Genesis 16:6 and Genesis 21:11–14. How are they different? How does Abraham show more wisdom in the second episode than the first in responding to Sarah and handling this heartbreaking choice between his two sons?

When Abraham released Hagar from servitude, he cut off Ishmael from his inheritance with no hope for return. Although Abraham loved Ishmael and desired God's blessing for him (17:16), he had no choice but to swallow the bitter fruit of his sin and banish Hagar and his beloved son.

God, however, was moving behind the scenes. Through each hurtful event—Abraham's sin, Hagar's contempt, Sarah's rage, and the boys' rivalry—God was working His will. It's just like God to take tragedy and turn it around for His purposes (Romans 8:28)! What thread of hope do you see woven into the story?



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Word Study: From Laughter to Making Fun

Sarah saw Ishmael “making fun of her son, Isaac” (Genesis 21:9). The Hebrew word for “making fun” is an intensive form of the same root as Isaac’s name, which means “laughter.” In his recounting of this story in Galatians 4:29, the apostle Paul used which severe word to describe Ishmael’s actions?

Ishmael was half Egyptian (Genesis 16:1). How might the original readers of Genesis, who had recently fled Egypt, have understood Ishmael’s persecution of Isaac?

The play on words indicates that Ishmael was doing more than teasing his little brother; he was challenging Isaac’s role. Ishmael, who was about age 17, chose the feast to make his move for the inheritance. By mocking Isaac in front of the crowd, Ishmael was asserting his claim as the eldest—a foolish action that sealed his fate.

Despite the consequences of Abraham’s sin and our sin, God’s work is not hindered. He reshapes broken spirits and weaves torn threads into a beautiful tapestry of His design. He has a special place in His heart for sin’s victims, those who are desperate and alone, like single-parent Hagar and her son.



Interpretation: God’s Compassion for Single Parents

Previously, when Hagar ran away, “The angel of the LORD found Hagar” (Genesis 16:7), and Hagar remarked, “You are the God who sees me” (16:13). God found her and saw her, and then in this scene, “God heard the boy crying” (21:17). Notice the progression: God finds, God sees, and God hears.



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Genesis 21:8–21

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What meaning do you perceive in God's compassion toward single-parent Hagar and her son?

God showed Hagar a well full of water (Genesis 21:19). What meaning can you draw from this example of God's provision?



Correlation: God's Promises to Single Parents

When Hagar left Abraham's secure home, she faced a vast, sun-scorched wasteland with nothing but a bit of food, a bag of water, and a promise from God (Genesis 16:10). Single parents and domestic abuse victims stumble through their own deserted wastelands, with finances stretched thin, resources run dry, and little hope of relief. What comfort do the following passages offer?

Psalm 54:5

Psalm 68:5–6



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Forgiven Sin . . . Lingering Consequences

Genesis 21:8–21

It didn't matter that Hagar was Egyptian, a race that would later enslave the Hebrews. God's compassion for the abused transcends all ethnic borders, even reaching our enemies—just as Christ taught, "I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:44–45). It's a powerful lesson for us to learn.

Application: Lessons to Be Learned

God's compassion shines in this story, and there's more! Each character has a lesson to teach.

Sarah: *Sinful consequences may stalk us, but they won't conquer us unless we let them.* Sarah had to learn to live above Hagar's contempt and focus on God's purposes.

Abraham: *Marital disagreements will trouble us, but they can be great teachers if we're willing to learn.* Abraham learned to listen to Sarah. Really listen. Not react to her anger but genuinely seek to understand.

Hagar: *Personal regrets can discourage you, but they can't cripple you if you choose to press on.* God will point the way to the wells full of water, but we must ask for help, listen to His words, and follow His way.

Which of these applications hit closest to home for you? How can you put these lessons into action?

Some of sin's consequences may dog your steps, but that's not the end of the story. God is writing all the experiences of your life into a new chapter for you. Don't get stuck in the past or bogged down in the consequences. Let God help you turn the page, leave the past, pick a new heading, and move on.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, what a mess of things I've made at times! Thank You for Your patience and willingness to help me pick up the pieces and deal with the consequences of my sin. How good You are to give me a future—a well full of water in the desert. Please give me a reason to go on, and help me stand tall once again and move forward in Your strength. Amen.



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Forgiven Sin . . . Lingering Consequences

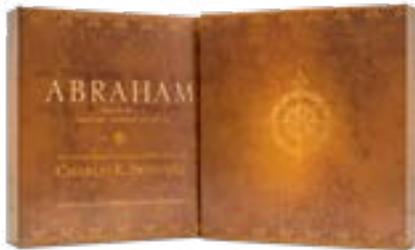
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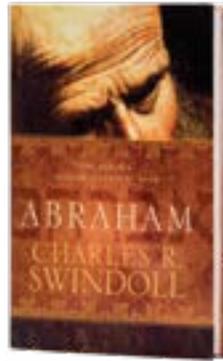
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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

When God Says, “Let Go!”

Genesis 22:1–14



LET'S BEGIN HERE

The father, James, sat across the table wearing a tailored grey suit. He glared at his son's American history teacher, Mrs. Moore, and said, “What else can I do? Look, I've created binders for him for each class, and he's still not performing.”

Mrs. Moore calmly replied, “Maybe you can let him embrace some of the responsi—”

“I can't lift my shoe off his neck or else he'll fail,” James interrupted.

These words from a desperate father, clinging to his hopes and dreams for his son's success, display the verbal symptoms of our disease to possess, to cling, to clutch, and even to control.

While the father's disease to control evidences itself as red ink on a white page, our own tendencies to cling to and control may not show themselves so blatantly. And we may not even be aware of these tendencies. For this reason, God chooses to test us—telling us to let go—just like He did with Abraham.

Genesis 22 contains the account of God calling Abraham to let go of his precious gift—his beloved son, Isaac. Chuck Swindoll says, “Some years after receiving Isaac, as promised by God, the time had come for Abraham's faith to be put to the supreme test.” This test would reveal if Abraham cherished God's covenant blessings more than the God of the covenant. Chuck continues:

God is, of course, omniscient. He knows the future as accurately as He knows the past. He doesn't put people to a test to see how well their faith responds under fire; He prepares tests of faith to show us what He has made of us lately. Whether we pass or fail, we learn about ourselves. We learn where we need improvement, or we discover how spiritually mature we have become.¹

From Genesis 22:1–14, we will not only read about God's test to Abraham, but we will gain wisdom for when He tests us. We'll also gain confidence that He can be trusted through the testing.

Quotable

*But it isn't simply
Abraham's story
from ancient days;
it's your and
my story as we
learn the value of
releasing rather
than being caught
in the grip of
the gift.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

When God Says, “Let Go!”

Genesis 22:1–14

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YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

As we near the end of Abraham's life, let's review his record with the *chart*, “A Patriarch in Panorama—The Life of Abraham,” from the first *Searching the Scriptures* study in this series on Abraham. How long did Abraham wait for God's promised son?



Searching the Scriptures Tip

In Chuck Swindoll's book *Searching the Scriptures*, he gives helpful tips for observing what a biblical passage says before interpreting what it means. In Genesis 22, we will use the observation principle of *emphasis*. The author emphasizes what he believes is important. How do we know what is emphasized? Simple: look at the amount of space the writer uses.



Observation: Unswerving Obedience and Unwavering Faith

Begin by reading Genesis 22:1–14 slowly. Before we walk through this passage together, underline in your Bible what initially seems important and note below any questions you may have.



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

When God Says, “Let Go!”

Genesis 22:1–14

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God's Command—Genesis 22:1–2

Notice how the author provides us God's perspective at the beginning of this story in Genesis 22:1. As you read, remember that you know more than the characters. Why do you think the author chose to portray God's intention?

How does the angel describe Isaac in 22:2? What is the author emphasizing with this description?

Abraham's Response—Genesis 22:3–10

According to Genesis 22:3, how quickly did Abraham respond to God's call? What details in this section indicate Abraham responded positively to God's call?

Genesis 22:3 serves as a summary of Abraham's response to God's call to let go. But the author then chose to devote six more verses detailing Abraham's next moves along with the conversations between Abraham and his servants and between Abraham and Isaac. What does this dialogue tell us about Abraham's view of God (see especially Genesis 22:5, 8)?



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

When God Says, “Let Go!”

Genesis 22:1–14

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Isaac couldn't hold his tongue any longer; he asked his father, “Where is the sheep for the burnt offering?” (Genesis 22:7). Remember, Isaac didn't know what Abraham knew until Abraham placed him on the altar (22:8–10). In Genesis 22:9, it appears that Isaac let Abraham bind him with no resistance. What does Isaac's obedience reveal about his relationship with his father?

Heaven's Provision—Genesis 22:11–14

The biblical authors repeat themselves for emphasis. How many times does the angel call Abraham in 22:11? How many commands does the angel give Abraham in 22:12? Do you see other repeated words or phrases in 22:13–14?

What is the outcome of God's test, according to 22:12? Also, notice the writer uses the same description of Isaac in both 22:2 and 22:12.

Look at what the author tells us at the end of 22:13. Also observe Abraham's response in 22:14. By comparing these points to Abraham's statement in 22:8, we begin to cross the bridge from observation to interpretation.



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When God Says, “Let Go!”

Genesis 22:1–14

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Interpretation: What Does This Story Mean?

Let's begin by looking up *burnt offering* (Genesis 22:2) in a Bible dictionary. If you're using the *New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, you'll find a helpful overview by looking under the entry for *sacrifice* and *sacrifice, human*. We also recommend exploring the notes on this passage at [Lumina](#). How does a better understanding of *burnt offering* illuminate the meaning of God's command to Abraham to let go?

Now let's look up the term *Moriah* (22:2). Did any other significant biblical events happen at Moriah? Next, let's locate *Yahweh Yireh* (or *Jehovah Jireh*). Some dictionaries place these terms under the heading “Names of God.” The *New Unger's Bible Dictionary* contains the entry for *Jehovah Jireh* under *Lord Will Provide*. Note anything significant you find.

As we interpret the Bible, we look for what is important both historically and theologically. We understand the eternal nature of God in His particular actions with particular people throughout biblical history. We see Abraham's obedience in his response to God's command. What attribute of God does Abraham's dialogue communicate in Genesis 22:5, 8?

In 22:12, the angel tells Abraham, “For now I know that you truly fear God.” In your own words, summarize what it means to fear God as defined in Genesis 22:1–14.



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Correlation: Let's Compare the Scriptures

Did you know the New Testament references this event? It's found in Hebrews 11:17–19. Take a moment to read this passage and make a few notes on how it contributes to our understanding.

To help us better understand God's testing, let's use an *NASB concordance* to look up *tested* (Genesis 22:1). You may try searching *test* as well. Peruse the verses and note anything that gives you a clearer picture of how and why God tests His people.

Next, let's look up passages that mention *fear God*. Seeing how biblical authors use the phrase elsewhere in the biblical narrative helps us understand this term in Genesis 22:1–14. *Search* the phrase in the NASB. This online search tool looks for any verse containing both *fear* and *God*, regardless the word order. You may also want to try searching verses that contain both *fear* and *Lord*. As you read through the verses, write down additional insights they provide. (See especially Exodus 18:21; 20:20; Deuteronomy 6:2, 13, 24; Proverbs 1:7; 3:7.)



Application: What Should I Let Go?

At the beginning of Chuck's message, he mentions four main categories where “letting go” is especially difficult. These categories are possessions, occupation, long-awaited desires, and people. Take a moment to think over your own life. As you practice the spiritual discipline of self-reflection, pray that the Holy Spirit



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brings to your mind something or someone you may need to let go. Once you've got something in mind, write down why you're tempted to cling to or control this area of life.

At the end of his sermon, Chuck makes three profound statements:

- 1) "What you cling to is usually what God asks you to release."
- 2) "What you release He often replaces with something or someone far more valuable."
- 3) "When God replaces, He also rewards."

As you meditate on these wonderful principles, what is God calling you to let go? Do you need to apologize to someone for trying to control him or her? Do you cling to your money and refrain from giving for fear that God may not provide? Remember that Abraham took small steps of faith in his obedience to God by getting up early, chopping the wood, and saddling his donkey before journeying to Moriah. Take a moment to write down the steps you need to take toward your Moriah.

As we internalize this biblical account, let's anchor in our hearts the faithfulness and goodness of God who is not only Abraham's provider but also ours. For it is only through this trust in God that we can truly let go and treasure Him above His gifts.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for preserving this wonderful account of Your servant's faith and Your faithfulness. At this moment, I confess my temptation to cling to and control because I believe the lie that life is better when I'm in control. Please increase my faith in You so that I may let go what needs to be released. Most of all, I thank You, Yahweh Yireh, for providing Your Son Jesus Christ as my sacrificial substitute so that I may have You as my portion forever. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Abraham: One Nomad's Amazing Journey of Faith* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 200.



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When God Says, "Let Go!"

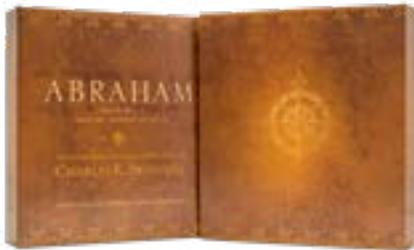
Genesis 22:1–14

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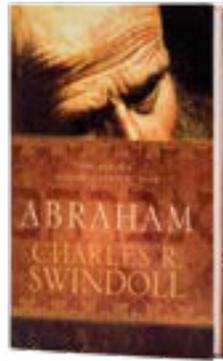
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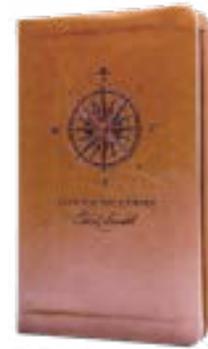
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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

The Pleasures of Passing God's Exams

Genesis 22:11–19

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LET'S BEGIN HERE

After years of walking with God, Abraham's journey had brought him to a hill-top altar in the land of Moriah. It was the ultimate test of faith, offering Isaac as a sacrifice. Each step of faith to this point had been mere prelude—warm ups—to this fearless leap into the gracious provision of God.

“God will provide,” Abraham confidently told his beloved boy as they approached this place of testing (Genesis 22:8). Unwavering, Abraham laid Isaac on the stone and drew his knife to kill his son as a sacrifice, when “at that moment the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, ‘Abraham! Abraham! . . . Don't lay a hand on the boy! . . . for now I know that you truly fear God’” (22:11–12).

Abraham's arm relaxed, and his eyes beheld a ram caught in a thicket—God's provision! In minutes, Abraham, with Isaac by his side, offered the lamb in the place of his son. And as they turned to go, Abraham gave God a name to memorialize the moment. It was a name forged in the fires of faith. A name to inspire future generations, who, like Abraham, would look to that same mountain for God's provision in times of testing. A name that one day would be fastened to a cross on which God's own Son would hang in our place as an offering for the sins of the world: “the LORD will provide” (22:14).

The test complete, Abraham and Isaac walked down the mountain arm in arm, praising God as they reveled in the glow of God's blessing and the pleasure of passing God's exam.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

In this study, we'll look at the aftermath of God's test—the trip *down* the mountain after the test is over, enjoying God's blessing. Joy is the feeling Abraham and Isaac experienced . . . joy overflowing!

Quotable

*God will show
me the path of life
that's obedience.
And once you have
walked in that
path, you will know
joy; you will know
pleasure.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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“The heart is glad!” says Chuck Swindoll, as he underscores the pleasure that follows tests of faith:

The spirit is filled with cheer and delight and celebration. I don't believe Abraham came down from that mountain with a grim face. I know Isaac didn't! They came down together, probably arm in arm talking about how God provides in marvelous ways we never expect Him to.

Now, as you picture Abraham and Isaac celebrating together, read Genesis 22:11–19. Use the *Searching the Scriptures* technique of putting yourself in the scene as you read.



Observation: Put Yourself into the Scene

Put yourself in Abraham's place. Imagine the scene on top of a windswept hill. At center was a large, flat stone altar. The tools needed for a burnt offering were at hand: wood, rope, knife. Abraham was ready to sacrifice Isaac, the boy for whom Sarah and he had longed their entire married life, the miracle baby whom God had promised. Write down the feelings that you imagine him experiencing in each moment:

- As he hears God's voice (Genesis 22:11–12)
- As he accepts God's provision (22:13–14)
- As he receives God's blessing (22:15–18)
- As he returns to his home in Beersheba (22:19)

Now read the same passage from Isaac's point of view, and write down the feelings that you imagine him experiencing in each moment.



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Do you observe anything else in your reading, perhaps a cause and effect, an emphasis, or repeated words? Note your observations below.



Correlation: Blue Skies after the Storm

So often in Christian circles, we focus on the negatives: the struggles, worries, disappointments, and burdens. Sadness dominates our attitudes like thunderclouds, as we dwell on failing marriages, wayward children, declining standards—the 10 percent negative instead of the 90 percent positive.

However, this triumphant scene in Abraham's life shifts our focus from the storm to the blue skies that follow, from the harshness of the test to the pleasure of passing. Look up the following verses, and write down the benefits of a positive outlook.

Psalm 16:11

Proverbs 15:15

Proverbs 15:29–30



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The Bible doesn't gloss over the potholes in life's road, but it never gets stuck in them. Why? Because God is good, and His tests are meant for positive ends. In his sermon, Chuck Swindoll observed **four positive outcomes** from God's test and Abraham's obedience. In the next phase of our *Searching the Scriptures* study, let's take a closer look at each one as we decipher the text's meaning.



Interpretation: Joyful Principles after We Pass the Test

Return once more to Genesis 22:11 where the angel of the Lord speaks to Abraham at the moment Abraham's knife is poised to strike Isaac. How do we interpret the *person-to-person* nature of God's intervention?

When We Pass God's Tests, God Becomes More Real

At that moment the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Yes," Abraham replied. "Here I am!" (Genesis 22:11)

What meaning do you draw from the closeness of this encounter between God and Abraham?

What link might there be between the *intensity* of the test and the *realness* of our connection with God when we take a step of faith?

When We Pass God's Tests, God Relieves the Pressure as He Affirms Our Faith

To His often-faltering servant, the Lord said, "I *know* that you truly fear God" (Genesis 22:12, emphasis added). These are not the words of a severe God who never is pleased. On the contrary, they are like wings that lifted Abraham's spirit and food that filled his soul.



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What does this scene reveal about God, His tests, the relief God brings, and the affirmation we feel?

When We Pass God's Tests, God Provides for Our Additional Needs in Surprising Ways

"Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket" (Genesis 22:13). Don't miss the word, *then*. Only *after* Abraham released his son into the hands of Isaac's heavenly Father did God reveal to Abraham the substitute He had planned all along. The ram may have surprised Abraham but not God! And remember: *God never runs shy of rams in thickets!*

What principle do you see in the timing of God revealing His provision to Abraham?

When We Pass God's Tests, God Multiplies His Blessings as He Ratifies His Promises

Twice the word *because* appears in Genesis 22:16–18. Find these instances, and write down what they reference.

God multiplied the seed of faith that Abraham planted that day into a harvest of blessings beyond numbering. Don't forget that the original readers of Genesis were the Hebrews amassing at the border of the Promised Land ready to cross the Jordan and conquer their enemies.



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What did this restatement of blessings and ratification of promises mean to these Hebrews?

What about God's faithfulness and provision applies to us today?



Application: Next Time You're Tempted to Major in the Minors

Abraham and Isaac's joy after passing God's exam offers three lessons to uplift our hearts when God tests us.

- *Reflect on the benefits that have come your way.* Through the trial, let the psalmist's prayer be yours: "May I never forget the good things [the Lord] does for me" (Psalm 103:2).
- *Refuse to allow the few negatives to eclipse the many positives.* Set aside self-pity in favor of the more delightful fare of thankfulness. Even a few positive words of gratitude can open a window and refresh your attitude.
- *Renew your motivation by decreasing your expectations.* After passing his test with an amazing display of faith, Abraham didn't expect God's blessings as if he were entitled to them. He just obeyed and left the blessing part to God.

Perhaps one of these applications hits home, or maybe God reveals an application just for you. Write down what you find meaningful in this passage and how you can put it into practice.



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Now let's close in prayer, ever mindful of God's overflowing blessings before, during, and after God's tests and of the pleasure they bring.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the wonderful way You guide me and for Your provisions that come again and again like rainbows after the rain. Thank You for Your grace that You revealed to Abraham when You provided a ram as a sacrifice to take Isaac's place—a foreshadow of the grace revealed at Calvary. Whatever trials or hardship life brings, keep my eyes on that mountain of provision and my heart ever thankful. Amen.



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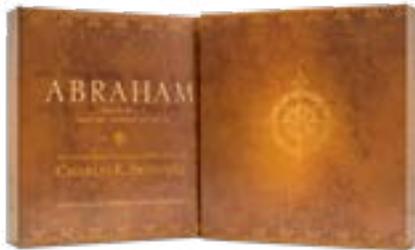
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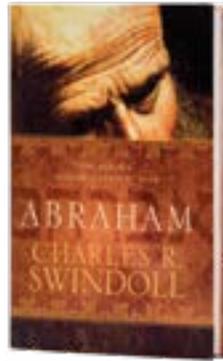
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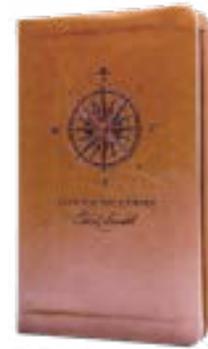
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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

On Finding Your Lifelong Companion

Genesis 23:1–2, 19–20; 24:1–4, 61–67; 25:20

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LET'S BEGIN HERE

Through the ups and downs of Abraham's life, God faithfully provided what was needed to fulfill His covenant. The ultimate provision was Isaac, the promised son born to Abraham and Sarah in their old age. Isaac's birth, however, was just the beginning of the fulfillment of God's promise of generations of descendants to Abraham (Genesis 22:17). As heir, Isaac needed to marry, have children, and hand the covenant blessing to his descendants. Once again, the Lord would prove Himself faithful by providing a wife for Isaac.

As we'll see in this study, the story of the search for Isaac's wife culminates in a heart-pounding moment when Isaac meets his bride, Rebekah. This scene is the focal point of the story, and it recalls the moment when God escorted Eve to Adam as the one divinely chosen for him (2:22).

God is the central character of both stories. He is the divine Father who lovingly created Eve for Adam and who sovereignly guided the events that brought Isaac and Rebekah together. He is the writer and director of life's beautiful dramas who deserves praise as the One who "does great things too marvelous to understand" (Job 5:9)!



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Prepare your heart to read Genesis 23 and 24 by taking a moment to pray. Thank the Lord for the ways He has sovereignly directed you through your ups and downs. Just as God led Abraham and his family through the seasons of family life, He will guide you as well. Meditate on the following verse, and write down a prayer for God's guidance on your journey of faith.

For You are my rock and my fortress;
For Your name's sake You will lead me and guide me.
(Psalm 31:3 NASB)

Quotable

*In every great
courtship there are
some things that
you can't explain.
You just know that
God is in it.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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On Finding Your Lifelong Companion

Genesis 23:1–2, 19–20; 24:1–4, 61–67; 25:20



Observation: Overview and Flow of the Story

According to the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we observe the text by looking for words or sections that are emphasized, repeated, related, alike, or unlike. In narratives like the passage we're studying, we look for themes that weave through the story, noticing problems that lead to solutions.

Through problems and solutions, good literature builds and resolves tension. Characters face a problem or a crisis, go on a search for a solution, find their hearts' true desire, and become better people along the way. Think of the story of *The Wizard of Oz* in which Dorothy's journey begins with a tornado (her crisis) that takes her to the Land of Oz. She then embarks on her own amazing journey. Finally, the crisis resolves when she returns home forever changed.

Read Genesis 23 and 24 and take note of the problems and solutions, the crises that lead to resolutions, as you grasp the flow of the story. Use the chart below as a guide.

| Verses to Compare | Problem or Crisis | Solution or Resolution |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Genesis 23:1–2 and 24:67 | | |
| Genesis 23:3–4 and 23:17–20 | | |
| Genesis 24:2–4 and 24:27, 48 | | |
| Genesis 24:49, 57 and 24:58–61 | | |



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Can you see how Genesis 23 and 24 are linked? The two chapters are a pair. Sorrow over the death of Sarah gives way to joy when Rebekah arrives. Sarah's death and burial described in Genesis 23 raises the question, "Who will be the next mother to continue the family line?" Genesis 24 answers the question with a story that builds our faith in God who guides and provides a mate for Isaac.

How do we interpret the meaning of this ancient story of courtship and marriage and apply it to us? Although traditions differ today, the principles we learn from this passage span the centuries and teach helpful guidelines for finding a mate.



Interpretation: Helpful Guidelines for Choosing a Mate

With the big picture in place, let's draw five principles from the story that we can apply to our cultural setting.



Searching the Scriptures Tip

A principle is a statement based on a truth that transcends time and culture. It applies to all people in all eras, from the tent-dwelling nomads in Abraham's day to the selfie-clicking millennials of the postmodern age. Principles express the central meaning of the biblical text, and they are the basis for making accurate applications.

Hear and Heed the Counsel of Godly Parents—Genesis 24:1–9

God blessed Abraham "in every way" (Genesis 24:1), with a long life and great wealth. And yet his greatest treasure, Isaac, lacked the blessing of a mate. So Abraham called upon his oldest and most-trusted servant, likely Eliezer (15:2), to find a wife for his son.

What did Abraham warn his servant *not* to do (24:3, 6)? And why were these prohibitions so important to Abraham and the future of the Hebrew race?



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What wise counsel did Abraham give his servant about where to find a wife (Genesis 24:4)? And what reassurance did he give his servant (24:7)?

Abraham's instructions to his servant model the warnings and wise counsel that godly parents give their adult children. Chuck Swindoll advises those seeking a spouse:

[Godly parents] often know you better than you know yourself, and they can help you examine your motives. Your parents will also maintain a healthy objectivity that will help balance your “in love” subjectivity. Pay attention to that sixth sense parents often have about people.

Again, parents aren't always right, but you are wise to hear their counsel and take it seriously.¹

Saturate the Entire Process in Prayer—Genesis 24:10–14

The servant led his caravan laden with gifts to Haran, where “Abraham's brother Nahor had settled” (Genesis 24:10). At a well outside of town, Rebekah, Nahor's granddaughter (24:15), came to draw water. Here she met Abraham's servant—a meeting not of chance but of divine leading and answered prayer.

For what, specifically, did the servant pray (24:12–14)?

What lessons about praying for a mate can you draw from his prayer?



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The sign for which the servant prayed was, in fact, a test of character—which leads to the next guideline when searching for a mate.

Look for Qualities That Reveal Character—Genesis 24:15–20

What character qualities did Rebekah's kind deeds display (Genesis 24:15–20)?

Rebekah was a lovely woman with the right pedigree, but it was her moral purity and strong character that made her God's choice for Isaac.

Proceed Cautiously . . . Think Deeply—Genesis 24:21–32

Rather than assume Rebekah was the “one” based on first impressions, the servant cautiously and thoughtfully “watched [Rebekah] in silence, wondering whether or not the LORD had given him success in his mission” (Genesis 24:21).

Take time to observe your potential spouse under pressure. What often surfaces that you might not see otherwise?

Find out about the person's family. The servant asked about Rebekah's family: “Whose daughter are you?” he asked. “And please tell me, would your father have any room to put us up for the night?” (24:23).

Shining a light on a family often reveals a hidden side of an individual from that family. According to Chuck Swindoll:

When you marry the person, you marry the family. Even if you don't live near them or visit often, your mate carries his or her family within. . . . I have seen wonderful healthy people emerge from terrible families, but they are rare. I'm not advising you to call it off right away; I merely suggest that it's a flashing caution sign on the road to the altar. Pay attention.²



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Determine If There Is a Mutual Interest in Spiritual Things—Genesis 24:33–67

A final principle emerges from the servant's dinner conversation with Rebekah's brother, Laban. What is the conclusion of the conversation according to Genesis 24:48–50?

Rebekah's family could sense the hand of God moving, but did Rebekah? Was she spiritually in tune and willing to take a step of faith as Sarah did when she left her family in Haran decades earlier? Read Genesis 12:4–5, and compare Abraham and Sarah's faith in action with Rebekah's (Genesis 24:56–61). What similarities do you see?

Imagine a young woman leaving her hometown and her family—whom she'd never see again—and traveling hundreds of miles to marry a man she'd never met! Why did Rebekah say yes?

Rebekah's journey of faith led her on the same road into the unknown as Sarah's journey with Abraham! Her spiritual life synced perfectly with Isaac's heritage of faith. She would be the ideal match for Isaac and the ideal woman to bear the Abrahamic covenant to the next generation.

Application: Some “Always” and “Nevers” Worth Remembering

Read one more time the account of the climactic moment when Rebekah and Isaac met (Genesis 24:62–67). Look past the ancient traditions, and notice Rebekah's respect and dignity and Isaac's commitment and love—reminiscent of the relationship of humanity's first couple, Adam and Eve.



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In this day of shallow relationships, hurry-up romances, and carnal escapades, let Isaac and Rebekah's story give you a model to follow . . . along with these application points from Chuck Swindoll:

- *Always pursue God's will, and always be honest in your relationship.* Build a foundation of submission to God and authenticity of character in your dating relationship. Then you'll have something on which to build a lifetime of marriage.
- *Never rush into anything, and never rationalize around the importance of sexual purity.* Take time to really know each other, and give your spouse the gift of purity before marriage and fidelity afterward.

Perhaps one of these applications hits home, or maybe God is revealing an application just for you. Write down what you find meaningful in this passage and how you can put it into practice.

Now let's close in prayer, praising God for His guiding hand in every aspect of our lives.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, guard me from pursuing what I want rather than what You want in my relationships. Give me the courage to be honest, the strength to remain pure, the patience to be thoughtful, and the sensitivity to see Your hand in the subtleties of life's circumstances. Thank You for the good that will come from following the counsel of Your Word. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Abraham: One Nomad's Amazing Journey of Faith* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 226–7.
2. Swindoll, *Abraham*, 231.



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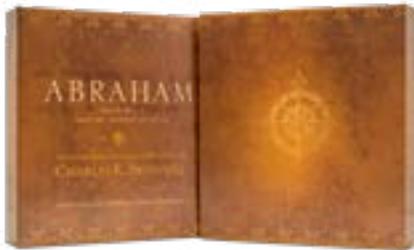
Genesis 23:1–2, 19–20; 24:1–4, 61–67; 25:20

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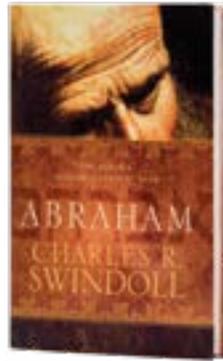
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For the 2017–2018 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Searching the Scriptures Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

What a Way to Go!

Genesis 25:1–10

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LET'S BEGIN HERE

Aging Abraham kept active right up to the end of his journey. In a season of life when many adults slip into neutral and glide toward the sunset, Abraham stayed engaged, remarrying after Sarah died, starting a new family, and generously using his resources to encourage the next generation.

Enthusiastic participation in life is exhilarating. It's the mundane that wears us out and shrinks our vision. When daily routine bores us silly, it's time to examine our priorities. Where do we *really* want to be at the end of our lives? Propped in a lounge with a Do Not Disturb sign on the door . . . or smack in the middle of exuberant existence?

Three mental sinkholes can impede our potential in our older years. Narcissism traps us in self-preoccupation: *I've paid my dues. I deserve to live for myself.* Pessimism drags us into self-pity: *I have nothing to offer. I'm too old.* And fatalism saps our will to live: *I've done all I can in life. All I can look forward to is the grave.*

What was Abraham's mind-set in his autumn years that safeguarded him from these pitfalls and kept him living well? Let's find out through our *Searching the Scriptures* study as we dig into Genesis 25:1–10.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

According to Genesis 23:1, Sarah died at Hebron at age 127. Abraham was 137 years old when his dear wife passed and the light of his life went out. Heartbroken over the loss, "Abraham mourned and wept" (Genesis 23:2). Isaac was 37 years old when his mother died, and he married three years later at age 40 (25:20).

So without Sarah's companionship and Isaac out of the home, Abraham, probably around age 140, made three important choices that contributed to him being productive, purposeful, and fulfilled in his remaining years.

Quotable

*When you die,
what will be your
frame of mind?
Think about it.
How will you
be spending
your days
prior to your
breathing your last?*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

What a Way to Go!

Genesis 25:1–10

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Observation: An Uncommon Example of Living Well

According to the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, observation is looking for verbs in the text that move the action forward, as well as names, places, and background information. Observing also prompts questions we need to explore.

Let's read the passage in three sections. We'll highlight three verbs that describe Abraham's life-enriching choices, make observations, and record questions as we go.

Abraham's New Wife—Genesis 25:1

What verb in Genesis 25:1 describes Abraham's first important choice in his old age, and what questions spark your curiosity about the situation?

Look up other references that mention the name *Keturah* by consulting a concordance, such as *The Strongest NASB Exhaustive Concordance*, or by going to biblegateway.com and entering *Keturah* in the search box. What do you discover about this woman?

Both Hagar and Keturah were Abraham's concubines. The term *concubine* was used to distinguish between Sarah, the wife whose child had full rights of inheritance, and the wives whose children did not have the same legal rights.

So Abraham's first life-enriching choice was to remarry. We'll examine what the Bible says about remarriage after the death of a spouse when we come to the interpretation section of our study, but for now, let's look at Abraham's second choice.



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Abraham's Second Family—Genesis 25:2–4

What do you observe in Genesis 25:2–4?

Keturah bore Abraham six sons! While many people in his stage of life would be dolefully poking at the embers of a waning fire, Abraham was tossing in six fresh pieces of wood! We applaud the Patriarch's undying zest for life and his desire to grow his family and pass on to others the blessings God had given him.

We might wonder, what happened to these sons and their families? We'll consider the significance of their lineage in a moment. In the meantime, let's observe Abraham's third choice that gave him meaning and purpose.

Abraham's Generous Inheritance—Genesis 25:5–10

What verbs do you see in Genesis 25:5–8? Why is it important that the author mentioned to whom Abraham distributed an inheritance?

Interestingly, Genesis 25:6 mentions the children of his "concubines" in the plural, indicating that the children Abraham blessed with gifts included not only the six children of Keturah but also Ishmael, the son of Hagar. Despite the conflict years earlier between Sarah and Hagar (Genesis 21:8–20), Abraham ensured that Ishmael also received a portion of the Patriarch's blessing.



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Genesis 25:1–10

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Interpretation: What Does It Mean?

The interpretation phase seeks to understand meaning, initially, for the Hebrews entering the Promised Land—the original readers. Then, we draw principles that apply to modern-day readers.

What meaning would the Hebrews have gathered from knowing about the Patriarch's remarriage and family line through Keturah? Thomas L. Constable's chart of Abraham's family tree gives us insight into the lineage of Abraham's sons, other than Isaac, and his nephews. Examine this [chart](#) on page 205 of the pdf document. In the space below, write down the Semitic tribes listed and how they related to Abraham, the Patriarch of the Israelites.

What would have been the significance of this knowledge to the Israelites who were surrounded by other tribes included in Abraham's family tree? And why was it important for them to know about the distribution of Abraham's inheritance?



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Correlation: Remarriage after the Death of a Spouse

Widows and widowers often wonder what the Bible says about remarriage. Look up the following verses, and write down the principles you discover.

Romans 7:2–3

1 Corinthians 7:8–9

What do you conclude from these verses?

What principles and applications can modern-day readers draw from Abraham's remarriage, family, and generosity? We can appreciate the importance of having an enriching and meaningful life in our older years. What do you learn from Abraham's example?



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Read the following verses. What principles about living well in your older years can you draw from the description of Abraham's death and burial?

Abraham lived for 175 years, and he died at a ripe old age, having lived a long and satisfying life. He breathed his last and joined his ancestors in death. His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, near Mamre, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite. This was the field Abraham had purchased from the Hittites and where he had buried his wife Sarah. (Genesis 25:7–10)

Abraham “lived a long and *satisfying* life” (25:8, emphasis added). The Hebrew word for *satisfying* literally means “to be full.” Abraham was content—full of peace, knowing he had passed a legacy of faith to his children and the generations after them.



Application: Two Valuable Secrets to Finishing Well

Chuck Swindoll draws two vital applications from Abraham's example of finishing well:

The first secret: *faithfully remember that each day offers opportunities for staying young at heart. . . .*

The Lord has granted you a genuine stake in what the day holds. Choose a positive attitude. Choose to seek out and focus on the good things. Choose to face your opportunities with eager anticipation. Choose to set aside your own expectations, and then embrace what God chooses to do. Choose to live in a constant state of surprise by laying aside your will and letting the Lord's will unfold.¹



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What choices can you make today to take full advantage of the opportunities for staying young at heart?

He continues:

The second secret: *diligently refuse to give up.*

Determine that you will never stop living until someone puts a mirror under your nose and there's no fog. Never stop. Never give up.²

Have the traps of narcissism, pessimism, and fatalism snared your hopeful attitude? What can you do, practically, to apply to your outlook Abraham's tonic of enthusiasm for life?

It's a matter of intentionality. You can choose your attitudes. You can choose how to invest your time—in reading widely and wisely, in helping others, in planning enriching activities. You can choose to be involved, to have a sense of humor, to spend less time wishing for more, to be *satisfied*, and to pass a legacy of faith to future generations.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, deliver me from the self-pity of our day and the bad-news pessimism that often accompanies old age. Raise me up to take life by the throat and live it to the full. Help me to be generous. Give me the joy of releasing what I think I can't live without so that I can cling more tightly to what's most important: my relationship with You. Thank You for filling me up and making me completely satisfied. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Abraham: One Nomad's Amazing Journey of Faith* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 244.
2. Swindoll, *Abraham*, 245.



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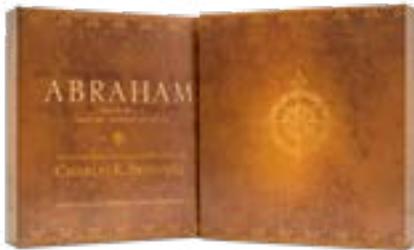
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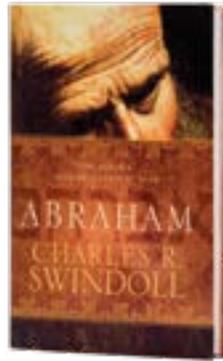
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ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

Portrait of a Hero . . . Warts and Everything

Hebrews 11:1–2, 8–12, 17–19



LET'S BEGIN HERE

In our final study of Abraham's amazing journey of faith, we reflect on a man who walked through life as a "friend of God" (James 2:23) but who was anything but perfect. The author of Abraham's biography painted a realistic portrait of the old Patriarch, warts and everything. Abraham soared the heights of godliness but also plummeted to the depths of fear and foolishness.

The benefits of studying the real Abraham are fourfold.

- *We can translate truth into life.* What does it mean to be a "friend of God" and walk closely with Him? Abraham gives us a flesh-and-blood example to follow.
- *We feel a closer kinship with the person we've admired from a distance.* Discovering that Abraham's family was not so different than ours reminds us that God still uses imperfect people.
- *We are stabilized when we have similar experiences.* Think of Abraham and Sarah's heartache through years of infertility, their grief over moving away from their homeland, or their intense family conflicts. The lessons they learned can instruct and steady us in our hard times.
- *We are enabled to maintain a divine perspective.* Although Abraham strayed periodically into worry and fear, he always returned to a divine perspective. We can learn from him to move beyond failure and keep our eyes on God.

Quotable

*Great things
await you if
you're willing
to obey without
knowing all
the details.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Portrait of a Hero . . . Warts and Everything

Hebrews 11:1–2, 8–12, 17–19

Did you experience these benefits during our study of Abraham's life? Did you see truth more clearly or feel a closer kinship with Abraham? Were you stabilized in hard times? Did this study help you see God's perspective when you were tested? If so, we've learned some valuable spiritual lessons together. Keep these lessons in mind as we replay the highlights of Abraham's life with Hebrews 11 as a guide, and let's grow more!



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

The author of Hebrews opens chapter 11 with this definition of faith:

Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see.
(Hebrews 11:1)

This truth may seem abstract and theoretical at first, until we see it modeled by Abraham and Sarah. Write a prayer asking the Lord to help you grasp the concepts of faith and hope through our review. Write your prayer in this space.



Observation: Abraham's Faith

A key principle in the *Searching the Scriptures* process is observation. Remember to look for repeated words, commands, questions, emphatic statements, and images or figures of speech. Reading different Bible versions can give you a fresh perspective of the same passage. If you don't have different versions handy, there are plenty of Web sites that can help you (biblestudytools.com, bible.org, or biblegateway.com, to name a few).



ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

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Hebrews 11:1–2, 8–12, 17–19

Read carefully and slowly Hebrews 11:8–12, 17–19. Look for the repeating phrase, *by faith*. Circle this phrase in your Bible, if you wish. How many times does it appear? Write down what Abraham and Sarah *did* by faith.

Recall the phrases which define faith from Hebrews 11:1: “reality of what we hope for” and “evidence of things we cannot see.” What were the “realities” for which Abraham and Sarah hoped? (Hint: look closely at Hebrews 11:8, 11.)

Imagine Abraham and Sarah with their feet planted on the Promised Land and their arms holding the promised child. These realities that they could see with their eyes and touch with their hands and feet were evidence of “things” they could *not* see or touch. What were the things Abraham and Sarah did not experience but still, by faith, believed God would accomplish (Hebrews 11:10, 12)?

Abraham and Sarah didn't live to see the city or the nation God promised, but with eyes of faith they saw them in the distance and welcomed them (11:13).



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Hebrews 11:1–2, 8–12, 17–19

The Heights: Abraham's Abundance of Faith

In what specific ways did Abraham express his faith? Let's scan the mountain range of his life and observe four pinnacles of faith.

When Abraham was called, he obeyed. Abraham expressed his faith by obeying “when God called him to leave home and go to another land” (Hebrews 11:8). Abraham took with him his family and his possessions, knowing very little about his destination. God didn't even give him a map! What typical travel aids that we usually take with us on journeys did Abraham *not* have when he embarked on his journey?

According to Chuck Swindoll, an essential element of faith is not knowing:

Great rewards await if you obey without knowing all the details. It's a principle God wants each of His followers to experience. Learning to trust Him is like making a journey step after step. Faith builds upon faith. When we trust, we receive unexpected blessings. This strengthens our confidence and inspires us to trust God again as we take another step.¹

What Abraham was promised, he believed. Abraham took God's promise literally. What promise did Abraham believe, and what sacrifices do you think he made by living “like a foreigner, living in tents” (11:9)?



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Hebrews 11:1–2, 8–12, 17–19



Correlation: Paul's Perspective on Abraham's Faith

Read Romans 4:19–21. What additional insight can you glean from Paul's teaching about Abraham? Try reading the passage in *The Message* for a more colorful description of Abraham and Sarah's faith. You can find *The Message* at biblegateway.com. What do you discover?

Despite their infertility, aging Abraham and Sarah believed against all odds God could fill their empty arms with a son, just as He promised. "Don't let the odds of any situation keep you from trusting God," advises Chuck Swindoll.²

When Abraham was tested, he trusted. The author to the Hebrews peers inside Abraham's mind to reveal the thought that bolstered Abraham's faith when God told him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. Observing Hebrews 11:17–19, what reassurance helped Abraham trust when tested?

Do you remember the comment Abraham made to his servants when they arrived at the mountain for the sacrifice?

"The boy and I will travel a little farther. We will worship there, and then we will come right back." (Genesis 22:5, emphasis added)

Don't miss the implication of the little pronoun *we*: "we will come right back." Somehow, Abraham knew Isaac would return with him. What trust!



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Hebrews 11:1–2, 8–12, 17–19

When Abraham was blessed, he shared. For this final point, we exit the halls of Hebrews 11 and scale the hillside overlooking the Jordan valley, where Abraham offered Lot first choice of the land (Genesis 13:5–10). And then, we fast-forward to the end of Abraham's life when he gave all he had to Isaac and gave generous gifts to his other sons (25:5–6).

What is the source from which Abraham's generosity flowed? Find the wellspring in Genesis 12:2–3; 13:15; and 24:35.

The Depths: Abraham's Lack of Faith

Between the pinnacles of faith in Abraham's life plunge three faith-deficient valleys.

When he was afraid, he retreated. Abraham retreated geographically by fleeing the famine-stricken land for Egypt, and he retreated personally by lying about his marriage to Sarah and abandoning her when Pharaoh took her into his harem (Genesis 12:10–13).

When he became impatient, he listened to the wrong counsel. Abraham couldn't wait for God to fulfill His promise of a son, so he took Sarah's unwise counsel and fathered a child with Hagar (16:1–2).

When he faced a similar test, he repeated the same failure. In a situation with Abimelech that mirrored the situation with Pharaoh, Abraham lied again. Isaac acquired his father's bad habit and jeopardized Rebekah in the same way (26:6–11).

Whether Abraham climbed to the heights of faith or sank to the depths, he never abandoned God . . . and God never abandoned him. Now let's look at the meaning we can glean from our review of Abraham's life.

Interpretation: What Does It Mean?

Bible stories are rich sources of principles for godly living. We learn best by example, don't we? Lists of points are quickly forgotten, but the story of Abraham's willingness to release his son, for example, sets memorable pegs in our minds so the next time we're called to trust God, we have some guidelines to hang on to.



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What are the timeless principles from Abraham's life that God's Word sets like pegs in your mind? Look over the observation section of our study, and write down the principles that stand out to you.

Do you sense God leading you? *Follow!* Has God made you promises? *Believe!* Are you experiencing a time of testing? *Trust!* Has God blessed you? *Share!* Let Abraham and Sarah's example be your guide on your own amazing journey of faith.

Application: Valuable Lessons We Can Learn

Abraham's story is our story. We're all nomads in this world and scaling heights of faith and slipping into valleys of fear. Despite the ups and downs, we're always moving forward to our eternal destination, "confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God" (Hebrews 11:10).

Conclude this series by telling the Lord how you intend to put into practice one or two of the concluding principles from this study. What will you do in the coming days to make Abraham's faith your own?

Now, let's pray with hearts of praise to Abraham's God . . . who is our God too.

A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the magnificent way You speak to me from the life of a man and his wife who lived more than 4,000 years ago. Though the people and places are unfamiliar, the truths linger as lifelong companions. I pray You will use an imperfect person like me in the same way You used imperfect Abraham and Sarah. You are the perfect One, forgiving and patient—the only One worth following and worthy of praise. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Abraham: One Nomad's Amazing Journey of Faith* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 249.
2. Swindoll, *Abraham*, 251.



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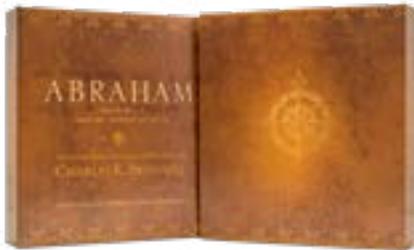
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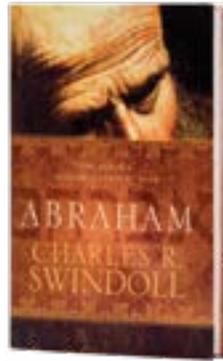
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