

## **The Man Abram/Abraham**

Scripture and References: Genesis 11:27-15:21; *Patriarchs and Prophets* 125-176; *1SP* 93-101; *3SG* 98-108; *1SDABC* 1092-1094; *SR* 75-86; *4T* 523-524.

1. Abram or Abraham (ca.1950-1775 B.C.) is the number one example of faith given in Scripture. (See Romans 4; Galatians 3; James 2; Hebrews 11.) For this document, the names Abraham and Sarah will be used throughout even though his name was Abram and her name was Sarai until God changed them as recorded in Genesis 17 at the time when God gave them circumcision as a sign of the covenant of their coming child and their numberless descendants when Sarah was 90 years old and Abraham was 99 years old. Abraham is the person mutually acknowledged as “father” of the three great monotheistic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Why is that? He is the primary subject of the faith chapter, Hebrews 11. There are some other very interesting characters in Scripture also called examples of faith—for example Rahab, the harlot; Samson; and the children of Israel! (James 2; Hebrews 11)
2. Read Acts 16:31. Paul seemed to suggest that faith is the only requirement for salvation. Why do you think that is?
3. Some describe Abraham’s faith as “unquestioning.” Is it true that one of the most important characteristics of true faith is its willingness to believe without questioning? Isn’t that the message of the famous gospel song which says: “God said it, I believe it, and that settles it for me”? Let us look at the life experience of Abraham and see if we can determine what made him a man of faith.
4. In Noah’s day, apparently everyone had turned away from God except for one family. In Abraham’s day, the whole world had rejected God and turned away from Him except for one family.

After the dispersion from Babel idolatry again became well-nigh universal, and the Lord finally left the hardened transgressors to follow their evil ways, while He chose Abraham, of the line of Shem, and made him the keeper of His law for future generations. Abraham had grown up in the midst of superstition and heathenism.... Faithful among the faithless, uncorrupted by the prevailing apostasy, he steadfastly adhered to the worship of the one true God.... He [God] communicated His will to Abraham, and gave him a distinct knowledge of the requirements of His law and of the salvation that would be accomplished through Christ. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 125.1) [Content in brackets is added.]

Why was Abraham so different from the rest of his family and humanity of his time?

5. Did people in the days of Noah and Abraham make attempts to evangelize those around them? Clearly, the answer is, “Yes!” Why did the Devil seem to be so much more successful at spreading his “gospel” than God was?

Now that Abraham was, in a special sense, connected with heaven, he must dwell among strangers. His character must be peculiar, differing from all the world. He could not even explain his course of action so as to be understood by his friends. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned, and his motives and actions were not comprehended by his idolatrous kindred. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 126.1)

God has spoken, and His servant must obey; the happiest place on earth for him was the place where God would have him to be. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 126.3)

Abraham sought by every means in his power to guard the inmates of his encampment against mingling with the heathen and witnessing their idolatrous practices, for he knew that familiarity with evil would insensibly corrupt the principles. The greatest care was exercised to shut out every form of false religion and to impress the mind with the majesty and glory of the living God as the true object of worship.

It was a wise arrangement, which God Himself had made, to cut off His people, so far as possible, from connection with the heathen, making them a people dwelling alone, and not reckoned among the nations. He had separated Abraham from his idolatrous kindred, that the patriarch might train and educate his family apart from the seductive influences which would have surrounded [142] them in Mesopotamia, and that the true faith might be preserved in its purity by his descendants from generation to generation. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 141.2-3)

6. Is it dangerous to stay among friends and family? Do our friends and family tend to lead us away from God? Or, nearer to Him?
7. As we know from historical records, intermarriage with members of one's own family was very common in ancient times. Both Abraham and Nahor married their own sisters, although they were half-sisters due to the fact that their fathers had multiple wives—or possibly sequential wives. Why do you think they did that? Were they trying to remain separate and uncorrupted by the world?
8. What was there about Abraham that led God to choose him as the number one biblical example of a friend (2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8) and continue to work with his descendants for so many years? Would God have done better with Job? (See Job 1:1,8; 2:3.) Or, perhaps Melchizedek who lived about the same time as Abraham? (See Genesis 14:18-20; Psalms 110:4; Hebrews 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:1-28.)
9. It is quite possible that God chose Abraham as the ancestor of His “chosen” people not because the Israelites were such a good people, or even because their ancestor was so good, but simply because He recognized that they would serve as such an excellent example of the many things that He needed to demonstrate before the universe—both good and bad. Some of the descendants of Abraham proved to be wonderful people, but others turned out to be real scoundrels.
10. Why is it that when God chooses a family of patriarchs to be His representatives, He seems to emphasize their mistakes? What would a good advertising agency from Madison Avenue do with the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?
11. It was the custom of ancient nations to record only the victories and successes of their leaders and armies. If one reads the records of each nation, he will find that there is seldom anything said about battles lost, territory lost, or disasters that happened to their kings or generals.
12. By contrast, Scripture often seems to talk about the sins of its heroes even in more detail than their triumphs. (There are few exceptions!) This actually results in the Bible being

more believable. We can relate to the leading characters of the Bible as real people with faults; people who make frequent mistakes like us.

13. Often, the sins of the “heroes” in the Bible resulted in major changes in the society and culture, and those would lead to questions being asked by children and others. No doubt, the stories were recalled to explain how it was that such a thing came about. Thus, the story of Tamar had to be told to explain the presence of the two major clans of the tribe of Judah (See Genesis 38.); the story of the Levite and his concubine had to be told to explain the disappearance of almost the entire tribe of Benjamin (See Judges 19-21.); etc.
14. **Why do you think it was God’s choice to pick out one individual with whom to work instead of trying to spread the gospel to all parts of the world? If isolation from those to whom we are closest makes it easier to maintain a pure faith, why didn’t God pick someone from South America, Western Europe, or East Asia instead of Abraham who lived not far from the center of sin?**
15. Who received the first call of faith? Was it Abraham who was called to move from Ur to Haran? Or, was it his father, Terah? (Genesis 11:31) Why does the Bible say it was Terah who took his son, Abraham, and other members of his family and moved to Haran? Do you think God intended for them to spend several years in Haran? Why? (Compare Acts 7:2-4.) What happened as a result of this two-step call?
16. Why didn’t Abraham and his family go directly to Canaan? **Abraham’s family, even some of those who accompanied him to Haran, continued to practice idolatry. Why do you think this giant man of faith could not convince his own family to be faithful to God?** Which is harder: 1) To convince a member of your own family about the gospel, or 2) To convince a stranger about the gospel? Do we have evidence that Abraham was trying to reach out to others and teach them the truth? Read Genesis 12:5.

Among these were many led by higher considerations than those of service and self-interest. During their stay in Haran, both Abraham and Sarah had led others to the worship and service of the true God. These attached themselves to the patriarch’s household, and accompanied him to the land of promise. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 127)

17. **What would happen today in our church if there were a few members in each congregation willing to do what Abraham did?**
18. **What did God promise Abraham?** What reasons did He give him for leaving his home and his family and traveling to an unknown place? (Genesis 12:1-3; Hebrews 11:8-10) As we know, historically, Abraham is acknowledged as the father of the three great monotheistic faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Millions of people today are still named after him. The people at the tower of Babel gathered together and worked hard to make a name for themselves! God took Abraham out of that setting and sent him to a distant country to dwell alone to make a name for Abraham! Why was God’s plan for Abraham successful and the plan of the builders of the tower of Babel unsuccessful?
19. **In trying to explore the roots of Abraham’s faith, what factors do you see that were important? Remember that Abraham had no Bible, apparently no spiritual advisers, no prophets or pastors to give him guidance (except maybe Melchizedek), and he lived in a family corrupted by idolatry.**
20. When God called Abraham, how did He do it? How did Abraham know that God was even

speaking to him? Did they have a personal relationship? Did he hear voices? Or, see visions? Today, we send someone like that to a psychiatrist! Does God speak to people and call them in our day? What about in Ellen White's day? Didn't God call two men who turned Him down before He called Ellen Harmon who later became Ellen White? How would you know if God was calling you?

21. Many ancient families, and even many families in poorer parts of the world today, lived/live a subsistence life. A famine, an epidemic, a war, or even a disease among their animals could wipe out a whole community. Living in a trade city near a large river protected one from many of those dangers. Moving away by oneself into a country of unknown people with a different language and with different tribal customs and background could put one at great risk.
22. **Not long after Abraham reached Canaan, a famine set in. Abraham had to move south to Egypt. Why didn't he go back to Ur? Or, at least to Haran? Did Abraham have questions about this wonderful land that God was about to give him?**
23. When Abraham reached Egypt, he told his wife to tell the Egyptians that she was his sister. (Genesis 12:13) While this was true in the strictest sense of the word, it was intended to misrepresent their relationship. What do you think happened to Abraham and Sarah during their time in Egypt? How did he happen to come in contact with Pharaoh? How did Pharaoh learn about Sarah?
24. How old was Sarah when she seemed to be so attractive to Pharaoh? What do you think it was about Sarah that made her attractive?
25. Was Abraham's faith weakened by the fact that God had led him into a land of famine? How often does God lead us into testing? Don't we pray about that? (Matthew 6:13)

The Lord in His providence had brought this trial upon Abraham to teach him lessons of submission, patience, and faith—lessons that were to be placed on record for the benefit of all who should afterward be called to endure affliction. God leads His children by a way that they know not, but He does not forget or cast off those who put their trust in Him. . . .

Abraham had been greatly favored by the king; even now Pharaoh would permit no harm to be done him or his company, but ordered a guard to conduct them in safety out of his dominions. **At this time laws were made prohibiting the Egyptians from intercourse with foreign shepherds in any such familiarity as eating or drinking with them.** Pharaoh's dismissal of Abraham was kind and generous; but he bade him leave Egypt, for he dared not permit him to remain. He had ignorantly been about to do him a serious injury, but God had interposed, and [131] saved the monarch from committing so great a sin. Pharaoh saw in this stranger a man whom the God of heaven honored, and he feared to have in his kingdom one who was so evidently under divine favor. Should Abraham remain in Egypt, his increasing wealth and honor would be likely to excite the envy or covetousness of the Egyptians, and some injury might be done him, for which the monarch would be held responsible, and which might again bring judgments upon the royal house.

**The warning that had been given to Pharaoh proved a protection to Abraham in his after-intercourse with heathen peoples; for the matter**

**could not be kept secret, and it was seen that the God whom Abraham worshiped would protect His servant, and that any injury done him would be avenged. It is a dangerous thing to wrong one of the children of the King of heaven.** The psalmist refers to this chapter in Abraham's experience when he says, in speaking of the chosen people, that God "reproved kings for their sakes; saying, Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm." Psalm 105:14,15. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 129.2-131.1) [Bold type is added.]

26. When was the last time you can remember that God tested your faith? How did He do it?
27. When Abraham and Lot with their herds and herdsmen returned to Palestine, what happened? Read Genesis 13:1-13. **If Lot had insisted that Abraham choose first, what do you think Abraham would have chosen?** Lot chose the well-watered valley of the Jordan River. What can we learn from Abraham's very generous spirit?
28. Now that things seemed to be looking up for Abraham and his flocks and herdsmen were scattered over the hills of Judea, what did God say to him? Read Genesis 13:14-18.
29. **Since Abraham still had no son, why do you think he did not choose to adopt Lot? Shouldn't Lot have been the natural choice? Why did Abraham look to someone not even of his tribe or his nationality as the inheritor of his estate?**
30. Read the story of Abraham going to war as recorded in Genesis 14. What do you think was going on in that war between four kings and five kings? Where did these different groups come from? Had they traveled a long distance to carry out that attack? If we understand the names correctly, one king was from Babylon; another king was from Iran; and one was from a city east of Babylonia; and the last king came from a place which we cannot locate. After conquering several kings east of the Jordan, (Genesis 14:5-7) they apparently went on a raiding party into the Jordan Valley. How large a group do you think was involved in this battle?
31. Abraham took 318 trained soldiers from among his own workers, plus the forces of Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner with him as allies, and pursued the escaping group. They attacked at night; and under the capable leadership of Abraham, they won a resounding victory.
32. How did Melchizedek get involved in this story? Read Genesis 14:17-24. Who was this king from ancient Jerusalem? Why did he have a name like "righteousness is my king" and "the king of peace"? Had he become a friend of Abraham? Why do you think Abraham refused to keep any of the loot which he had brought back from the battle? Why did he choose to pay a tithe of the loot to Melchizedek?
33. After this encounter, Abraham was afraid that he would become a target of raiders and war parties. But, God appeared to him again—now for the third time that we know about—and reassured him, once again promising a son. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, Abraham trusted God. Apparently, that is what God wanted. "Abram put his trust in the LORD, and because of this the LORD was pleased with him and accepted him." (Genesis 15:6, *GNB*) What is implied by this statement?
34. What was the purpose of the strange ceremony that Abraham carried out to seal his agreement with God? (Genesis 15:8-21) Tablets found in the city of Nuzi, not far from where Abraham was born, show that this "contract signing" process is what they normally did in that area about the time of Abraham. Ellen White commented: "The Lord

condescended to enter into a covenant with His servant, employing such forms as were customary among men for the ratification of a solemn engagement.” *Patriarchs and Prophets* 137.1. How do you suppose she knew that before the discovery of the vast majority of the tablets in Nuzi?

35. How did Abraham relate to all the people around him after God told him that all of their property was to be his one day?
36. What was it that made Abraham stand out as a man of faith? Was it his willingness to move forward without evidence? **What kind of evidence was Abraham’s faith based on? What kind of faith—based on what kind of evidence—is God looking for in us today?**

Many are still tested as was Abraham. They do not hear the voice of God speaking directly from the heavens, but He calls them by the teachings of His word and the events of His providence. They may be required to abandon a career that promises wealth and honor, to leave congenial and profitable associations, [127] and separate from kindred, to enter upon what appears to be only a path of self-denial, hardship, and sacrifice. God has a work for them to do; but a life of ease and the influence of friends and kindred would hinder the development of the very traits essential for its accomplishment. He calls them away from human influences and aid, and leads them to feel the need of His help, and to depend upon Him alone, that He may reveal Himself to them. **Who is ready at the call of Providence to renounce cherished plans and familiar associations? Who will accept new duties and enter untried fields, doing God’s work with firm and willing heart, for Christ’s sake counting his losses gain? He who will do this has the faith of Abraham, and will share with him that “far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,” with which “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared.” 2 Corinthians 4:17; Romans 8:18. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 126.4)** [Bold type is added.]

37. Read Genesis 16:1-4. What do you think Sarah had in mind when she suggested that Abraham should take Hagar as a secondary wife? Did she think Ishmael would be her adopted son?
38. Had God made it very clear to Abraham who the mother of this promised child was supposed to be? (Genesis 12:1-3,7; 13:15-16; 15:4-6,13-21; 17:1-8)
39. Abraham was then 85 years old, and Sarah was 75. **Polygamy was commonly practiced in the surrounding territories. In fact, some have suggested that based solely on Scripture, polygamy cannot be stated to be against God’s rules. Why has it become so forbidden and such an issue in our day? What has led to the kinds of laws which we have regarding polygamy? What is the real evil of polygamy?**
40. **Did Abraham really believe that he was helping God?**
41. Have you ever tried to help God? **Why did God wait so long to send Isaac?** Was He afraid that Abraham and Sarah would not be good parents? Was He testing their faith? Their patience?
42. **What should we do in our day when common sense and rationality seem to point in one direction and God’s guidance seems to point in another direction?**

43. What do you think would have happened if Abraham had not shown hospitality to the three strangers on the road? Would the story have ended differently in any way?
44. Would the world have been a better place without Lot and his daughters? God, knowing full well the future history of these nations, decided to preserve Lot and his daughters anyway. Was that a good decision? (Genesis 19:30-38; 2 Peter 2:7-8)
45. **If you had been Lot escaping from the city of Sodom, where would you have gone?** What happened to Lot's enormous flocks and herds? Where were his herdsmen? What do you think would have happened if Lot and his daughters had gone straight to Abraham's place after leaving Sodom? Why didn't they go to Abraham?
46. For more than 17 years, Hagar and Ishmael lived in the home of Abraham and Sarah. What kind of relationship did they have? Did Hagar have any more children?
47. Read Genesis 17. Do you think this appearance that God made to Abraham was in a vision? Or, did He appear in human form? What would you think if God made all of those promises to you that He made to Abraham?
48. Read Genesis 17:9-14. Why did God ask Abraham and his family to seal their part of the covenant with the act of circumcision? Did God leave any room for personal decisions about circumcision? Was God exercising force? Notice that everyone in Abraham's camp was included. **Does that mean that they eventually became part of the Israelite nation?**

**Abraham's household comprised more than a thousand souls.** Those who were led by his teachings to worship the one God, found a home in his encampment; and here, as in a school, they received such instruction as would prepare them to be representatives of the true faith. Thus a great responsibility rested upon him. He was training heads of families, and his methods of government would be carried out in the households over which they should preside. *Patriarchs and Prophets* 141.1. [Bold type is added.]

49. At the time that circumcision was given as a sign of God's covenant with Abram, God changed Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's name to Sarah. (Genesis 17:5,15) What would you do if God appeared to you and gave you a new name? Would you tell your friends? What if your wife's name was changed at the same time?
50. Read Genesis 17:17 and compare Genesis 18:9-15. Would you dare to laugh at God in His face? Why did both Abraham and Sarah laugh at God? Was that an involuntary laugh based on the apparent impossibility of the situation? Why does the Bible with its very limited space include the stories of these two giants of faith laughing at God? Sarah went on to lie about her laughter! **Does the Scripture go out of its way to record the mistakes and sins of its heroes? If so, why?** See Item #s 10-13 above.
51. **Does circumcision have any meaning in a spiritual sense in our day? Did circumcision have something to do with the circumstances in which Abraham lived? Why did circumcision become such a big deal?**
52. Read Genesis 17:15-19. Finally, God mentioned Sarah by name. Does it require the exercise of greater faith to believe what God says when the circumstances seem impossible? Should we be ready at any time to say: "God has said it, I believe it, and that settles it for me"? (Genesis 15:2; 16:4; 17:15-19; Romans 4:16-25) What do these verses tell us about how faith works?

53. Review the story of the three visitors who came to Abraham's home. (Genesis 18:1-8) With Abraham's thousands of attendants, why do you think that he and Sarah personally prepared food and served it to these three visitors? Or, did they? Did Abraham spend a lot of time waiting by the road looking for any visitors who might come along? Was this his version of reading the newspaper or watching the evening news or checking the news on the Internet? Notice that Abraham violated the laws of kosher!

Notice Ellen White's comments about the approach of the visitors.

In the hot summer noontide the patriarch was sitting in his tent door, looking out over the quiet landscape, when he saw in the distance three travelers approaching. Before reaching his tent, the strangers halted, as if consulting as to their course. Without waiting for them to solicit favors, Abraham rose quickly, and as they were apparently turning in another direction, he hastened after them, and with the utmost courtesy urged them to honor him by tarrying for refreshment. With his own hands he brought water that they might wash the dust of travel from their feet. He himself selected their food, and while they were at rest under the cooling shade, an entertainment was made ready, and he stood respectfully beside them while they partook of his hospitality. *Patriarchs and Prophets* 138.3.

How did Ellen White know these details?

54. Read Genesis 18:20-21. Compare Genesis 3:9. Taken literally, these two verses seem to give a real-time commentary on God's reporting system. Is God really that ignorant of the events that take place on this planet? Is His reporting system not very reliable? What about all the texts that talk about the precise and detailed records that God keeps? If His records are complete and accurate, why does He use this kind of language?
55. Read Genesis 18:16-33. With whom was Abraham talking in this discussion? If you have a traditional English translation, you will notice that this person is called LORD (in capital letters). That is an English code word for the Hebrew name, YHWH. Is that God, the Father? Or, God, the Son? If Abraham was talking to God, either Father or Son, would that qualify as prayer? Have you ever said anything to God in prayer like Abraham said directly to God?

Surely you won't kill the innocent with the guilty. That's impossible! You can't do that. If you did, the innocent would be punished along with the guilty. That is impossible. **The judge of all the earth has to act justly.** (Genesis 18:25, *GNB*) [Bold type is added.]

Should Abraham have been struck down for his impudence? **Is that the way the faithful are supposed to speak to God?**

56. Why does the Bible picture Abraham as bargaining with God? Do you ever do that? It would appear that Abraham was quite successful in his bargaining! What do you think God would have said if Abraham had gotten down to three? Or, one?

Love for perishing souls inspired Abraham's prayer.... His deep interest for Sodom shows the anxiety that we should feel for the impenitent.... The spirit of Abraham was the spirit of Christ. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 140.1-2)

He [Abraham] remembers that Lot has made his home in Sodom and that Lot has connections all through Sodom by marriage. Therefore Abraham



commences at fifty, and the Lord tells him that He will spare it for fifty; then he goes down to ten, and the Lord tells him that He will spare it for ten's sake. He does not make any further appeal, but he does hope that there will be found ten righteous [persons] in Sodom. (*Christ Triumphant* 75.2) [Content in brackets is added.]

57. Read Genesis 19:1-11. What was the purpose of telling the story of Sodom's last night? What do these verses tell us about conditions in Sodom? How did things become so bad there? Remember that those are the people who were rescued by Abraham just a few years earlier! Based on what you know about Sodom and Gomorrah, what do you think was the reason for their destruction?
58. Lot was described in 2 Peter 2:7-8 as a righteous man. Why would such a person choose to raise his family in the city of Sodom?
59. **There are some verses in Scripture that are absolutely stunning to us given our cultural milieu. Read Genesis 19:8. What could possibly have led Lot to offer to give his virgin daughters to a large group of violent and homosexual men?**
60. Apparently, Lot had other children who were already married and living in Sodom. Try to imagine yourself going to the home of your child to convince him/her to grab his/her things and get out of Sodom with you. What would you say to him/her?
61. What kind of a God would turn Lot's wife into a pillar of salt just because she glanced back? (Genesis 19:26) Why did Lot offer his virgin daughters to that crowd instead of letting them take the angels? (Genesis 19:7) If Lot is to be considered a "just man," (2 Peter 2:8-9) wasn't his first duty to his daughters?

This passage is clear evidence of how different the culture was in Lot's day than it is in our own. We cannot imagine a father in his right mind offering his virgin daughters or anyone to such a crowd under any circumstance, let alone in an attempt to protect the honor and dignity of strangers! One wonders how Lot's daughters could have remained virgins in that environment! It is clear from events that happened later, (Genesis 19:30-38) that their thinking had been corrupted even if their bodies were not. Why were Lot and these two daughters living in a cave when Lot's uncle, Abraham, was nearby?

This is primarily a thought question. What would you have done? Would we all be better off if God had just allowed Lot and his entire family to disappear into history instead of giving rise to the very troublesome nations known as the Ammonites and the Moabites? This story must be compared to others in the Scriptures. See the handout, "**From Sodom and Gomorrah to Hell.**"

62. What do we know about Lot's wife? What was her spiritual background? Did Abraham help Lot find a wife?

The wife of Lot was a selfish, irreligious woman, and her influence was exerted to separate her husband from Abraham. **But for her, Lot would not have remained in Sodom, deprived of the counsel of the wise, God-fearing patriarch. The influence of his wife and the associations of that wicked city would have led him to apostatize from God had it not been for the faithful instruction he had early received from Abraham. The marriage of Lot and his choice of Sodom for a home were the first links in a chain of events fraught with evil to the world for many generations.**

*(Patriarchs and Prophets 174.2)* [Bold type is added.]

63. Try to imagine yourself fleeing from Sodom. Like Lot's wife, would you be inclined to look back, at least for a glance, to see what was happening to your other children?

Lot trod the plain with unwilling and tardy steps. He had so long associated with evil workers that he could not see his peril until his wife stood on the plain a pillar of salt forever. (*Advocate*, December 1, 1900 par. 9)

64. If you had the choice right now of leaving all your earthly possessions and living in poverty for the rest of your life but with a guarantee of eternal salvation, would you accept it? Or, would you try to bargain with God?

65. Read Genesis 19:12-29. What do we know about Zoar? If you knew that the cities behind you were experiencing the outpouring of God's wrath in fire and brimstone, would you want to stay nearby? Or, would you want to flee as fast and as far as possible?

Lot dwelt but a short time in Zoar. Iniquity prevailed there as in Sodom, and he feared to remain, lest the city should be destroyed. Not long after, Zoar was consumed, as God had purposed. (*Patriarchs and Prophets 167.3*)

66. Read Genesis 19:30-38. We know very little about the rest of the life of Lot or his daughters except for their incestuous relationship that resulted in the Moabites and Ammonites who ended up being long-term enemies of the Israelites. Did they ever make an attempt to speak to Abraham about what had happened? Did Abraham try to find them? Why? Or, why not?

67. **Who was it that poured out fire and brimstone on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah?** Would it matter to you if it was God the Father, or God the Son? Who was the God of the Old Testament? (1 Corinthians 10:1-4; John 5:39-40; Luke 24:27,44) Did the disciples or any of the followers of Jesus in His day have any inkling that they were walking with the One who had poured out fire and brimstone on Sodom? (Matthew 10:15; 11:23-24)

68. Stop and think about the overall goal of the plan of salvation. Isn't the purpose to separate God's people from their sin so that sin can be eliminated from the universe once and for all? Do we make it easy for God to separate us from our sin? What was the final outcome of the Hagar-Ishmael episode? Where are the descendants of Hagar-Ishmael now? To what do you attribute the apparent differences in character between Ishmael and Isaac? Did Abraham reject Ishmael? Why do you think Ishmael ended up living in the desert, apart from almost all other humanity? Did Abraham's treatment of Hagar lead to that development in the character of Ishmael? What does the Quran say about the story of Ishmael?

69. Would it have been better if the story of Hagar and Ishmael had been left out of the Bible? Why was it included?

70. Genesis 20:1-25:10 covers the last 75 years of Abraham's 175 years of life. Fortunately, although the story begins with some lows, it ends on a very high note.

71. Read Genesis 20. Why do you think this story is included in Scripture? What does it teach us about Abraham, the great man of faith? Why do you think a king from Gaza would want to marry a ninety-year-old woman? What do you think was so attractive about Sarah?

72. How do you think God communicated with this pagan monarch? How long do you think

Sarah stayed with him? **In Genesis 20:12, we discover for the first time that Abraham's father likely was a polygamist.** Does this help us to understand Abraham's experience with Hagar? Did Sarah's mother travel with them to Haran? Why don't we know anything about either Abraham's mother or Sarah's mother?

73. **Ladies, would you be willing to lie for your husband? Would you be willing to join a pagan king's harem to seemingly protect your husband?**
74. How do you explain Genesis 20:17-18? How long did it take for the women of Abimelech's household to realize that they were not fertile? What was the point of this part of the story? Do you think Sarah verbally lied about her true status? Or, did she only lie through silence? Did Abimelech or the people of Gerar have any idea about God's conversation with Abraham regarding Sodom and Gomorrah? What was their idea about what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah? We have no extra-biblical information about the final end of Sodom and Gomorrah.
75. Do we ever lie through silence? In our society, is it even possible to be fully and completely honest all the time? Is it a lie to say you are "fine" when you really are not? Either by our statements or by our silence, how often do we twist the truth?
76. Review God's statement about Abraham. (Hebrews 11:8-11) Should God have rejected Abraham on the basis of the failures recorded in Genesis? If God rejected people every time they made a mistake, would He have any followers left? **What are we supposed to learn about God from this story about lying through silence?**
77. If Sarah had stopped having periods, how long did it take her to figure out she was pregnant? How did she know for sure? Was it when she felt the baby kicking, perhaps several times?
78. Why was Isaac given the name "laughter"? (Genesis 17:17; 18:9-15) What does it do to your faith to laugh at God in His face? What about lying to Him to His face? Abraham had gotten into the Hagar-Ishmael debacle because of a lack of faith. Was it an act of faith to send them away?
79. Try to imagine yourself in the position of Hagar or Ishmael after Isaac was born. Did Abraham's attitude toward Ishmael change? Ishmael was about 14 or 15 years older than Isaac. Isaac would normally have been weaned at the age of one or two years; so, the weaning party would have taken place when Ishmael was about 16 or 17. Were Abraham and God fair to Hagar and Ishmael? Was it the actions of God and Abraham that led Ishmael to be the kind of person he was? Given the fact that Ishmael was about 17 years old, what does it mean in Genesis 21:14 by saying, "Put the child on her back and sent her away"? Why does Genesis 21:14-16 seem to imply that Ishmael was still a small child?
80. As Abraham aged, the size of his household continued to grow; and he was recognized as a powerful force in the community. Even kings thought it safer to have agreements with him! (Genesis 21:22-34)
81. **Why did God ask Abraham to sacrifice the "son of promise"? Would that be breaking the sixth commandment?** Abraham was about 120 years old and Isaac about 20 years old when this event took place.

God had called Abraham to be the father of the faithful, and his life was to stand as an example of faith to succeeding generations. But his faith had not been perfect. He had shown distrust of God in concealing the fact that Sarah

was his wife, and again in his marriage with Hagar. **That he might reach the highest standard, God subjected him to another test, the closest which man was ever called to endure. In a vision of the night he was directed to repair to the land of Moriah, and there offer up his son as a burnt offering upon a mountain that should be shown him.** (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 147.2) [Bold type is added.]

82. Abraham was the owner of thousands of sheep and cattle and had hundreds of workers in his employment. After years of delay and disappointment, everything seemed to be going right for him. But, God had one more test for Abraham! Prior to this account, what evidence do we have in Scripture of Abraham's faith?

In the obedience of faith, Abraham had forsaken his native country—had turned away from the graves of his fathers and the home of his kindred. He had wandered as a stranger in the land of his inheritance. He had waited long for the birth of the promised heir. At the command of God he had sent away his son Ishmael. And now, when the child so long desired was entering upon manhood, and the patriarch seemed able to discern the fruition of his hopes, a trial greater than all others was before him. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 148.1)

83. If *faith* is a word we use to describe a relationship with God as with a Friend well-known, what was the basis for Abraham's faith? He had no Bible, no church, no pastor, and no congregation with whom to consult. Did he have frequent communication with God? What was the form of that communication?
84. How do you think God spoke to Abraham on this occasion? Was it in a vision? Did God appear to him in person? Apparently, Abraham was very certain that it was God who had spoken to him. In our day, Abraham would have been taken immediately to a psychiatrist. What possible reason could be important enough for God to ask such a sacrifice of Abraham? Satan was on hand and must have suggested many doubts to Abraham. If "God never asks us to believe anything for which he does not give adequate evidence..." (SC 105) what evidence did Abraham have that this was indeed God's will? How could this "son of promise" who was to be the father of kings and nations now be offered as a sacrifice? Abraham did everything he could think of to try to get some further confirmation from God, apparently without effect!
85. **Ladies, what would you think if you woke up in the morning and found your husband and only son missing? Had they ever gone away like that before? What if someone hinted to you that your son had gone with his father in order to be sacrificed? What would you do?** Abraham had finally awakened Isaac but did not awaken Sarah. The two of them set off with two servants and a donkey to carry the wood. They traveled for three days to reach Mount Moriah. Every night, Abraham prayed and sought God's favor through the entire night without sleeping. (*Signs of the Times*, April 1, 1875 par. 9; *PP* 151.3) Finally,

As they were about to begin the journey of the third day, the patriarch, looking northward, saw the promised sign, a cloud of glory hovering over Mount Moriah, and he knew that the voice which had spoken to him was from heaven. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 151.3)

86. Abraham was left clinging to the promise that Isaac was to be the "father of a great nation."

It was the only consolation he had. Does this kind of experience strengthen one's faith? Or, tend to destroy it?

87. **What would be an equivalent test in our day? If God asked you to give up your car, your home, your favorite dietary items, your bank account, and your 401(k) in order to do some important thing for Him, would you be willing?**
88. For those of you who have older children, try to imagine saying to your teenager or to your child who is twenty-something that God had instructed you to sacrifice him/her on an altar! What would be his/her response? Does God ever ask us to make such sacrifices in our day? What do you think Abraham's last words to Isaac were?
89. Why was Isaac willing to cooperate with his aged father in this incredible experience? He could easily have escaped. Fortunately, we know the outcome. Abraham's arm was held back, and Isaac did not die.

**Abraham's great act of faith stands like a pillar of light, illuminating the pathway of God's servants in all succeeding ages. Abraham did not seek to excuse himself from doing the will of God. During that three days' journey he had sufficient time to reason, and to doubt God, if he was disposed to doubt.** He might have reasoned that the slaying of his son would cause him to be looked upon as a murderer, a second Cain; that it would cause his teaching to be rejected and despised; and thus destroy his power to do good to his fellow men. He might have pleaded that age should excuse him from obedience. But the patriarch did not take refuge in any of these excuses. Abraham was human; his passions and attachments were like ours; but he did not stop to question how the promise could be fulfilled if Isaac should be slain. He did not stay to reason with his aching heart. He knew that God is just and righteous in all His requirements, and he obeyed the command to the very letter.

**It was to impress Abraham's mind with the reality of the gospel, as well as to test his faith, that God commanded him to slay his son. The agony which he endured during the dark days of that fearful trial was permitted that he might understand from his own experience something of the greatness of the sacrifice made by the infinite God for man's redemption.** No other test could have caused Abraham such torture of soul as did the offering of his son. God gave His Son to a death of agony and shame. The angels who witnessed the humiliation and soul anguish of the Son of God were not permitted to interpose, as in the case of Isaac. There was no voice to cry, "It is enough." To save the fallen race, the King of glory yielded up His life. What stronger proof can be given of the infinite compassion and love of God? "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Romans 8:32.

**The sacrifice required of Abraham was not alone for his own good, nor solely for the benefit of succeeding generations; but it was also for the instruction of the sinless intelligences of heaven and of other worlds. The field of the controversy between Christ and Satan—the field on which the plan of redemption is wrought out—is the lesson book of the**

universe. Because Abraham had [155] shown a lack of faith in God's promises, Satan had accused him before the angels and before God of having failed to comply with the conditions of the covenant, and as unworthy of its blessings. God desired to prove the loyalty of His servant before all heaven, to demonstrate that nothing less than perfect obedience can be accepted, and to open more fully before them the plan of salvation.

Heavenly beings were witnesses of the scene as the faith of Abraham and the submission of Isaac were tested. The trial was far more severe than that which had been brought upon Adam. Compliance with the prohibition laid upon our first parents involved no suffering, but the command to Abraham demanded the most agonizing sacrifice. **All heaven beheld with wonder and admiration Abraham's unflinching obedience. All heaven applauded his fidelity. Satan's accusations were shown to be false.** God declared to His servant, "Now I know that thou fearest God [notwithstanding Satan's charges], seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me." [Genesis 22:12] God's covenant, confirmed to Abraham by an oath before the intelligences of other worlds, testified that obedience will be rewarded.

**It had been difficult even for the angels to grasp the mystery of redemption—to comprehend that the Commander of heaven, the Son of God, must die for guilty man. When the command was given to Abraham to offer up his son, the interest of all heavenly beings was enlisted. With intense earnestness they watched each step in the fulfillment of this command. When to Isaac's question, "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham made answer, "God will provide Himself a lamb;" and when the father's hand was stayed as he was about to slay his son, and the ram which God had provided was offered in the place of Isaac—then light was shed upon the mystery of redemption, and even the angels understood more clearly the wonderful provision that God had made for man's salvation.** 1 Peter 1:12. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 153.3-155.2) [Bold type and Bible reference in brackets are added.]

90. What does this story say to us about faith? The authors of the New Testament writing about this story made it plain that Abraham's faith worked! (Hebrews 11:17-19; James 2:17-26) (See also Romans 3:28; 5:1; Galatians 2:16-17.)
91. **So, what do you think qualifies Abraham to be the central figure in the chapter on faith? Why is Sarah mentioned there?**
92. When Isaac was 40 years old, Abraham sent a trusted servant back to Haran to look for a wife for his son. How many young people today would accept this kind of arrangement? Why do you think things are so different today?
93. Some 400 years later, Moses was instructed to tell the people not to marry sisters or cousins or aunts or uncles. However, in the early history of this family as we have it recorded, there were many marriages within one family! (Leviticus 18:6-18) Did this raise any questions in the minds of the people who came along later?
94. Critical scholars have taught that the book of Genesis was put together more than a

thousand years after the times of Moses (the real author of Genesis) from 3 different authors who wrote quite different stories about Israel's past. But, in fact, we can discover a very definite pattern to the way Genesis was written. It was constructed almost like a poem. There is no way such a delicate and precise structuring could have been produced by some haphazard throwing together of material from three different authors. This pattern was first recognized by several Jewish scholars including Umberto Cassuto (Hebrew University of Jerusalem); Michael Fishbane (then of Brandeis University, now of the University of Chicago); and Jack Sasson (then of the University of North Carolina, now of Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee). Gary A. Rendsburg (Rutgers University) put these ideas all together in his book, *The Redaction of Genesis* (1986).

95. We can see this literary technique at work in the three main sections of the patriarchal narratives: the Abraham cycle, the Jacob cycle, and the Joseph story. We will look at the cycles for Jacob and Joseph when we come to their stories.

- a. Rendsburg used the term *cycle* to refer to the material about Abraham (Genesis 12-22) and the discussion about Jacob (Genesis 25-35) because those narratives tend to be more a series of individual episodes in the lives of those characters with the connections between and among them not always readily visible.
- b. He used the term *story* for the section about Joseph (Genesis 37-50) because those chapters hold together as one very long narrative. That narrative holds together so much so that some scholars refer to that last section of Genesis as a *novella* or short novel, and there has been a famous musical play made of Joseph's story.
- c. All three structures work the same way. They are called "redactional" to indicate that they have been put into a suitable literary form.
  - i. The cycle or story builds from its onset with a series of episodes in the life of the individual hero or patriarch—Abraham, Jacob, or Joseph.
  - ii. Each of the cycles or stories reaches a climax, or focal point, halfway through the narrative. Everything turns on that focal point.
  - iii. The cycle or story then concludes with another series of episodes each of which matches, in reverse order, the episodes in the first half of the story or narrative.
  - iv. Rendsburg called this pattern with inverse order of matching units a *chiasm* or *chiastic structure*. This term originated from the Greek letter *chi* ( $\chi$ ), which looks like an *X* and suggests that the patterning of this material is to be seen or visualized as an *X*. This chiastic structure is a literary pattern that is also used in other sections of the Bible including Revelation.
  - v. Note that there is no cycle of stories about Isaac. He was mentioned only as a son to Abraham or as a father to Jacob. There is no highly developed narrative about him as an individual in the book of Genesis. There is no chiastic structure in the portions of Genesis which refer to Isaac.

96. In Genesis, the Abraham cycle builds to a focal point, or pivot point, with God's appearance

to Abram to make circumcision the sign of the covenant between them and to change Abram's name to Abraham as recorded in Genesis 17:1-3. After that point, the themes and stories are repeated in reverse order, creating the chiastic structure.

- a. In Genesis 17:1-8, the name Elohim for God is introduced into the narrative for the first time; Abram's name is changed to Abraham; and the covenant is established with circumcision given as the sign of that covenant.
- b. There are five episodes (described by Rendsburg as A, B, C, D, E), followed by five parallel episodes (called E', D', C', B', A' by Rendsburg).
- c. The result of this pattern is a carefully constructed symmetrical structure in what was already a well-unified story.
- d. Though not indicated in the chart below, each of the matching episodes in the story or cycle is linked by a series of key words, for example, *lekh lekha*, "go forth," in Genesis 12:1 and Genesis 22:2 and the place names *Moreh* in Genesis 12:6 and *Moriah* in Genesis 22:2.

### **The Abraham Cycle (Genesis 11:27-22:23)**

**A** The genealogy of Terah, Abraham's father (Genesis 11:27-32)

**B** The start of Abraham's long spiritual journey or odyssey (Genesis 12:1-9)

**C** The story of Sarah in the foreign palace in Egypt; the ordeal ends in peace and success; Abraham and Lot part (Genesis 12:10-13:18)

**D** Abraham and his "army" went to the rescue of Sodom and Lot (Genesis 14:1-24)

**E** God's covenant with Abraham; announcement and story of Ishmael (Genesis 15:1-16:16)

**Focal point: a)** Abram's name changed to Abraham

**b)** The term Elohim for God appears for the first time in the story

**E'** God's covenant with Abraham; God's promise of Isaac (Genesis 17:1-18:15)

**D'** Abraham temporarily rescued Lot and Sodom (Genesis 18:16-19:38)

**C'** Sarah was again described as being in a foreign palace; the ordeal ended in peace and success; Abraham and Ishmael parted (Genesis 20:1-21:34)

**B'** The climax of Abraham's spiritual odyssey or journey (Genesis 22:1-19)

**A'** The genealogy of Nahor, Abraham's brother (Genesis 22:20-24)

97. Why do you think God instructed Moses to construct the book of Genesis in this very distinctive pattern? Would that make it easier to memorize? Or, to understand?

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