

Genesis

The Covenant with Abraham

Lesson #7 for May 14, 2022

Scriptures: Genesis 15-19:29; Romans 4:3-4,9,11,22; 9:9 Galatians 4:21-31; Amos 4:11.

1. This lesson will focus on covenants or binding legal agreements between God and Abraham. Put on your “lawyer hats” for this lesson. Is that the method of salvation?

Genesis 17:7: “I will keep my promise to you and to your descendants in future generations as an everlasting covenant. I will be your God and the God of your descendants.”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Genesis 17:7). New York: American Bible Society [abbreviated as *Good News Bible*].^{†‡}

2. Notice that this covenant is to be at least a part of an everlasting covenant. Everlasting or eternal covenants, extending from the rebellion in heaven to the third coming of Christ, are mentioned in several places in the New Testament. Notice the following:

Hebrews 13:20-21: ²⁰⁻²¹ God has raised from death our Lord Jesus, who is the Great Shepherd of the sheep as the result of his blood, by which the **eternal covenant is sealed**. May the God of peace provide you with every good thing you need in order to do his will, and may he, through Jesus Christ, do in us what pleases him. And to Christ be the glory **for ever [sic] and ever!** Amen.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†‡}

This episode of **Abraham’s life is full of [emotion] fear and laughter**. Abram is afraid (*Gen. 15:1*), as are Sarah (*Gen. 18:15*) and Hagar (*Gen. 21:17*). Abram laughs (*Gen. 17:17*), and Sarah (*Gen. 18:12*), and Ishmael, too (*Gen. 21:9, ESV*). **These chapters resonate with human sensitivity and warmth**. Abram is passionate about the salvation of the wicked Sodomites; he is caring toward Sarah, Hagar, and Lot; and he is hospitable toward the three foreigners (*Gen. 18:2–6*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sabbath, May 7.^{†‡§}

3. In this lesson we will see that Abraham was afraid, Sarah was afraid, and Hagar was afraid. Of what were they afraid? Abraham was afraid that enemies might attack him. He was also afraid that he would not have a son who could carry on his promised rewards.

Genesis 15:1: After this, Abram had a vision and heard the LORD say to him, “**Do not be afraid, Abram**. I will shield you from danger and give you a great reward.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†} [Why are so many people afraid of God?][‡]

Genesis 18:15: Because **Sarah was afraid**, she denied it. “I didn’t laugh,” she said.

“Yes, you did,” he replied. “You laughed.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

Genesis 21:17: God heard the **boy crying**, and from heaven the angel of God spoke to Hagar, “What are you troubled about, Hagar? **Don’t be afraid**. God has heard the boy crying.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

It is not only fear that we notice in this lesson connected with this covenant; but there was also laughter.

Genesis 17:17: Abraham bowed down with his face touching the ground, but **he began to laugh** when he thought, “Can a man have a child when he is a hundred years old? Can Sarah have a child at ninety?”—*Good News Bible*.*† **[It had been 25 years since Abraham had left Haran at the age of 75; and still, he had no son. How would you respond to a visitor who announced that your wife was going to have a baby at age 90?]**‡

Genesis 18:9-15: ⁹ Then they asked him, “Where is your wife Sarah?”

“She is there in the tent,” he answered.

¹⁰ One of them said, “Nine months from now I will come back, and your wife Sarah will have a son.”

Sarah was behind him, at the door of the tent, listening. ¹¹Abraham and Sarah were very old, and Sarah had stopped having her monthly periods.

¹²So **Sarah laughed to herself and said, “Now that I am old and worn out, can I still enjoy sex? And besides, my husband is old too.”**

¹³ Then the LORD asked Abraham, “**Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Can I really have a child when I am so old?’** ¹⁴**Is anything too hard for the LORD [YAHWEH]? As I said, nine months from now I will return, and Sarah will have a son.**”

¹⁵ **Because Sarah was afraid, she denied it. “I didn’t laugh,” she said. “Yes, you did,” he [YAHWEH] replied. “You laughed.”**—*Good News Bible*.*†‡

4. How do we explain the fact that two people who laughed at God including the one who lied about it both ended up being examples of great faith as listed in Hebrews 11?
5. It was not only Abraham and Sarah who showed emotion; but also, there was another occasion when it was probably much more serious!

Genesis 21:9: One day Ishmael, whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham, **was playing with Sarah’s son Isaac.**—*Good News Bible*.*†

Genesis 21:9: And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, **mocking** [Footnote: or laughing, or playing].—*The Holy Bible: King James Version*.* (2009). (Electronic Edition of the 1900 Authorized Version. Genesis 21:9). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.†‡

6. How do you understand the “cutting” of animals that Abraham was requested to do?

Genesis 15:1-21: ¹ After this, Abram had a vision and heard the LORD say to him, “**Do not be afraid, Abram.** I will shield you from danger and give you a great reward.”

² But Abram answered, “Sovereign LORD, what good will your reward do me, since I have no children? My only heir is Eliezer of Damascus. ³You have given me no children, and one of my slaves will inherit my property.”

⁴ Then he heard the LORD speaking to him again: “This slave Eliezer will not inherit your property; **your own son will be your heir.**” ⁵The LORD took him outside and said, “Look at the sky and try to count the stars; you will have as many descendants as that.”

⁶ **Abram put his trust in the LORD, and because of this the LORD was pleased with him and accepted him.**

⁷ Then the LORD said to him, “I am the LORD, who led you out of Ur in Babylonia [Chaldea], to give you this land as your own.”

⁸ But Abram asked, “Sovereign LORD, how can I know that it will be mine?”

⁹ He answered, “Bring me a cow, a goat, and a ram, each of them three years old, and a dove and a pigeon.” ¹⁰Abram brought the animals to God, cut them in half, and placed the halves opposite each other in two rows; but he did not cut up the birds. ¹¹Vultures came down on the bodies, but Abram drove them off.

¹² When the sun was going down, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and **fear and terror came over him.** ¹³The LORD said to him, “Your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land; they will be slaves there and will be treated cruelly for 400 years. ¹⁴But I will punish the nation that enslaves them, and when they leave that foreign land, they will take great wealth with them. ¹⁵You yourself will live to a ripe old age, die in peace, and be buried. ¹⁶It will be **four generations before your descendants come back here, because I will not drive out the Amorites until they become so wicked that they must be punished.**”

¹⁷ When the sun had set and it was dark, **a smoking fire-pot and a flaming torch** suddenly appeared and passed between the pieces of the animals.

¹⁸Then and there the LORD made a covenant with Abram. He said, “I promise to give your descendants all this land **from the border of Egypt to the River Euphrates**, ¹⁹including the lands of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, ²⁰the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, ²¹the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”—*Good News Bible*.*†‡ [Did Abraham travel around the country and tell all those people about God’s promise?]*‡

7. To our modern eyes, that was a very strange event. However, the cutting in half of animals and laying them out on the ground and passing between the cut portions was a method recognized in the part of the world from which Abram had come as a way to seal an agreement or covenant. As a result of that ceremony, Abraham trusted God; God counted it as righteousness on Abraham’s part. That was the way they made a binding agreement!
8. What interesting, maybe even obscure, meanings were conveyed by this ceremony?

God then sets up a sacrificial ceremony for Abram to perform. Basically, the sacrifice points to Christ’s death for our sins. Humans are saved by grace, the gift of God’s righteousness, symbolized by these sacrifices. But this particular ceremony conveys specific messages for Abram. The preying of the vultures on the sacrificial animals (*Gen. 15:9–11*) means that Abram’s descendants will suffer slavery for a period of “‘four hundred years’ ” (*Gen. 15:13*), or four generations (*Gen. 15:16*). Then in the fourth generation, Abram’s descendants “‘shall return here’ ” (*Gen. 15:16, NKJV*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sunday, May 8.[§]

9. Apparently, God asked Abraham to physically do this process of cutting animals and laying them out on the ground for a period of time. Abraham needed to protect the raw meat from vultures, etc. But, then, Abraham fell into a deep sleep that included a vision during which he saw “a smoking fire-pot and a flaming torch” (a symbol of God) (Genesis 15:17, *GNB**) which suddenly appeared and passed between the pieces of the animals.
10. God promised Abraham that his descendants would rule almost the entire Middle East. Later, God said, “Forever!” (Genesis 17:8) What a promise!

The boundaries of this Promised Land, “‘from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates’ ” (*Gen. 15:18, NKJV*) **remind us of the boundaries of the Garden of Eden** (*compare with Gen. 2:13, 14*). This prophecy has, therefore, more in view than just the Exodus and a homeland for Israel. **On the distant horizon of this prophecy, in Abraham’s descendants taking the country of Canaan, looms the idea of the end-time salvation of God’s people, who will return to the Garden of Eden.**—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sunday, May 8.^{†§}

11. Does this promise from God really have any implications for us near the end of time?
12. Although God had promised Abraham that he would have descendants and that they would reap a great future benefit, Abraham still had doubts. Where were those descendants—or at least a start, a son? As time passed and Abraham grew older and Sarah stopped having her monthly periods, she finally suggested that they should try a method often used under such circumstances in the territory from which they had come.

Genesis 16:1-16: ¹Abram’s wife Sarai had not borne him any children. But she had an Egyptian slave woman named Hagar, ²and so she said to Abram, “The LORD has kept me from having children. Why don’t you sleep with my slave? Perhaps she can have a child for me.” Abram agreed with what Sarai said. ³So she gave Hagar to him to be his concubine. (This happened after Abram had lived in Canaan for ten years.) ⁴Abram had intercourse with Hagar, and she became pregnant. **When she found out that she was pregnant, she became proud and despised Sarai.**

⁵ Then Sarai said to Abram, “It’s your fault that Hagar despises me. I myself gave her to you, and ever since she found out that she was pregnant, she has despised me. May the LORD judge which of us is right, you or me!”

⁶ Abram answered, “Very well, she is your slave and under your control; do whatever you want with her.” Then Sarai treated Hagar so cruelly that she ran away.

⁷ The angel of the LORD met Hagar at a spring in the desert on the road to Shur ⁸and said, “Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?” [Did Hagar actually see someone? Or, was that just a voice from the sky that she heard?]

She answered, “I am running away from my mistress.”

⁹ He said, “Go back to her and be her slave.” ¹⁰Then he said, “I will give you so many descendants that no one will be able to count them. ¹¹You are going to have a son, and you will name him Ishmael, because the LORD has heard your cry of distress. ¹²But your son will live like a wild donkey; he

will be against everyone, and everyone will be against him. He will live apart from all his relatives.”

¹³ Hagar asked herself, “**Have I really seen God and lived to tell about it?**” So she called the LORD who had spoken to her “A God who Sees”. [sic] ¹⁴That is why people call the well between Kadesh and Bered “The Well of the Living One who Sees Me”. [sic]

¹⁵ Hagar bore Abram a son, and he named him Ishmael. ¹⁶Abram was 86 years old at the time.—*Good News Bible*. *†‡

13. When we look at the New Testament to see what comments are made about this arrangement, we read:

Galatians 4:27-31: For the scripture says:

“Be happy, you childless woman!

Shout and cry with joy, you who never felt the pains of childbirth!

For the woman who was deserted will have more children than the woman whose husband never left her.”

²⁸ **Now, you, my brothers and sisters, are God’s children as a result of his promise, just as Isaac was.** ²⁹At that time the son who was born in the usual way persecuted the one who was born because of God’s Spirit; and it is the same now. ³⁰But what does the scripture say? It says, “Send the slave woman and her son away; for the son of the slave woman will not have a part of the father’s property along with the son of the free woman.”

³¹So then, my brothers and sisters, we are not the children of a slave woman but of a free woman.—*Good News Bible*. *†

14. As we read, in spite of God’s promise, many years passed, and Abraham still did not have a son by Sarah. Finally, as above, Abraham and Sarah decided to try a human method.
15. It is interesting to notice that Sarah’s appeal to Abraham and the results should remind us of something that happened many years earlier.

The passage describing Sarai’s relation to Abram echoes the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The two texts share a number of common motifs (Sarai, like Eve, is active; Abram, like Adam, is passive) and share common verbs and phrases (“heed the voice,” “take,” and “give”). This parallel between the two stories implies **God’s disapproval** of this course of action.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Monday, May 9.†

16. There is no evidence that either Abraham or Sarah or the two of them together had consulted with God regarding their plan.
17. Paul saw a very interesting parallel between these two women and the two covenants. (See Exodus 19:8; 24:3,7; Jeremiah 31:31-34.)
18. **Read Galatians 4:23-26.** Eventually, things turned sour, and Sarah made things so difficult for Hagar (Genesis 16:6) that Hagar took her son and fled into the desert. But, God was not finished with this story. As we have read in the Bible:

God then appears to Hagar but only after she has left the house of Abram. This unexpected appearance discloses God’s presence in spite of human attempts to work without Him. The reference to “the Angel of the LORD”

(*Gen. 16:7, NKJV*) is a title that is often identified with the LORD, *YHWH* (see *Gen. 18:1, 13, 22*). This time it is God who takes the initiative and announces to Hagar that she will give birth to a son, Ishmael, whose name means God hears (*Gen. 16:11*). Ironically, the story, which ends with the idea of hearing (*shama'*), echoes the hearing at the beginning of the story, when Abram “heeded” (*shama'*) the voice of Sarai (*Gen. 16:2*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Monday, May 9.[§]

19. The terms by which this covenant was described should remind us of Genesis 3:15, the first covenant of salvation given to Adam and Eve outside the Garden of Eden.
20. In order for a covenant to be an everlasting covenant, (Genesis 17:7) it must involve the coming of Jesus and His eventual reign as the future Messiah.
21. Notice in Genesis 3:15, Eve’s descendants and Satan were always to be enemies. And God’s free gift of salvation (Romans 6:23) was given before the beginning of time.

Titus 1:2: ... ²Which is based on the hope for eternal life. **God, who does not lie, promised us this life before the beginning of time.**—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

22. In Genesis 17 when Abraham was 99 years old, God “appeared” to him and again promised him a son. In connection with this covenant, there were to be changes in names from Abram to Abraham and from Sarai to Sarah.

It is in this context that Abram, whose name implies nobility and respectability, will have his name changed into Abraham, which means “father of many nations” (*Gen. 17:5*). Thus, we see here more hints of the universal nature of what God plans to do through His covenant with Abraham.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sabbath, May 7.[§]

Interestingly, this promise of an eternal future is contained in the change of the names of Abram and Sarai. The names of Abram and Sarai referred just to their present status: Abram means “exalted father” and Sarai means “my princess” (the princess of Abram). The change of their names into “Abraham” and “Sarah” referred to the future: Abraham means “father of many nations” and Sarah means “the princess” (for everyone). In parallel, but not without some irony, the name of Isaac (“he will laugh”) is a reminder of Abraham’s laughter (the first laughter recorded in the Scriptures, *Gen. 17:17*); it is a laughter of skepticism or, maybe, of wonder. Either way, though he believed in what the Lord had clearly promised him, Abraham still struggled with living it out in faith and trust.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, May 10.[§]

23. Associated with this covenant and those name changes, there was to be a sign; **that sign was circumcision**. Then, finally, God promised that Sarah herself would have a child. (Genesis 18)
24. Scholars have wondered many times about the purpose of circumcision. In Canaan, Abraham was living in the midst of many fertility cult religions. It was accepted in those societies for young men to go out and have sexual intercourse with “temple prostitutes” as a part of their religious services. One explanation for circumcision is that it would be impossible for a young Hebrew male to get involved in those fertility cult practices without it being obvious that he was circumcised, thereby identifying him as a Hebrew.

25. This covenant involving circumcision was to include not just Abraham and the future son of Sarah but also all those who belonged to Abraham.
26. **Read Genesis 17:23-27.** Four times the word *all* is used to emphasize that all males from Abraham's household were included. How many men were circumcised on that occasion?
27. Looking again at Genesis 17:19, we notice that this child to whom Sarah was to give birth would be part of an everlasting covenant.
28. Much later, Moses had an interesting experience regarding circumcision. Remember that Moses had lived among the Midianite people for 40 years, herding sheep and associating with them. His Midianite wife, Zipporah, had given him two sons. The older son had been circumcised at his birth. But, apparently, when the second son was born, Moses had failed to circumcise him. So, on the way to Egypt to lead the Israelites out of slavery:
- Exodus 4:25-26:** ²⁵⁻²⁶Then Zipporah, his wife, took a sharp stone, cut off the foreskin of her son, and touched Moses' feet with it. Because of the rite of circumcision she said to Moses, "You are a husband of blood to me." And so the LORD spared Moses' life.—*Good News Bible*.*
- [From the writings of Ellen White=EGW:] On the way from Midian, Moses received a startling and terrible warning of the Lord's displeasure. An angel appeared to him in a threatening manner, as if he would immediately destroy him. **No explanation was given; but Moses remembered that he had disregarded one of God's requirements; yielding to the persuasion of his wife, he had neglected to perform the rite of circumcision upon their youngest son. He had failed to comply with the condition by which his child could be entitled to the blessings of God's covenant with Israel; and such a neglect on the part of their chosen leader could not but lessen the force of the divine precepts upon the people. Zipporah, fearing that her husband would be slain, performed the rite herself, and the angel then permitted Moses to pursue his journey. In his mission to Pharaoh, Moses was to be placed in a position of great peril; his life could be preserved only through the protection of holy angels. But while living in neglect of a known duty, he would not be secure; for he could not be shielded by the angels of God.**—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 255.5.† [Why can't God protect people who have committed a known sin? In the context of the great controversy, Satan claims such people belong to him!][†]
29. As the future leader of the people of Israel, Moses needed to be a faithful example by following exactly the directions that God had given to Israel.
30. Those of us who live after the times of the New Testament realize how controversial the issue of circumcision became. (See Acts 15.)
31. Only later as described in Genesis 18 did the experience happen with the three strangers who approached Abraham. Seeing those three strangers walking toward him at a distance, he rushed out to invite them to his home for a meal. **Abraham became an example of great hospitality.** In the conversation, a son was promised to Abraham.

Genesis 18:1,13,22: The LORD appeared to Abraham at the sacred trees of Mamre. As Abraham was sitting at the entrance of his tent during the hottest part of the day,...

¹³ Then the LORD asked Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Can I really have a child when I am so old?’”...

²² Then the two men left and went on towards Sodom, but the LORD remained with Abraham.—*Good News Bible*.* [See item #3 above which quotes Genesis 18:9-15.]‡

32. Several things that are noteworthy happened during this visit by Christ and two angels.

33. Partly as a result of what happened at that visit, Abraham became a great example of faith. Would you find it easy to trust in God’s promise even after years had passed with no results?

34. Looking again at that time when the three strangers approached Abraham in the desert and were welcomed into his home, we notice:

It is not clear whether Abraham knew who these strangers were (*Heb. 13:2*), even though he acted toward them as if God Himself were among them. He was sitting “in the tent door in the heat of the day” (*Gen. 18:1, NKJV*), and because visitors are rare in the desert, he was probably longing to meet with them. Abraham ran toward the men (*Gen. 18:2*), although he was 99 years old. He called one of these persons Adonai, “my Lord” (*Gen. 18:3*), a title often used for God (*Gen. 20:4, Exod. 15:17*). He rushed around them in the preparation of the meal (*Gen. 18:6, 7*). He stood next to them, attentive to their needs and ready to serve them (*Gen. 18:8*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, May 11. §

35. In this story, God’s comments (Compare Matthew 25:35-40.) suggest that welcoming strangers into our homes is not just a nice courtesy, but also a religious duty. Could it be that God identifies Himself more closely with the hungry and the needy than with the generous ones who receive them? (Matthew 25:35-40)

36. Moving on with our story, Abraham walked with Christ toward Sodom.

37. **Review the story of Abraham’s negotiations with God over Sodom and what happened when the angels entered Sodom. See Genesis 18:16-19:29.**

38. When Abraham spoke to and “negotiated” with God, did that qualify as prayer? In fact, the form of the Hebrew suggests a prayer.

39. Read again **Genesis 19:1-6**. This brief story of the last night of Sodom and Gomorrah gives us a hint of the kind of environment in which Abraham and Lot were living. And yet, God said that it was not yet time to drive out the Amorites!

Genesis 15:16: [The LORD said:] “It will be four generations before your descendants come back here, because I will not drive out the Amorites until they become so wicked that they must be punished.”—*Good News Bible*.*‡
[Weren’t they wicked enough in the days of Lot and Abraham?]

[EGW:] And now the last night of Sodom was approaching. Already the clouds of vengeance cast their shadows over the devoted city. But men perceived it not. While angels drew near on their mission of destruction,

men were dreaming of prosperity and pleasure. The last day was like every other that had come and gone. Evening fell upon a scene of loveliness and security. A landscape of unrivaled beauty was bathed in the rays of the declining sun. The coolness of eventide had called forth the inhabitants of the city, and the pleasure-seeking throngs were passing to and fro, intent upon the enjoyment of the hour.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 157.4-158.0.‡

40. The details of this story are so outlandish that it is hard for us to believe that it could really have happened like that.

Genesis 19:14-15: ¹⁴ Then Lot went to the men that his daughters were going to marry, and said, “Hurry up and get out of here; the LORD is going to destroy this place.” But they thought he was joking.

¹⁵ At dawn the angels tried to make Lot hurry. “Quick!” they said. “Take your wife and your two daughters and get out, so that you will not lose your lives when the city is destroyed.”—*Good News Bible*.*†

41. The word *hafakh*, “overthrew,” used in this text to describe the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, suggests a reversal, just as the flood reversed creation. The destruction of Sodom was a reversal of the Garden of Eden. Might it also be a precursor to what will happen at the end of time?
42. We know that only Lot and his two daughters were saved. So, why did they end up living in a cave? Why didn’t they go to Uncle Abraham’s place? What happened to their flocks and herds?
43. Is it appropriate for us to pray for the wicked? Should we follow the example of Abraham?
44. Elsewhere in the Bible, we read on several occasions that sinners are the ones who will reap the consequences of their sins, not their fathers and not their children. But, in this story, God promised Abraham that He would preserve the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah if there were even 10 people in those cities who were righteous!
45. Notice these comments from the Bible study guide:

“In an extremely revolutionary manner the old collective thinking, which brought the guiltless member of the guilty association under punishment, has been transposed into something new: the presence of a remnant of righteous people could have a preserving function for the whole. . . . For the sake of the righteous remnant Yahweh [*sic*] would in his righteousness [*tsedaqah*] forgive the wicked city. This notion is widely expanded in the prophetic utterance of the Servant of Yahweh [*sic*] who works salvation ‘for many.’ ”—Gerhard F. Hasel, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea From Genesis to Isaiah*, 3rd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1980), pp. 150, 151.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Friday, May 13.]‡§ [The Hebrew word in brackets is in the Bible study guide, but the other brackets and other content in brackets are added.]‡

46. Is it true that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah? Will He destroy the wicked in the end? Or, is God too loving to do that? How do we explain verses like Amos 4:11?

Amos 4:11: “I destroyed some of you as I destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

Those of you who survived were like a burning stick saved from a fire. Still you did not come back to me,” says the LORD.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

47. In the Bible we see that Abraham’s faith was counted to him as righteousness. And he was repeatedly called the great example of faith. Would you still describe Abraham as a great man of faith, considering what we have studied? Think of his questions and doubts and his unwillingness to wait for that son to be born. He even laughed at God! But, he tried to plead for Sodom and Gomorrah.
48. Think of how graciously he cared for those three visitors who came walking toward him at noonday. Contrast that with the way the Sodomites wanted to treat the angels!
49. What was it that Abraham feared? What do many of us fear? Often, fear is fear of the unknown in the future. Repeatedly, God spoke to Abraham, making various kinds of promises to him.

The Hebrew verb *he’emin*, “believed,” describes more than a sentimental or intellectual process or the mere reference to a creed. In Hebrew, “to believe” is relational, as implied in the root *’aman*, “firm,” “reliable.” Relying on God, Abram “believed” that he would have descendants. It is this faith that God “accounted” as “righteousness.” In other words, God “counted” (ESV) this faith as having the same value as righteousness. This view makes sense against the background of **ancient Egyptian beliefs**. Whereas in ancient Egypt, the weight of human righteousness was evaluated on the basis of counting human works against the weight of the Maat, the divine righteousness. In the case of Abram, his righteousness is evaluated on the basis of the divine works for him. What makes Abram righteous is not the sum of his deeds but his willingness to rely on God’s deeds for him (*Rom. 4:2–4*).—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 94.^{†§}

50. After Abraham laughed at God and, later, Sarah laughed at God, God had the last laugh because Isaac’s name means, “He laughs,” and the subject implied is *God*!
51. Does studying the example of Abraham and Sarah help your faith increase? Is faith primarily about the future?
52. Did any of those ancient people have any idea that they were going to be the ancestors of the God-Man, Jesus Christ? Do we ever have times when it seems that God’s promises are delayed?
53. Some people have suggested that laughter is demonic. Is that true? What examples from the Bible can you give, suggesting that God has a wonderful sense of humor?

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