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# LESSON 1

Abraham and Sarah Receive God’s Promise

*Four stories comprise today’s lesson about Abraham’s meeting and relationship with God.*

## Where You’ll Find Today’s Story:

**Genesis 12:1-9 (Abram is called to Canaan)**

**Genesis 15:1-21 (God promises a son and land)**

**Genesis 18:1-33 (Abraham’s three guests) Genesis 19:1-29; optional (Sodom and**

**Gomorrah)**

## Summary of Today’s Story

In the first story, the Lord tells Abram to leave his country and go to the land that the Lord directs, promising that through him a nation will rise up and be blessed. Abram obeys without question.

In the second story, God repeats this promise, even though Abram reminds God that he has no heir. God then makes a covenant (a binding agreement) with Abram as a sure sign of God’s promise.

At another time, when Abram (now Abraham) is 100 years old and still without an heir with his wife Sarah, three messengers of the Lord appear to him and again promise a son. They also warn Abraham about the coming destruction of the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, while Abraham receives a promise from God that God will spare the city if there are as few as ten righteous people. Genesis 19, an optional reading, describes the destruction of these cities.

## A black and white logo AI-generated content may be incorrect.Weaving Our Story with the

Biblical Story

In the story of Abraham and Sarah, we see the beginning of God’s call to us as God’s people. And we also see why it is that Abraham and Sarah are called. Abraham is the ideal man of trust, faith and obedience. Sarah, as his spouse, mirrors the complexity of a strong relationship; she is faithful but not unthinkingly submissive, both strong and weak, faithful and independent.

Abraham and Sarah are asked by God to cut themselves off from their entire past in order to follow God. The Bible says nothing about Abraham’s feelings about this call, only that “Abram went.” We of course know nothing about how Sarah might have reacted to this seemingly arbitrary change in their lives. However, we can imagine that the leaving must have been hard. A call or demand from God can be difficult. But God will provide for us, God’s people, just as God provided for Abraham, Sarah, and their family.

***God stays with us, no matter what.***

Why Abraham and Sarah? Abraham at least is ready to do what God asks of him. We assume that God also trusts Sarah to do the same. Abraham must have cultivated in himself the habit of listening to God, for when God asked, “Abram went.” And he has cultivated the kinds of thoughts and feelings that lead him toward the higher good. He does not insist that his property, or his possessions, or even his relatives, are too important to leave behind in order to follow God. He has been living his life aware of the higher priorities, so that when he is called to make a decision, he knows how to respond. His heart and his mind, and his soul, are predisposed toward God. God’s call to him, and his response to God, is not made at random.

**We too need to cultivate that kind of predisposition to God and to the good, for God will call us also. If we are ready, then we will be able to hear.**

Sarah’s relationship with God is different, and lived out through her relationship with Abraham.

Sometimes we too, like Sarah, are faithful companions that make it possible for others to fulfill more completely their calling in life. Still, Sarah was not an invisible presence but a powerful figure who protected the promise made to her by God. From her protective stance, we might learn a lesson about what it means to defend our spiritual inheritance and the gifts that God has given to us. Such defense of God’s promises is at the root of good stewardship and good relationship with God.

**We too are blessed in our relationship with God and in the strength we receive from God. We are blessed to be part of the *family of God*. “For once we were no people, but now we are God’s people,” says Peter (1 Peter 2:10).**

Abraham and Sarah may also realize that in the blessings they receive, they will be a blessing for others. Their sacrifice in leaving their homeland, although a great cost to them, will ultimately find fulfillment in the creation of a holy people dedicated to God. But they do not know this immediately. In fact, they need to be reassured periodically of God’s promise. But they still trust that God is leading them, and they are ready to obey even when they do not yet see the results of that promise. We find that same trusting obedience and sacrifice in Isaiah’s “suffering servant” of humankind, of whom we find the fulfillment in Jesus Christ’s obedience and sacrifice on the cross.

So Abraham and Sarah’s trust, faith and obedience to God show us how to listen for God and obey, even when the call is difficult. The blessing we receive is closeness with God and knowing that following God’s ways of love and righteousness will be a blessing to others, even if we do not see it.

*Note:* In the dialogue that Abraham has with the divine messenger about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, God agrees to spare the two cities if God finds as few as ten righteous men living there. We may ask, why did Abraham not push farther?

Why not five or two good men? But later in the story, we find out why. With a number fewer than ten, those few good people can be led out of the city to freedom, just as Lot and his family were led out by the angels.

## A black and white drawing of a shield AI-generated content may be incorrect.The Episcopal Thread

One of the distinctive characteristics of the Anglican ethos is the recognition that, like Abraham, we don’t always receive answers to our questions, even when

w God comes to meet and to call upon us. In fact, the Prayer Book’s Morning Prayer can be seen as a daily response to God’s call to us, a response of trusting in God’s daily guidance. In one of the call- and-response prayers, we pray (*BCP,* p. 98):

**Lord, show us your love and mercy; For we put our trust in you.**

And at the end of the day, in the service of Compline, the “bedtime prayer of the Church,” we acknowledge our own uncertainties and put our trust in the sure presence and guidance of God (*BCP*, p. 133):

“**Be present, O merciful God, and protect us through the hours of this night, so that we who are wearied by the changes and chances of this life may rest in your eternal changelessness...”**

Another lesson from Abraham and Sarah’s life that has been woven into the Episcopal and Anglican ethos is the attitude of thanksgiving for God’s blessings. The Anglican faith is an incarnational faith, seeing God’s blessings in all of daily life. The Eucharistic prayers *(Eucharist = Thanksgiving)* begin with thanks to God, for example, “for the goodness and love which you have made known to us in creation; in the calling of Israel to be your people...”(*BCP,* p. 368). This calling began with Abraham and continues to God’s calling of us, the Body of Christ, to worship and serve God every day.

In this first patriarch, God made a promise and a covenant. The practice of covenants with God our Creator continues as we participate in the Holy Eucharist each Sunday, re-enacting the time when Jesus said to his disciples as he passed the cup of wine to them, “This is my blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.” Each time that we share in this cup, we reconfirm that New Covenant and make it ours.

When we are baptized, we promise to live a life “in Christ,” making five vows that comprise our Baptismal Covenant. We renew these promises for ourselves every time someone in our church is baptized. In these promises and in God’s care for us, we are assured that “now we are God’s people.”



## Weaving God’s Beloved Community

Abraham and Sarah will leave everything behind in order to follow

God’s call to them. In this story, we see the trust and the strength of their devotion to God, and we also get a glimpse of Sarah’s inner strength and the bond that she has with Abraham.

In God’s Beloved Community, we hold most dear our relationship with God, and out of this relationship of trust and love, we can form strong and healthy relationships with others, based on God’s values of compassion, integrity, mutual respect and devotion, and forgiveness. Healthy relationships in the Beloved Community also depend on our recognition of the worth and gifts of all persons—including women like Sarah.

Our ties to one another, and our tie to God, would overshadow any devotion to our material possessions.

Read youth version of this story of Abraham & Sarah below!

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# Genesis 12:1-9; 15:1-21; 18:1-33;

(optional) 19:1-29

Everybody is part of the family of God, because God created and loves us all. But there are some people in this big, big family of God whose lives teach us about God because of things they have said about God, or ways they trusted God, or ways they have obeyed God. The Bible is full of stories about men, women and children who can teach us about God.

Today we meet Abraham and Sarah. God chose them to start a family dedicated to God, not so much because they are especially good, but because they trust God. This is their story.

Abram Is Chosen by God

They begin as *Abram* and *Sarai*. They are married, but they have no children. They live with Abram’s nephew Lot in a place called Haran. Abram’s father came here with this family a long time ago. He was on his way to Canaan, but when he came to Haran, he decided to stop here and build his house. So Haran is the land where Abram’s whole family lives.

One day, God calls on Abram. God says to him, “Leave this place. Leave this land where you live, leave your father’s house, and leave your father’s family. Take your wife Sarai and your nephew Lot. I will show you where to go.”

God is asking Abram to leave everything and follow God wherever God may take him. But God also makes a promise to Abram. God says, “You and your family will grow into a great nation, and your name will be great. I will bless you and you will be a blessing. And I will bless everyone who blesses you, and curse anyone who curses you.”

Then God makes a promise that Abram can hardly imagine: “In you, all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

Abram hears God and does just what God tells him to do. He is 75 years old, and Sarai is nearly that old, and they still have no children even though people that age usually have children and grandchildren and great- grandchildren. Abram and Sarai, along with Lot, pack up all their things and move out. They take their household belongings, their servants and their animals—a great caravan—and travel until they reach a land called Canaan.

There God tells them, “This is the land where your children will live.” This is where the promise will begin. But not now. Abram and Sarai move on. They will live someplace else for now.

God Makes a Promise to Abram and Sarai

Abram and Sarai have traveled to Egypt, and to Negeb, and finally settle in Canaan. Lot moves away from them, and he pitches his home near some cities. That will be a dangerous decision for Lot. But for now, Abram and Sarai live in one part of the land, and Lot and his family in another part.

One day, God speaks to Abram again. When God suddenly comes into Abram’s dream, Abram is afraid. But God says, “Abram, do not be afraid. I will always protect you, and will give you much.”

But Abram remembers the promise that God made to him and Sarai, that they will be the head of a great family. Abram says to God, “But God, what will you give us? We still do not have any children!”

God brings Abram outside into the dark night. The sky is full of stars. God says to Abram, “Now look up into the sky and try to count the stars up there.” Of course, Abram cannot count all the stars in the sky—there are billions of stars twinkling in the night.

God says, “You cannot count all the stars in the sky, so many are they. So will be your descendants, the people who will be born of you and Sarai—your children, your grandchildren, your great-grandchildren and all down the line. There will be as many as there are stars in the sky.”

Abram believes God, and God sees Abram’s trust as a sign of his goodness.

Abraham and Sarai Welcome Three Visitors

Many years have passed. God has changed their names from *Abram* to *Abraham*, and from *Sarai* to *Sarah*. They are now very old. Abraham is now 100 years old, and Sarah is 90 years old. They still have no children.

One day, Sarah is in their tent cooking, while Abraham is sitting at the tent’s door. It is hot. Abraham looks up, and out of nowhere—or so it seems— three men are standing in front of him. Where did they come from? Never mind! They are strangers in this land, and they must be hungry or thirsty. He doesn’t know that these three men are God.

Abraham runs from his tent to meet the three men. He bows down to the ground in welcome. “Please,” he says, “stay here for a while. Let Sarah and I bring you some water so you can wash your feet and rest under the tree over there. And let us give you some bread to eat, and you can rest here for a while before you go on.”

Then Abraham runs back to his tent. Sarah is inside. He says to Sarah, “Quick! We have some visitors! Make three cakes, one for each of them, so they can eat here.”

Then Abraham runs to his herd of cattle and picks out a nice young calf. He leads the calf to his servant, who kills the calf to make a nice meaty meal for their new guests.

Finally, a feast is ready for his visitors. Abraham brings the cooked calf, the cakes, some milk, and some curds to the three men. They are sitting under the tree resting and keeping cool in the heat of the day. The men take the food and eat, while Abraham stands by, waiting to serve them if they need more.

Finally, one of them says, “Where is your wife Sarah?” “She’s over there, in the tent.”

Another says, “She will have a son.”

Sarah is at the door of the tent listening to the four men talking. She had given up on having children a long time ago. She is much too old now to have children—her time has passed years ago. She is no longer sad or angry—this is just the way things are.

So when she hears “she will have a son,” she laughs to herself. “I am old, and Abraham is old—what is this about having children?”

But God, in the voice of the men, says, “Why did Sarah just laugh? Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? I tell you, in due time, I will come back to you and Sarah will have a son.”

Now Sarah knows that God is here. She becomes afraid because she has just laughed at what God just said. So she says, “Oh, no! I didn’t laugh!”

“Oh yes, you did!” says God. “You did laugh!” And Sarah doesn’t laugh anymore, but she does get her promise.

Abraham Makes a Deal with God

The three angels are well fed by Abraham, and now it’s time for them to go. Abraham does not hear them whispering to each other in hushed voices. One of the voices belongs to God.

“I have heard about the evil things that the people of Sodom and the people of Gomorrah do. I am going to go there to see if this is true. If they are truly evil, the cities will be destroyed. Shall I tell Abraham, or should I hide what I am about to do? No, I will tell him. He needs to know, and his children need to know, to follow the right way.”

But Abraham hears God talking. And when the angels walk toward Sodom, Abraham catches up with God. He has a beef with God.

“Don’t tell me you’re going to destroy a whole city! You’re going to kill the good people along with the bad people?”

God says, “Yes, the whole city.”

Abraham looks surprised. “But what if—what if—there are 50 good people in that city. I can’t believe you would let them die! Wouldn’t you do the right thing and let them live?”

God says, “Okay, if I can find 50 good people living inside that city, I will forgive everybody.”

Abraham says, “Well, then, what about *40* good people?” God says, “I will save the city for those 40.”

“What about *30*?” Abraham is taking a chance. God might get annoyed and forget the whole deal. But Abraham pushes on. “Or 20. Or 10! You wouldn’t kill 10 good people, would you, O God of justice and love?”

God says, but in a lower voice, “For 10 people, I will save the city.” There’s a long silence. Abraham knows he has no more bargaining room.

God then turns and goes away, silently. Abraham stands there. His knees are

shaking.

Two Cities Are Destroyed

Lot, Abraham’s nephew, lives in the city of Sodom. He likes cities. One night, he is sitting at the gate of the city. He sees two men walking towards him. They are angels. But they look like men, tired and a bit dusty from walking all day.

Lot stands up and opens his arms, smiling. He loves visitors. “Hello!” he says. “You must be travelers. Please, come to my home and get washed and rested. Tomorrow when you’ve had a good night’s sleep, you can move on.”

So Lot feeds the men a nice meal. As they are finishing their food, he hears a loud commotion outside his house, and then a banging on his door. A crowd of people are standing outside, and the are mean and angry.

“Bring out those men!” They shout. “We don’t like them!”

Lot wants to be friendly and welcome the men, but the people outside are bullies who want to hurt them.

Inside, the two men turn to Lot. “It’s dangerous out there. And the city is killing itself with its own hatred. God cannot stop them. You and your family need to leave—right now! The people are starting to riot. They’re coming out with weapons and torches. They city will start burning soon. Run for your life!”

The two men take Lot and his family safely through the crowd and outside the city.

“Now go! Hurry! And don’t look back!”

When Lot and his wife and children are far away from Sodom and Gomorrah, they hear a loud roar, and explosions. They feel heat as from a giant furnace, coming from behind. Sodom and Gomorrah are on fire! They are far away and safe.

But Lot’s wife dies. Some people say that she wanted to look back and see what was happening, to face the evil, and so she turned into a pillar of salt.