

## *Patriarchs Study and Discussion Questions*

### *Lesson Two: God's Covenant & Abraham's Growth – Genesis 15:1-18:15*

#### Read Genesis 15.

- 1) About which two things did Abram express doubt and how did the Lord answer his honest concerns? (See also Genesis 12:2 and 13:14-16.) **Abram expressed doubt (15:2) about God's promise to give him physical descendants (promised in 12:2 and 13:16) and in verse 8, about God's promise to give him land (15:7 and 13:14-15).** The Lord answered Abram by stating clearly that a son from his own body would be his heir, not merely one of Abram's servants. God showed him the stars in the heavens and proclaimed Abram's descendants would be just as numerous (15:5). The Lord answered Abram's second concern with a covenant (a promise) and with foreknowledge of when and how his descendants would inherit the Promised Land. The covenant was God's guarantee that Abram's descendants would inherit the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.
- 2) Reread verse 6 along with Romans 4:1-5, 18-25 and Galatians 3:3-9. These passages explain what kind of "belief" (faith) will result in a person being considered "righteous" or "justified" by God. In other places, the Scriptures call this being "saved." Make a list of all you learn from these verses about being made righteous (justified/saved) by faith. (*Note: The New Testament passages listed above use the name "Abraham" rather than "Abram," a name he was given in Genesis 17. The "law" Galatians references is the Mosaic Law [the commandments] given to Israel by God in the Old Testament. If you are new to Bible study, these verses will likely raise questions. This is to be expected, as Bible study is a learning process.*) 1) Genesis 15:6: Abram's "belief" was "credited" to him by God as righteousness. 2) Romans 4:4-5: When a person has faith, God credits righteousness to that individual as a gift, not because He is obligated to do so. God *would be* obligated to call us righteous if our deeds and motives were perfectly and completely good at all times and in all circumstances. But the truth is that we fall so short of His standard of righteousness, we are rightly considered wicked. 3) Romans 4:18-19: Abraham believed God in the face of what seemed humanly hopeless. 4) Romans 4:20-21: Abraham's belief was rooted in full persuasion that God was willing and capable of doing what He said He would do (in this case, to give him a child by Sarai.) 5) Romans 4:23-25: God will credit righteousness to any of us who believe in Christ's death and resurrection as the means by which we can be made righteous. 6) Galatians 3:7-9: All people (both Jews and Gentiles) who have the kind of belief that Abraham had are considered Abraham's children and are blessed along with him.
- 3) Do you think a person today can simultaneously believe God and have honest doubts, as Abram did? Explain your answer and if possible, include an example from your own life. **Yes, a person can fully trust God and at the same time have honest questions. God did not deride Abram for expressing his concerns. There is a great difference between the person who metaphorically shakes their fist in God's face, questioning His integrity or character, and the person of faith who sincerely seeks greater understanding or is honestly confused. Personal sharing**

#### Read Genesis 16:1-6.

- 4) Identify the characters involved in the drama of these verses. Also, tell who (surprisingly) was *not* included in the decision-making? **The characters involved in the drama of Genesis 16:1-6 are Abram, his wife Sarai, and her maidservant Hagar. There is no indication that Abram and Sarai sought the Lord before making this decision (and every indication that they did not).**
- 5) Why do you think Abram agreed to this plan? **After Abram had waited so long for God to give him the promised child, he probably began to wonder whether God might be expecting him to somehow "help out." This is a common human error.**
- 6) Have you ever wanted (or tried) to "hurry along" something you have been waiting a long time for God to do? What happened? **Personal sharing**

Read Genesis 16:7-16.

- 7) Who found Hagar alone in the desert? *“The angel of the Lord”* (16:7, 9, 11). Based on verses 10 and 13, it seems the angel of the Lord was a theophany (a physical manifestation of God).
- 8) What things might Hagar have been thinking of when she named the Lord *“the God Who Sees Me”* (verse 13)? Hagar could have been thinking, not only that the Lord saw her when she was alone near a spring in the desert (verse 8), but perhaps that He saw into her heart, since He answered her concerns for the future. He spoke of her holding a position of honor (she would bear a son and her descendants would be too numerous to count). Perhaps Hagar also recognized that the Lord saw her need for guidance (He directed her to return to Sarai) and her bitterness toward Sarai (He told her to submit to her mistress).
- 9) Perhaps you or someone you love lives with the consequences of a decision made without consulting the Lord, or even made in direct disobedience to Him. Like Hagar, you or your loved one might not have even been included in making the decision, yet you live with the consequences. How does this name for God, *“the One Who Sees Me”* (*El Roi*), make a difference in the way you view your circumstances? **Personal sharing**

Read Genesis 17.

- 10) Based on verses 1 and 17, together with Genesis 12:2-4, 16:16, 17:24 and 18:10 and 14, tell how many years Abram waited between the time God promised him descendants, the time Ishmael was born, and the time Sarah’s son was born? Altogether, what was the minimum amount of time he waited for God to do what He promised? **According to 12:4, Abram was 75 when God first promised him descendants. According to 16:16, Abram was 86 when Ishmael was born. Abram had been waiting 11 years when he took matters into his own hands. According to 17:1 (where he is 99 years old) and 17:17, 18:10 and 14, Abram would have been 100 years old when Sarah’s son Isaac was born. Therefore, Abram waited an additional 14 years after Ishmael’s birth for God to fulfill His promise. Altogether, he waited a minimum of 25 years. There is no Scriptural record of God having promised Abram a son when He first spoke to Abram (in Ur [Acts 7:2-4]). If God had promised Abram a son at that time, Abram’s wait would have been even longer.**
- 11) What was the sign of God’s covenant with Abram? Include the verse numbers. **Circumcision (verses 10 and 11)**
- 12) Read Deuteronomy 30:6, Romans 2:28-29, Philippians 3:3 and Colossians 2:11. What might the symbol of circumcision represent in the Christian life? **God’s people of faith (Jews and Gentiles alike) are those whose hearts are circumcised. For the Christian, circumcision is putting off the sinful nature (Colossians 2:11). It is allowing God, through Christ (Philippians 3:3), to make us holy by “cutting off” anything that is unholy. Because of our sin nature, we often guard these things as very dear to us (as a man would his genitals), though we may not want others to know our true feelings. They have a grip on our hearts and are often too difficult or painful for us to set aside in our own strength. The Spirit of God (Philippians 3:3) must do it for us.**

Read Genesis 18:1-15.

- 13) Do you think there was a difference between Sarah’s laughter in verse 12 and Abraham’s laughter in 17:17? Why or why not? **Abraham and Sarah both laughed (to themselves) at the thought of conceiving a child in their old age. Sarah was reprimanded by the Lord for her laughter, while it doesn’t appear that Abraham was. Perhaps Sarah’s was the laughter of scoffing and doubt, while Abraham’s laughter was that of amazement and joy!**
- 14) Compare what God says about Himself in verse 14a with the name God gave Himself in Genesis 17:1 (*El Shaddai*). Is God limited by anything? (Consider Leviticus 11:45b.) **God cannot do anything that contradicts His character, because He is holy. However, God is Almighty (all-powerful) and nothing is too hard (too wonderful) for Him.**
- 15) What will you ask God Almighty (who says nothing is too hard, too wonderful, or impossible for Him) to do for you today? **Personal sharing**