

1. What do you imagine it is like to be a homesick visitor in a totally foreign and perhaps even hostile land or environment? (Maybe you have experienced something like this yourself.)

Read Hebrews 11:11-16. You may have noticed that some versions say "By faith even Sarah," and others, "By faith...Abraham." Because the specific Greek terms in verse 11 seem to apply only to a male subject, and because of clues in the surrounding context, we will be using the NIV translation of that section: "By faith Abraham, even though he was past age--and Sarah herself was barren--was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise." Note, however, that even if this passage may not be clearly singling out Sarah as a woman of faith, I Peter 3 does. There she is looked back on as one of the "holy women of the past who put their hope in God."

In our last lesson, Abram travelled from Ur to Canaan in response to God's direction (chapter 12). After a short time there, his nephew Lot went to live in the fertile plains by Sodom and Gomorrah (chapter 13). As we begin this lesson, you may want to skim Genesis 14:1-17, where Abram and his servants raid the camp of a much larger enemy force and rescue the captured people of Sodom and Gomorrah--including Abram's nephew Lot--as well as all the stolen goods.

Read Genesis 14:17-24. Some think this king of Salem (now called Jerusalem) was a pre-incarnate manifestation of Christ, while others find that the wording about him in other passages seems to go against this conclusion. In any case, this meeting was provided by God.

2. How do you see God using Melchizedek in Abram's life in this passage?
3. God is still in the business of faithfully bringing visible "living reminders" of His love, care and truth into His people's lives. By God's grace, what are some specific ways in which you can reach out like Melchizedek to the believers in your life?
4. As you observe Abram in this passage, does he also serve as a pattern for your life? Explain.
5. What would you suppose Abram's frame of mind would be after the events of chapter 14?

Read and memorize Genesis 15:1 (KJV) "After these things, the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, 'Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.'"

6. Of all the things you might expect God to say at this point, what are His first words to His servant?

Now, from this same verse, put God's clear messages to Abram in your own words.

Read Genesis 15:2-6. Note: In those times "a childless man could adopt one of his male servants to be his heir" (NIV note). Eliezer of Damascus was probably a high ranking servant of Abram's household.

7. No one knows your heart like your God. He is able to go right to those secret burdens, ones that perhaps others might never guess. As you read on into verse 2, what concern spills out of Abram in response to God's wise and gentle touch?

8. He has told Abram in Genesis 12:2-3 and in 13:14-17, but what does God say again in 15:4-5--and what does He make clear here that wasn't specifically spelled out before?

9. From verse 6, what is Abram's response?

What was the result of this?

10. There ought to be stars and arrows around this verse, as it contains earth-shaking information. The Apostle Paul helps us mine the treasure in these words. What does he spell out for us in Romans 4:1-5, 23-25, 3:22-24, 8:1, and John 6:40?

God intends this truth to bring you unassailable confidence and joy--to be "your shield and exceeding great reward". How do you want to respond to Him?

Note on Genesis 15:7-18; Abram also expresses his qualms about inheriting the land, and the Lord instructs him to set up for a traditional contract ceremony. "In ancient times the parties solemnized a covenant by walking down an aisle flanked by the pieces of slaughtered animals. This practice signified a self-maledictory oath: 'May it be done so to me if I do not keep my oath.'" (From NIV study note.) Notice that God puts Abram into a deep sleep (verse 12) and walks between the pieces alone (verse 17). This signifies that the responsibility to bring about the promises rests on Him alone.

With chapter 15 still in mind, read Genesis 16:1-6. The arrangement Sarai suggests in verse 2 is a legal and acceptable practice in their society.

11. What does Sarai do? (verses 1-2)

Why do you think Sarai does this? (Note also verses 3 and 16.)

What is Abram's reaction? (verses 2-4a)

12. What results came of this action, in verses 4-6 and also later (after Isaac is born) in Genesis 21:9-16?

13. What a mess! But what do you discover as you read Genesis 16:7-15, 17:18-20 and 21:17-20?

Why do you think God included this part of the story for us--what do they reveal to us about Him?

14. Fourteen years after Sarai and Abram's "great idea", what did God make clear to them? See Genesis 17:3-6, but also especially 17:15-21, and shortly after that, 18:10.

(For those who want to dig deeper: You may also want to read chapter 18:1-19, where apparently the LORD and two angels appeared as men to Abraham and Sarah.)

In this section of the lives of Abraham and Sarah, God has shown us two things clearly: the natural results of their attempts to make His work happen, and the eventual and gradual nature of the enlightenment He gives as to how He plans to bring His promises about!

15. Now that He's told you their story, what do you hear God teaching you? (For further encouragement, see Psalm 32:8-10, Isaiah 30:18, Isaiah 55:8-9, Psalm 145:3-10.)

Personal: Is there a specific situation where you need to grasp this truth? (An area of discouragement, fear, etc.)

As you remember these things--by God's grace--what difference do you think it can make on your "inside" (thoughts, emotions) and your "outside" (words, actions)?

Now read and enjoy Genesis 21:1-8

16. From this section, tell what phrases you find particularly enjoyable or gratifying.

Re-read Hebrews 11:11-12

17. Abram did some stumbling while He was learning God's ways. But what one thing did he do that was so delightful to God? (verse 11)

18. Along with the Hebrews passage, read Romans 4:17-21. What point do you think God is making, both to Abraham and Sarah and to us, by fulfilling His promise only when all human possibilities have been eliminated?

Re-read Hebrews 11:13-16. Some of the promises God gave Abraham were fulfilled in his lifetime (verse 11). But the promise of inheriting the land of Canaan was something for which Abraham, and then many of his descendants, had to wait.

19. In this passage, it's obvious that these folks weren't just looking to an earthly homeland that God would provide for them.
What else were they looking for? Tell the descriptive phrases you find in verses 14-16.

What words or phrases do you see in verses 13-16 that show how they felt about this promised hope that lay ahead?

In these words we can hear a longing for the rest and safety of the eternal home God will provide for us, but we can also hear the longing to just be with Him. The more He reveals Himself to us on our journey home, the more clearly we see Him as the love of our lives. He Himself is "our exceeding great reward."

20. Look back through this study of God's Word--the Word that comes to us! (Genesis 15:1) Is there something you have seen or learned in this lesson that has made you love Him more? Please write what you have discovered.