

## Goals

With one single step of faith out of the land of Ur, Abraham set into motion the salvation plan of God. This plan culminated in the Lord Jesus who came to the world to save all sinners. In this unit our students will learn about characters such as Abraham, Zacchaeus, and Cornelius who all responded to the call of the Lord. They responded to God's calling with immediacy, earnestness and simplicity of faith. They turned from their unbelief to a total commitment in God. While it is important to get off to a good start, it is even more crucial to hold onto our faith to the very end. Naaman and Gehazi provide our students with an interesting antithesis of those who started off well in their faith and those who failed tragically at the end. Our students will learn that faith is a seed that has to be planted and constantly nurtured and pruned through the plethora of life's experiences so that we progress from a dependent faith to one that is mature and independent.

unit  
1**Teacher Devotional**

In one family lived a mother and her three daughters. One evening after a hearty meal, the daughters thanked their mother profusely for her love and the wonderful meal. With this the mother exclaimed, "Mom has had such a long and hard day. I wonder who would be willing to do the dishes tonight?" The daughters looked at each other. The oldest was the first to speak up. "Sorry mom," she said. "I would love to help but I have an essay due tomorrow, so I have to go." And with that she ran into her room and closed the door. The second daughter grimaced and said, "Ugh! I hate touching grease!" and she too slithered quickly away. Now only the mother and the youngest daughter remained at the table. The youngest glanced at her mother and without saying a word she began to carefully clear away the dirty dishes. Who would you say truly loved mom?

***Blessed Are the Doers***

*"For not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified."  
(Rom 2:13)*

## Lesson 1

Abraham,  
the Father of Faith***Listed Scriptures***

Gen 11:24-25:11; Ac 7:1-8; Rom 4; Neh 9:7-8; Heb 6:13-15, 11; Gal 3:6-9

***Lesson Aim***

- 1) To identify the events that helped shape Abraham's faith and conviction of God.
- 2) To enable students to imitate Abraham's faith in God and love for men.

***Memory Verse***

"For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.'" (Rom 4:3)

***Bible Reading For This Week*** (for students and teachers)

*Isaiah 1-5*

## B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D

**Covenant**

A covenant (Heb. *berit*, meaning "cutting") is a term applied to transactions between God and man and man and his fellowman. In a compact between men or tribes or nations, each party bound himself to fulfill certain conditions and was promised certain advantages. God was solemnly invoked as a witness when the expression "a covenant of the Lord" (1 Sam 20:8; Ezek 17:19) and an oath was sworn (Gen 21:31). Accordingly, a breach of covenant was regarded as a heinous sin. Ceremonies were not only concluded with an oath, but at times, confirmed by slaughtering and cutting an animal into two halves between which the parties passed to show that if either of them broke the covenant it would fare with him as with the divided beast. Covenanting parties often partook of a common meal (Gen 26:30; 31:54), or at least of some grains of salt (Num 18:19; 2 Chron 13:5). Throughout the Old Testament, God made covenants with men; among them were:

Edenic promise of redemption (Gen 3:15); Noah (Gen 9:9); Abraham (Gen 12-25); Israel (Ex 19:5-6); Levites (Num 25:12,13); David (2 Sam 23:5).

In the Abrahamic promises, God established His covenant through various ways: with a verbal promise (Gen 12:4-7), through a burning torch passed between the sacrificial pieces (Gen 15:17), through circumcision (Gen 17:9-11), by swearing (Gen 22:16-18).

The covenants established between God and Abraham are found throughout chapters 12 to 22 of the Book of Genesis. God promised: to make him fruitful (Gen 17:6; 12:2; 15:4-5; 22:17), to give the land of Canaan to him and his descendants as the everlasting inheritance (Gen 17:8; 12:7; 15:7), that all the nations on earth would be blessed on account of his descendants (Gen 22:18; 12:3; 17:6). This refers to how the Messiah would be a descendant of Abraham.

### Ur of the Chaldeans

Abraham's native city is commonly thought to be located in southern Babylonia. Modern excavations of the site of Ur revealed that the city had achieved a high level of civilization 500 years before Abraham. The Chaldeans came into southern Babylonia after 1000 B.C. There are detailed descriptions of the worship of the city god of Ur, the moon god Nannar and his consort Ningal. Many buildings were erected to the gods. Ur was a great and prosperous city with an estimated 360,000 inhabitants living in the city and its suburbs.

### Hospitality

In biblical times, it was believed to be a sacred duty to receive, feed, lodge and protect any traveler who might stop at one's door. The stranger was treated as a guest, and men who had thus eaten together were bound to each other by the strongest ties of friendship, which descended to their heirs and was confirmed by mutual presents. Hospitality was required in the Law of Moses (Lev 19:33-34). As inns were provided, hospitality was still practiced. The Old Testament gives illustrations of it (Gen 18:1-8; 19:1-3; 24:25, 31-33; etc.) In Job 31:32, it says, "But no sojourner had to lodge in the street, for I have opened my doors to the traveler." In showing hospitality, protocol required that the meal served to the guest exceed what was first offered. Thus the simple offer Abraham made turned out to be freshly baked bread, a calf and a mixture of milk and yogurt. What is particularly generous here was the fresh meat, an item not usually found in their daily diet. The three measures of flour used to make bread were also reflective of Abraham's generosity to his guests. Curds and milk are served along with the meal as customary side dishes and normal byproducts of the herd.

## W A R M U P



Read the following inscription of a poem that was written on a wall in a concentration camp.

I believe in the sun  
Even when it is not shining  
I believe in love  
Even when I feel it not  
I believe in God  
Even when He is silent

*What is your definition of faith? How does the poem illustrate the true meaning of faith?*

## B I B L E S T U D Y



### Part 1

### Faith

The Bible opens with four great events: the creation, the fall, the flood and the scattering of nations after the confusion of languages. Following these events, God focused on one man and his descendants. The man is Abraham, father of the Jewish people and recipient of three great promises from God. What really sets Abraham apart is his extraordinary faith in God. Abraham is most commonly known as the "Father of Faith." His original name Abram, which means "Father of High", was later changed by God to Abraham, which means "Father of a Multitude of Nations" (Gen 17:5-6).

But what is faith? In the Old Testament (KJV), the word faith occurs only twice (Deut 32:20; Hab 2:4), and the word believe appears less than thirty times. In the New Testament, faith and believe occur almost 500 times. Faith is a word with various meanings:

1. Faith may refer to the body of truth which constitutes the whole of the Christian message (Jude 3).
2. Faith can mean a belief in the Lord Jesus and His redemptive plan.

3. Faith encompasses complete confidence and trust in God.
4. Faith is believing every single word and promise that is written in the Bible about who God is, what He has done, is doing and will do for His saints. This belief culminates in obedience to His will.

Faith like Abraham's did not suddenly appear at the wave of a wand. It is a seed that has to be planted, nurtured and pruned. As we trace the Genesis accounts of Abraham's life, this is exactly what happened. The events in his life provided Abraham with opportunities to trust God more and to grow in faith. Sometimes he responded well; sometimes he failed. Nevertheless, Abraham is known as the "Father of Faith," because he fully believed in the impossible and the unattainable. His faith was completely grounded in God and His promises. And because of this, he was considered righteous in God's eyes. Let us look at how Abraham manifested faith in his life.

### **Abraham's Calling**

In the Book of Acts 7:2-4 it tells us that God first appeared to Abraham in the land of the Chaldeans and said, "Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you." Abraham thus departed from Ur with Sarah his wife, his father Terah and his nephew Lot and settled in Haran, where later his father died (Gen 11:31, 32). At the age of 75 God once again appeared to Abraham and asked him to leave his homeland to a land that God was to show him. From this incident, how did Abraham manifest his faith in God?

#### **a. He departed from Ur not knowing where he was to go**

When God appeared to Abraham and told him to depart from his homeland, God did not specify where he was to go (Gen 12:1). Abraham was virtually traveling into the unknown. The Bible however, states simply that "Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him" (Gen 12:4). How remarkable Abraham's faith was! Abraham willingly gave up the familiar for the unknown and he wholeheartedly trusted God for his future. We too face many unknowns in our lives, and uncertainty and the unknown are things we often fear most. We don't know what our future will hold and so we worry about this and that. God tells us that we should not be anxious about tomorrow but to simply take God at His word (Mt 6:25-34).

#### **b. He had to travel a long distance**

Genesis 11:31-12:5 records how Abraham departed from Ur to go to the land of Canaan. Abraham and his family would have had to cross the River

Euphrates and trek for more than a thousand miles over rough terrain to get to Canaan. Factors, such as lack of water, the harsh desert, and sheer exhaustion could have weakened Abraham's resolve, but his faith carried him through the rough circumstances (Cf. Ac 27:21-25). Similarly our journey to heaven is a long and arduous one. Difficulties and temptations threaten to weaken our resolve to go on. 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, however, reminds us that, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

#### **c. He had to leave his country, kindred and father's house**

In order to receive the blessings of God, Abraham had to leave his country, kindred and father's house.

##### **i. Leave his country**

For the first 75 years of his life, Abraham lived in Ur. From archaeological excavations Ur was found to be a prosperous place with a strong cult of the moon god (Josh 24:2). Yet, despite all its faults, Ur was home. Leaving his country meant leaving his roots. It meant having to leave a long tradition of worship of foreign gods for the God who had spoken to him, for whom he did not yet really know. It meant leaving the culture and people he had grown to know and love, to be with people and customs foreign to him. What does leaving one's country mean to us today? The beginning of Abraham's pilgrimage represents the beginning of each man's pilgrimage into Christ. To obtain blessings and inherit eternal life, we have to leave behind our old worldly values, habits and nature. We have to depart from the things that are valuable to us to obtain things that are valuable to God.

##### **ii. Leave his kindred and father's house**

Human beings are social creatures. We establish bonds and ties with one another to provide support and companionship. In most societies, the family is the basic unit and in countries such as Israel, the individual is counted for nothing in comparison with the family. Thus when God asked Abraham to depart from his kindred and father's house, God wanted him to forsake what was most dear to him. In Matthew 10:37 the Lord Jesus says, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me." The Lord does not mean for us to break off all family ties, but He understood how familial affection can hinder us from putting God as top priority. When our beloved ones and God come into competition, Abraham

sets us a good example of putting God above everything and everyone else.

**d. He departed from Ur not having yet received the promised land**

When God first appeared to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldeans, God had not yet spoken of the promises He was to give Abraham (Ac 7:3,4). Yet Abraham had the faith to leave his homeland purely based on God's calling. Although in the course of time, God promised to make Abraham into a great nation (Gen 12:2-3) and promised him the land of Canaan (Gen 12:7), yet throughout his entire life Abraham was not able to witness the fulfillment of these promises. It was only 600 years later that his descendants possessed the land of Canaan. Abraham's faith in God's promise is worthy of our imitation. Although he had not yet received any promise, Abraham simply obeyed. Because of his obedience God showered His blessings upon him. Sometimes we pray for blessings but receive nothing. If we first obey God and carry out His will blessings will surely follow.

**Reflection:**

1. Why do you think God asked Abraham to do such a difficult thing as to leave his loved ones?
2. When it comes down to a choice between following God's will and going against the wishes of someone you love, what would you choose to do?
3. Uncertainty, difficult circumstances, lack of assurance and giving up things that are precious did not hinder Abraham from responding to God's calling. Of these things, which ones might prevent you from doing the same?

 **B • God Promises Abraham a Son**

When God appeared to Abraham and promised him great blessings, Abraham said to God, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!" God then told him that "the one who will come from your own body shall be your heir" and that his descendants will be as innumerable as the stars in the night sky. Even though Abraham had no child at the time, he believed in the power of God and God credited it to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6).

This is what true faith is. Faith faces the facts. Abraham had no illusions that he and Sarah were "as good as dead", physically speaking. Yet Abraham believed in God's promise against all hope. Abraham knew God could make something out of nothing (Heb 11:3). In the Book of Romans, the apostle Paul emphasizes the

great trust this act of faith required (Rom 4:19-21). Nowadays, many people do not believe in the Holy Bible, the Creation, or the virgin birth - simply because it is too incredible. These people have yet to grasp a true understanding of God's power and almightiness. King David understood the greatness of God. In his 139th Psalm, David wrote, "For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them" (Ps 139:7-8,13-16).

 **C • Abraham Offers Up His Only Son**

Read Genesis 22:1-2. How did Abraham demonstrate his faith in this incident?

**a. He obeyed immediately**

When God told Abraham to offer his son, He did not give Abraham a time frame. But the Bible tells us an amazing thing—Abraham rose early the next morning to offer his son. Many of us would have waited for a week, a month or even longer to avoid the inevitable. Abraham, on the other hand, obeyed immediately. Our actions give evidence of the reality of our trust and faith in God. When the Lord Jesus asked Peter and Andrew to follow Him, they "immediately" left their nets and followed Him (Mt 4:20; Mt 4:18-22). Let us be like the Psalmist who wrote, "I made haste, and did not delay to keep Your commandments" (Ps 119:60). If we eagerly obey God we will experience God eagerly loving us and experience His abundant blessings (Lk 11:27-28).

**b. He obeyed totally**

Abraham did exactly as the Lord commanded him. In our pursuit of spiritual perfection obedience is one of the hardest lessons to learn. Oftentimes our obedience is partial, selective and conditional. But God's commandments are not suggestions. We need to obey them with faith regardless of how we feel (1 Sam 15:22; Jas 2:21-23,26). At times we find it difficult to obey God's word because we are afraid of suffering, cannot put down our own will, have lack faith in God or don't understand the truth or the will of God. We should therefore ask God to increase our faith and understanding of Him, to give us a humble spirit so that we can submit to His will.

**c. He obeyed even when it didn't make sense**

When Abraham heard God's command to offer up the child he had waited 25 years for, it must have seemed as if God was playing some cruel joke. Yet, regardless of how senseless it seemed, Abraham obeyed. There may be times when we are asked to do things that appear illogical or unreasonable. For example, commanding Peter to cast his net on the right side of the boat after an entire night of fishing seemed senseless. The little boy's offering of five loaves of bread and the two fish to feed a multitude of five thousand was absurd to the disciples (Jn 6:8-9). However, if we obey only when it makes sense then our faith and obedience is limited to our narrow understanding. We are walking by sight and not by faith. In Isaiah 55:8 God reminds us that "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts .... because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor 1:25).

**d. He believed that God would resurrect his son**

Although this was the hardest trial that Abraham would encounter, Abraham obeyed because he believed deeply in God's promise and power (Heb 11:18). He believed that God would not go back on His word to make him into a great nation. And even if Isaac were to die, Abraham believed that God had the power to resurrect him from the dead. Abraham trusted in God against all odds. His faith carried him through great trials, and enabled him to remain steadfast and sober.

**Reflection:**

1. Define true obedience.
2. To you, what are the hardest and the easiest things to give to God?
3. Were you ever asked to do something that didn't make sense? How did you respond?



*Part 2*

*Abraham's Love*



**Abraham's Love For Lot**

**a. He gave Lot first choice**

Read Genesis 13:8-13. When Abraham left the land of Ur he took with him his nephew Lot, whose father had died (Gen 11:27-28). Abraham loved and cared for Lot. As their possessions increased and the land could not support both of them living together, strife arose between Abraham and Lot's herdsmen. Abraham decided that to maintain peace and harmony between them, they should separate from each other and so he gave Lot first choice of the land. Abraham's love and long-suffering did not go unnoticed by God. After Lot departed from him, God appeared to Abraham to bestow great blessings upon him (Gen 13:14-17).

**b. He rescued Lot**

Read Genesis 14:14-17. In Abraham's time most cities had their own kings. A conquered city had to pay tribute to the victorious king. This meant that the five cities which included Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Zoar, had to pay taxes to King Chedorlaomer of Elam for 12 years. The five cities formed an alliance and rebelled by withholding tribute. Chedorlaomer reacted swiftly and called upon three other countries, namely Shinar, Ellasar and Goiim to fight against the five rebel cities. The four kings conquered the five cities and when they had defeated Sodom, Lot, his family and his possessions were also captured. What can we learn about Abraham from this incident?

**i. He overlooked other's wrongs**

In Genesis 13 Lot had ungraciously taken the best of the land and settled in the city of Sodom. In chapter 14, Abraham learned that Lot had been captured. Upon hearing the news, Abraham did not begrudge Lot of his loss; instead he went straight to the rescue (1 Cor 13:5-8; Rom 13:8).

**ii. He risked his life to save Lot**

Abraham was a herdsman by profession and unskilled in warfare. But when he learned that Lot had been captured, he took his 318 trained men and went in pursuit of the four kings. Abraham did not stop to consider what 318 trained men were compared to the armies of the four kings skilled in warfare. With God's help and his love for Lot, Abraham was spurred on to risk his life to rescue his kinsmen. Have we given of ourselves

to save those brothers and sisters who are weak and have fallen into sin and temptation (Gal 6:1; Jas 5:19-20)?

iii. He sacrificed his all

Abraham was living by the oaks of Mamre during this time, but when he heard the news, he quickly gathered his small forces and pursued as far as Dan. He later divided his forces and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. Mamre is about 2 miles north of Hebron which lies west of the Dead Sea. From Mamre to Dan and then to Hobah (north of Damascus), involved a journey that spanned the entire length of the country of Israel, which was approximately 300 km (about 187.5 miles). After he had defeated the kings, Abraham brought Lot and all his possessions back again to the Valley of Shaveh, which was one-fourth of a mile east of Jerusalem. This meant a return journey of another 300 km. Abraham teaches us that to show love or kindness to others, we need to sacrifice our time, effort, money and convenience.

**Reflection:**

1. We often show kindness and concern for others only when it is convenient for us or when we feel like it. What does Abraham's actions teach us about true love?
2. With what kind of attitude do we help others?

 **B Abraham Welcomes the Three Visitors**

Read Genesis 18:1b-8. In biblical times, showing hospitality was a common practice. It was believed to be a sacred duty to receive, feed, lodge and protect any traveler who might stop at one's door. Hospitality was also required in the Law of Moses (Lev 19:34). However, Abraham went far beyond the law's requirement.

Let's pay close attention to Abraham's actions as he sees the three men approaching: "In the heat of the day, Abraham ran from the tent door to meet them." Keep in mind that Abraham was not a young man at the time – he was 99 years old. "Then he bowed himself to the ground ..... hurried into the tent ..... ran to the herd ..... then he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate." What does Abraham's actions teach us?

1. Abraham did not take the easy way out. He took it upon himself to prepare for his guests. This is not an easy task considering his age and the warm climate.

2. Abraham offered his best to his guests. He did not offer leftovers. According to historians, the three measures of flour (c. 20 quarts) that was used to bake the bread reflected Abraham's generosity to his guests. The calf was tender and good and not one that he wanted to get rid of. Actually, meat was not an item customarily offered to guests and eaten as part of the daily diet. This too was reflective of Abraham's love and generosity.
3. Abraham did not realize that these men were in fact God and two heavenly angels (Heb 13:2). Abraham simply served the travelers wholeheartedly. Many times we show partiality in our treatment of others. We tend to reserve the best for our friends and people we know. But Abraham's love for all people is reflected in his warm welcome to the strangers.

**Reflection:**

1. Compare your attitude with that of Abraham's when asked to entertain strangers. What differences or similarities do you notice?
2. Why is showing hospitality to others important?
3. Share a testimony where people were blessed on account of welcoming others.

 **C Abraham Prays for Sodom and Gomorrah**

When the sins and wickedness of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were no longer bearable, God decided to destroy the cities. Realizing God's plans, Abraham began to plead to God on behalf of the people in those cities (Gen 19:16-33). Abraham's attitude in praying for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah is worthy of our imitation.

**a. He prayed with love**

Abraham prayed to God to spare the city for the sake of the righteous people. At first Abraham pleaded to God spare the city on account of 50 righteous people. God agreed. When 50 righteous people could not be found, Abraham continued to pray reducing the number of righteous people from 50-45-40-30-20-10. We can sense that Abraham was trying not to overstep the line, yet love for the people moved him to plead over and over again for those pitiful souls that were to be destroyed. Without love, our prayers are short-lived. Do our hearts burn like Abraham for the souls who are not yet saved? Have we mentioned the names of those who have not yet received the gospel, or those who are backsliding, in our daily prayers (1 Tim 2:1-5; Is 59:16)? Let us "pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit,

being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints" (Eph 6:18; Is 59:16; 1 Tim 2:1-5; Col 4:2-4).

**b. He understood God's righteousness and mercy**

Abraham understood that God was a righteous God. Job 37:23 says, "The Almighty—we cannot find Him; He is great in power and justice, and abundant righteousness He will not violate" (RSV). The Lord will reward each for his deeds and He will not let the evildoers go unpunished. Abraham understood God's will full well but he took God at His mercy no matter how far-fetched his petitions seemed to be (Eph 2:4). Genesis 19:29 mentions that God remembered Abraham and his petitions and especially sent two angels to save Lot and his family from the destruction. When we pray for others, we need to take God at His mercy. For "who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?" (Jon 3:9) Joel 2:13 reminds us of the kind of God we worship: "For He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm."

**Reflection:**

1. Share an experience where God responded to your prayers for others.
2. In God's dealings with Abraham, Lot and Sodom, what did you learn about God's character and purposes? About judgment and mercy for wayward people?

**C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G**



Due to the nature of this lesson, the Check For Understanding questions can be found after each Bible Study section under the heading "Reflection".

**L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N**



***My Journey of Faith From Ur to Canaan***

Each person's faith is built up from a plethora of life experiences such as births or deaths among family and friends, receiving the Holy Spirit, having a prayer answered, being involved in an accident, disappointments, relationships and so on. Through the ordinary and extraordinary events in

life, our faith, trust and knowledge of God deepen. Each event is a stepping stone to higher planes so that we progress from a dependent faith to one that is mature and independent.

In this exercise, we are going to map out the experiences that enabled us to know God a little better. Abraham's first contact with God was in Ur when God called him. Our first realization of God or "God's calling in Ur" may have been during RE classes when we were young. We can plot these various "contacts" with God on the map. We can also plot the times when we were disobedient to God (like when Abraham went down to Egypt to escape the famine) and the lessons we learned from those experiences. These maps will give us an idea of how God has used these experiences to deepen our knowledge of Him in our journey from Ur to Canaan.

**Suggested Reading:**

"The grace which God has manifested in my family," *Manna* Issue 1

**Teaching Tips**

*In preparation for Lesson 3, make copies of the printed survey from the Student's Workbook. Students should pass the surveys out to each local church member and ask him or her to fill out the forms. The students also need to be responsible for collecting the completed surveys from those members. You may wish to divide the members into manageable groups. You may also want to inform the church council members of this activity. During the next Sabbath, an announcement can be made to the entire congregation regarding the survey. Members should be encouraged to fill in and return the surveys at a certain date. Allow 2-3 weeks to administer the survey and more time for a larger church congregation.*

**R E F L E C T I O N & P R A Y E R**



*Through one man's obedience, the history of the world was affected. With one single step of faith out of the land of Ur, Abraham set into motion the salvation plan of God. Our journey to the promised land also requires us to take these steps of faith. May God increase our faith!*