

3. How can we plan our lives and know that we are obeying the will of God?
4. Does it make you more of a Christian if you stand up for what you believe in and less of one if you don't? Explain your answer.
5. Has your faith ever been challenged? What happened and how did it turn out?
6. Can you think of a good answer to someone who might challenge your faith in the future? What would you say that wouldn't offend him and yet would make your point about your love for God?

Encourage your students as you close with these thoughts: We can be confident that the Bible is true, that it is the word of God and that it does not contradict itself. However, we shouldn't base our confidence in God's word on our own ability to explain every challenge someone might bring up. It's perfectly valid to say, "I'm not sure what the answer is, but I'll do some research and get back to you." Don't give up faith in the truth of the Bible because someone raises a question that you can't answer right away.

REFLECTION & PRAYER



1. When we survey the world and its majestic splendor from the day of creation, we may feel like a tiny speck of dust in the grand scheme of life. But God has created each of us for a specific purpose in mind. Think about the role you feel God wants and needs you to play in His plan.
2. Remember that each of us is special in the eyes of God even though each of us is only one person out of the world's six billion people. It is recorded in the Bible that God has counted each strand of hair that is on our heads. There is nothing we cannot tell Him and nothing He cannot do for us. We only need to let His spirit guide us.

Lesson 3

Forefathers of Faith

Listed Scriptures

Gen 12, 15, 25, 26, 28, 37; Pro 16:7

Lesson Aim

To examine our faith more closely and evaluate our relationship with Jesus Christ

Memory Verse

"Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." (Heb 12:1b-2a)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Genesis 21-30

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



The previous lesson on the Book of Genesis covered up until the story of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11) and how God confused the language of the people so that they scattered all over the earth. Today's focus will be on the chosen people (Gen 12 and onwards), starting with Abraham and his immediate descendants. These stories are undoubtedly very familiar to the students, so rather than summarizing their lives from beginning to end, specific aspects of their lives will be studied, with the emphasis on what we can learn from their triumphs and mistakes. They are also mentioned as fathers of faith in Hebrews 11:17-22.

Abraham (born Abram) was born near the lower portion of the Euphrates River, by the city of Ur. Abraham journeyed much of his life. God guided him as he traveled from Ur to Haran (with his father) and along the mountain ranges of Lebanon until he reached Canaan, near the Jordan River. The land through which Abraham traveled was great for farming and for this reason, it was also known as the Fertile Crescent. Basically, it included:

*both sides of the Tigris River

*both sides of the Euphrates River (the area sandwiched between the two rivers is known as the plains of Mesopotamia, a center for nations such as Babylon and Asshur)

*the mountain ranges of Lebanon

*the western side of the Jordan River (the land of Canaan).

W A R M U P



Have you ever stopped to think about what your life of faith has been like? If someone were to put together a book about you, what kind of stories would you have? Would there be more peaks than valleys or vice versa? When we examine what our faith has been like over the years, we learn a lot about ourselves and our relationship with God. Today, we will take a look at the highs and lows of our forefathers' faiths and see how we can apply the teachings to our lives.

B I B L E S T U D Y



The Life of Abraham



A . Abraham (Gen 12-25)

Abraham was a descendant of Shem and was born at Ur of the Chaldeans (also descendants of Shem). This was obviously not a God-fearing nation and so any faith Abraham had in God was likely passed on through his own family. Abraham's father, Terah, had actually begun a journey to Canaan with his family (Gen 11:31), but stopped midway and settled at Haran. It is unsure as to why Terah did not continue the trip but Abraham completed this journey of faith when he was called by God at the age of seventy-five. Let's examine his journey of faith.

He acted on his faith:

When Abram was 75 years old, he listened to God's calling and left his homeland, tribe and father's house to go to the land of Canaan. Although God had promised him three important things (his descendants would become a great

nation, Canaan would be an inheritance for his children, all nations would be blessed through him), they weren't promises he could experience during his lifetime. It took a lot of courage and trust to pack up and go to a foreign land, but he was blessed by God throughout his life because of his faith.

He lied to get out of trouble:

Abram and his family had to leave Canaan and travel to Egypt because of a famine in the land. When he was in Egypt, he lied and said that Sarai was his sister so that the Egyptians would not kill him for his wife. But his problems were compounded even more because of his lie (she was taken to Pharaoh later on). Although God had made him many promises, he lost sight of that during times of need. In fact, he used this exact deceit later on when facing King Abimelech (Gen 20).

He tried to fulfill the will of God using his own ways:

When he was 86 years old, Abram listened to his wife, Sarah, and allowed her maidservant, Hagar, to bear him a son, Ishmael. Although it was common practice during that time for a wife to give her maidservant to her husband to produce heirs (if she were barren), Abram should have known better. God had promised him a son (Gen 15), but he lost trust in God's word and tried to fulfill the will of God through his own means. Because of his lack of faith, his family would suffer later on (Ishmael and Hagar were sent away by Sarah).

He put God above all else:

By the time Isaac was born, Abraham was 100 years old and his faith had also matured. When Isaac had grown up a bit, Abraham obeyed God by going up to Mount Moriah to offer his one and only son. But this time, his faith taught him that God would keep His promise of giving him a son. Although he didn't know how it would happen if Isaac really were to die, he trusted that God would do it according to His will.

Everyone says that Abraham was the father of faith. Most of us would hardly dare to compare ourselves with him, but our faith is like his in many ways. When we first believe or come to have a real relationship with God, we are full of zeal and bursting to obey God. Similarly, Abraham trusted God completely in the beginning and took off for a foreign land. But along the way, he met with difficulties and his faith was tried. Luckily, God helped him so that he wouldn't fall completely off the path. At the end of his life, he was able to triumph and, by being able to sacrifice his own son, he demonstrated the pinnacle of his faith in God. Today, as we examine our faith, we will see many peaks and valleys too. The important lesson is to learn

as Abraham did and be able to reach the goal of the heavenly kingdom in the end. Now let's take a look at his children and grandchildren. How did their faith measure up?

B . Isaac (Gen 25-27)

Having Abraham for a father must have taught Isaac a thing or two. Although not much is known about his faith in his early years, we are certain that he came to know God at a young age. Let's see how his faith compared to that of his father.

He was submissive to his father:

Isaac demonstrated the beginnings of his faith through obedience to Abraham. Isaac was the one that carried the wood up to Mount Moriah. He did not resist when his father bound and placed him on the altar (Gen 22). Later on, he did not object when his father arranged his marriage for him. These acts of submission were a great source of blessing for Isaac later on in life.

He prayed to God:

It is recorded in Genesis 25:21 that Isaac prayed for his wife because she was barren. This is the first time that we see Isaac personally commune with God. Because God heard his prayer and gave him two sons, Esau and Jacob, we can be certain his prayer was sincere and effective.

He lied to get out of trouble:

Interestingly, Isaac used the same trick his father did years ago by lying to King Abimelech (a different king with the same name) and saying that his wife was his sister (Gen 26:1-11). Although he knew to pray to God when he couldn't do anything about his wife's barrenness,

Teaching Tips

As you study each character, draw on the board (or have each student draw on a piece of paper) what the faith of each person was like by using a line (i.e. the peaks, valleys or plateaus). If you are doing all four lines on the board, ask the students for their input as to how far up (peak) or down (valley) the line should go during each step of their life. If students are drawing their own, do a quick comparison at the end. By drawing, the lines show vividly that each character is just like us, with many ups and downs in faith as we go through life. But more importantly, when all four lines have been drawn, point out that none of them stayed low at the end. That is the goal of our faith today, to be able to reach the heavenly kingdom.

he did not know to turn to God in this situation.

He was patient:

As he resided in Gerar, he became more and more wealthy. The Philistines envied him and quarreled with his servants over the wells they had dug, claiming the water belonged to them (Gen 26:12-33). Twice, Isaac just left, choosing to remain at peace with his neighbors, rather than start fights. As a result, God blessed him even more and even turned his enemies into his friends (Prov 16:7). Patience is one of the characteristics of the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

C . Jacob (Gen 27-36)

Jacob was a legendary individual who endured many hardships as a result of his own mistakes. In fact, his struggles began even before he was born (Gen 25:22). Although it seemed he had made many errors in judgment early on in his life, he was still blessed by God in the end. Let's examine the reasons behind that.

He was deceitful:

After he was born, he longed for his older brother's birthright. In addition to tricking Esau into giving up his inheritance, he also deceived his father into blessing him. Because of his brother's great anger, he fled for his life and ended up at his uncle's. Because of his deceit, he suffered many hardships later on in life and was not able to see his mother again.

God appeared to him:

Jacob had made two huge mistakes in his young life already, and God did not want to see him sink deeper into that hole. By appearing to him in a dream (Gen 28:10ff), he was strengthened so that he could endure some of his most difficult years at Laban's house.

He was patient:

Jacob had a taste of his own medicine when his uncle tricked him into marrying Leah instead of Rachel. Yet, because he wanted to marry Rachel, he agreed to work for another seven years in return. Even as Laban blatantly cheated him out of his pay, he continued to do his work and was blessed by God in the end. These long 20 years spent at his uncle's were trying and frustrating times, but they helped to build his character and faith. Jacob was even able to make up with his brother later on. Although suffering for any amount of time seems difficult, the trials we go through can ultimately help us draw closer to God.

D. Joseph (Gen 37–50)

Joseph did not always lead a glamorous life. Because he did not get along with his brothers, he was sold as a slave to Egypt at a young age. Then, he was wrongly accused and thrown into jail after he refused to sleep with his master's wife. But throughout his trials and tribulations, he continued to trust in God and was able to prosper in everything that he did. In the end, he became the prime minister of Egypt and his high position allowed him to keep his family alive during the famine. Let's see what his faith was like.

He was proud and immature:

When Joseph was still a child, God revealed two dreams to him, both pointing to how he would be in a position of command over his brothers (Gen 37:1–11). It is possible that he meant no harm in telling his brothers about it but because of his pride and immaturity, it caused his brothers to become jealous of him.

He didn't fight or argue:

After being sold as slave to Potiphar's house, he was soon framed by his master's wife and thrown into jail. But he didn't fight back. Rather, he accepted whatever was dealt to him and continued to trust in God's guidance. Later on, he found mercy in the eyes of the prison warden and was given the opportunity to interpret the Pharaoh's dreams.

He was forgiving:

When Joseph's brothers came to buy grain, instead of using his power and influence to punish them, he forgave them. He also showed great filial piety by bringing his father to live with him. In contrast to his father Jacob, much of what Joseph had to endure was not by his own doing. He could very well have given up on God since God did not seem to be in his life each time he was wrongfully accused. However, his experiences teach us that God is in control of our lives. What doesn't make sense to us now will make sense in the future. We just need to believe that God knows what is best for us; any suffering we are going through is a way to refine us.

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



1

Why do you think people tend to lie to get out of trouble?

2

Why is it that sometimes we turn to God immediately for help (i.e. Isaac prayed for Rebekah) and sometimes we choose to try out our own ways first? What determines how we respond to a situation?

3

Isaac didn't seem to have a problem obeying his father even though what he had to do didn't make sense to him. How difficult is it for you to submit to your parents? Explain your reasons.

4

Who of the four people we looked at today had the "best" faith? Explain your answer.

5

Share one thing you have learned from each of the characters. How can you apply them in your daily life?

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



Our Line of Faith

If the Devil were to write his own beatitudes, they might go something like this:

Blessed are those Christians who are too tired, too busy, too distracted to spend time with their fellow Christians in church—they are my best candidates to backslide.

Blessed are those Christians who wait to be asked and expect to be thanked—I can use them to slow things down.

Blessed are those Christians who are touchy, with a bit of luck they may stop going to church and get others to quit—they are my missionaries.

Blessed are those Christians who get on everyone's nerves—they are my most effective stumbling blocks.

Blessed are those Christians who are troublemakers—they are my best wrecking crew.

Blessed are those Christians who have no time to pray—they are easy prey for me.

Blessed are those Christians who are complainers—they are my best discouragers.

Blessed are you when you read this and think it is about other people and not yourself—I've got you. Author-Unknown

Sometimes we think we are pretty good Christians because we go to church, read the Bible or pray to God. But think back to what we just read. Many of us may fall into one or more of those traits described. It is only when we closely examine our faith do we realize how weak we truly are. Just as we drew lines for each of the four characters we studied today, we can each draw a line that represents our faith. Are there more peaks than valleys? Are there long stretches of plateaus? Take a moment to highlight some of the more important times of your faith, memories that stand out (both good and bad). Chart your line and be ready to explain the peaks, valleys and/or plateaus you have included.

Questions to think about:

1. *The more Joseph suffered, the closer he drew to God. Look at your own line of faith. At what times or under what circumstances do you find yourself closer or closest to God? Explain your reasons.*
2. *What is happening in your life when you see the plateaus in your line? Are these things affecting your relationship with God?*
3. *What is your goal for your faith in this upcoming year? What do you want your line to look like in the near future?*
4. *My faith or someone else's faith?*
When I went away to college, I had been a Christian for several years. I had done almost everything the church had taught me. I had attended church up to 2-3 times a week, read my Bible daily, shared the gospel with non-Christians and tithed. But when the influences of church were removed, I was faced with who I really was. I realized that I acknowledge Christ as my Savior, but didn't put Him in my life. I was not a disciple who followed Christ in everything. Jesus Christ said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). The Scriptures were clear about the relationship between a disciple and his Master. The Master has full reign, and the servant's responsibility is to follow and fulfill every request of the Master. I knew I had to make a decision. I had to decide whether I was going my own way or Christ's way. Intuitively, I knew that either I would become a real disciple now or I would remain a mediocre Christian for the rest of my life. I spent many days pondering whether I really wanted to be a disciple...

- b. *What about the things this person has done in the past – tithing, reading the Bible, praying to God. Do these things not count towards being a true disciple?*
- c. *Do you feel you are a true disciple? Explain your answer.*

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



If we were to look at our faith closely, we will see that there are many ups and downs, turns and curves. It is almost as if we were steering a car through a mountainous road. In examining our faith, our goal is to learn from the "valleys" we dip into and be encouraged by the "peaks" we reach. But more importantly, we want to ensure that our faith does not get so off track that our car veers off the road. How confident do you feel about your recent driving skills? Are you on the right path? Ask God to help you as you trek through the often-bumpy road of life.