



# The Story of Salvation

## Chapter 4 - Abraham Is Called



### Genesis 12-22

(In about 2000 B.C.) The kingdom of heaven did not fare well, even among the Semites (the descendants of Shem, eldest son of Noah). For now a new destructive force, idol-worship, had come into man's life. During the centuries after the flood it steadily gained ground. It was practiced by everybody. The time came when there was not a tribe or a nation left that God could use in the work to prepare for the coming of Christ. God had to build and train a new nation for this work. It is this new nation that begins with Abraham.

#### ABRAM IS SEPARATED

Abram was born at Ur of Chaldea, south of Babylon, in the world's oldest civilization. His father worshipped idols, but a grandfather or some other relative must have taught young Abram to worship the true God, Yahweh. There was no idol-worship in his life. He was a wealthy chief and the son of a chief and a man of education and influence. God first called him to leave Ur, and he moved north to Haran in Mesopotamia. Later, at Haran, God repeated the call.

“Get out of your country and from your kindred and from your father's house,” God said to Abram when He called him. He had to get away from the old surroundings in order that God could train him for his task. The kingdom of heaven makes separation a necessity. Abram got ready and left with Sarai, his wife, and the herder of his cattle and sheep, and their families. His nephew Lot and his family also went with him. When Abram came to Canaan, God said to him, “This is the land I will give you.” Abram built an altar and sacrificed and worshipped God. He dedicated himself and the land to God's service.

#### ABRAM IS GIVEN THE PROMISE

When God called Abram He gave him a promise. “I will make you a great nation and in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed,” God said. The promise was repeated several times in order to make Abram believe it so strongly that nothing could shake his conviction. *The promise meant that Christ would be a descendant of Abram.*

#### THE LAST LINK IS BROKEN

Abram had a nephew named Lot. Lot's people soon caused trouble. His herdsmen always tried to grab the best pastures. Abram did not like to have trouble, and so he offered Lot that he could choose the part of the country that he wanted and Abram would take the other part. Abram trusted God to give him the part that God wanted him to have. Lot chose the plain east of the Jordan toward Sodom where the pastures were best. Abram moved across the mountains to the south of the country. The last link between Abram and his family was now broken. The separation had been completed.

After the separation, God renewed His promise to Abram as he also made a covenant of circumcision to show that his people were completely set apart from all the others on the earth. In the covenant of circumcision the foreskin of every male at eight days old shall be cut off, as a symbol that those who are not circumcised shall be cut off from God's people, for they have broken His covenant. As part of this covenant promise God also changed Abram's<sup>1</sup> name to Abraham, which means “father of a multitude.” So also Abraham's wife, Sarai became known as Sarah, which means “princess.”

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<sup>1</sup> Abram means “exalted father”

## GOD MAKES A COVENANT

Abraham was at a loss to understand how God's promise that he would be the father of many could be fulfilled. For he had no children. One night God again revealed himself to Abraham. Leading him outside the tent, He said, "Abraham, look at the stars. Can you number them? So numerous shall your descendants be." And Abraham believed Yahweh and He "reckoned it to him as righteousness," the Bible tells us.

Then God made a covenant<sup>2</sup> with Abraham. God used a Babylonian ceremony known to Abraham as the most binding form for the making of a covenant. God instructed Abraham to take a three year old heifer, a three year old she-goat, a three year old ram, a turtle-dove and a young pigeon. Abraham killed the animals and divided each in two. But the birds he did not divide. Then he laid each half over against the other, leaving an alley-way wide enough for two to walk between the halves. When the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abraham and a horror of great darkness came upon him. "Know for a surety," God said to him, "that your seed shall move to another country where they shall be opposed for four hundred years; and also that nation will I judge. In the fourth generation they shall come back to this country with much property. For the iniquity of the Amorites (the inhabitants of Canaan) is not yet full," God added. Even the Amorites should have their day of grace—though they were misusing it. It was also promised that Abraham would die in peace at an old age.

When it was dark, Abraham saw a smoking furnace and a flaming torch passing through the alley-way between the pieces of animals on the ground. When two persons made a covenant with each other, they walked side by side between the halves of the slain animals. Here God alone passed between the halves, for He wanted to guarantee to Abraham the fulfillment of the promise. In that day Yahweh made a covenant with Abraham, saying, "Unto your seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates." God was building Abraham's faith.

## MORE GUARANTEES

The years passed and no son came. So Sarah proposed that Abraham take her slave girl, Hagar, as an additional wife. Hagar's son would legally be Sarah's son according to Babylonian law. Abraham did as Sarah told him, and Hagar bore a son called Ishmael. But this was not the fulfillment of God's promise. This was humanity trying to take matters into their own hands. It was sin.

When Abraham was ninety years old God again renewed His promise. It was difficult for Abraham to believe that Sarah would have a child in her old age. He thought Ishmael was the fulfillment of the promise. God did two things to assure him that Sarah's son would come in God's own time. He had changed both Abraham's and Sarah's names. God took the most prominent letter in His own name—יהוה (Yahweh/Jehovah)—and made it a part of their names—אַבְרָם to אַבְרָהָם (Abram to Abraham) and שָׂרַי to שָׂרָה (Sarai to Sarah). God thus impressed upon both Abraham and Sarah how close and unbreakable was the relation He had established between Himself and them and how assured they could be of the fulfillment of the promise. In giving him the name of Abraham God said, "I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you and kings shall come out of you."

## ISAAC IS BORN

Abraham's, and especially Sarah's faith, needed more strengthening before God could fulfill His promise. So the Lord and two angels visited Abraham at Mamre near Hebron in the southern part of the country, where Abraham had his headquarters. When Abraham saw the three men, he ran to meet them and invited them to stop and rest and have some refreshments.

While they were eating, the Lord said, "Next year about this time I will be back and then Sarah shall have a son. Sarah heard what the Lord said and laughed. It sounded impossible to her, because she was too old. The Lord asked why Sarah laughed, saying, "Is anything impossible for God?" She was

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<sup>2</sup> A covenant is a contract that guarantees the fulfillment of what has been promised.

afraid and answered, "I did not laugh." But the Lord said, "Yes, you laughed." Sarah needed the rebuke in order to make her believe that God was able to fulfill His promise. When the time came, Sarah's son was born and was called Isaac, which means "he laughs."

#### ABRAHAM PRAYS FOR LOST SINNERS

When the Lord and the two angels had finished their visit, they left for Sodom, and Abraham went with them. As they walked, the Lord said, "The cry over the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah has come to Me. I am going there to investigate, and if the report is true I will destroy these cities."

Abraham was deeply moved with pity for these people and, besides, his nephew Lot had by now settled in Sodom. So he said, "Will you destroy the righteous with the wicked? There may be fifty righteous in Sodom. Will you not spare the city for the sake of the fifty?" And the Lord promised to spare the city if He found fifty righteous in the place.

But Abraham knew the reputation of Sodom, and he was concerned. Fifty might be too high a number. There might be lacking five of the fifty. He said, "Will you not spare the city even if five be lacking?" And the Lord said He would.

However, the more Abraham thought of Sodom, the more concerned he became, and he continued to cut down the number until he came to ten. And the Lord promised to spare the city if He could find ten righteous.

But Sodom could not be saved. There were not ten righteous in the place. The Lord sent the two angels to bring out Lot and his family before the destruction came. They led them outside of the city and said, "Flee for your lives and do not stop to look behind you."

Then brimstone and fire rained from heaven and destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. The country sank and became a part of the Dead Sea. Since then, both in the Bible and in history, the two cities have become the symbol of the most godless wickedness.

During the destruction of the cities Lot's wife lingered on the road, stopping to watch what happened. The storm overtook her and covered her with sulphur till she became a pillar of sulphurous salt.

The next morning when Abraham looked from the western ridges toward the plain, he saw nothing but smoke. With a heavy heart he returned to his home at Mamre.

#### ABRAHAM FAITH IS TESTED

When Isaac was in his teens, God commanded Abraham to go to the land of Moriah and offer Isaac for a burnt offering on one of the mountains that God would show him. (Jerusalem and Golgotha were located in the land of Moriah. It seems reasonable to believe that God directed Abraham to the very spot where He Himself, hundreds of years later, gave His own Son to die on the cross for our sins.) We are not told of Abraham's struggle when he received the command. It must have been a terrible experience. His soul found peace in the assurance that God would raise Isaac from the dead.

Climbing the mountain, Isaac said, "Father, here are fire and wood, but where is the lamb for the sacrifice?" "God will provide it, my son," Abraham answered. We may assume that Abraham now told Isaac what God had commanded him to do. After unspeakable agonies, Isaac surrendered to the will of God. Fear seems to have been the most outstanding trait in Isaac's relation to God. Jacob called God the fear or dread of his father Isaac (Genesis 31:42). It must have been the terror of the Moriah altar that filled his soul with this fear. The experience may have been necessary in order that God might have the first place in his easy-going life.

They built the altar and got everything ready. When Abraham was at the point of sacrificing his son, a voice from heaven stopped him. The voice said, "Do not lay your hand upon the boy, for now I know that you fear God, seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me."

Something stirred in the bushes and Abraham saw a ram caught by his horns. He took the ram and sacrificed it in place of his son.

For the last time God now renewed the promise with Abraham. “By Myself have I sworn,” God said, “that in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you obeyed My voice.”

CATECHETICAL CONNECTION:

**As the head of the family should teach it in a simple way to his household**

***THE CLOSE OF THE COMMANDMENTS***

***What does God say about all these commandments?***

**He says, “I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep My commandments.” (Ex. 20:5–6)**

*What does this mean?* God threatens to punish all who break these commandments. Therefore, we should fear His wrath and not do anything against them. But He promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these commandments. Therefore, we should also love and trust in Him and gladly do what He commands.

Luther. (2017). [Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation](#) (p. 15). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

**Prayer:** We thank You, our God and Father in heaven, for Your obedient and faithful servants of old. Grant us to be obedient and faithful even when we have to do the hard things. Make us a blessing, O Lord, and create a willing spirit in all Your people to live to the glory of Your most holy name, even as you have taught us to pray: **Our Father, who art in heaven...**

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Reading for the Next Bible Class 19 May 2021:

- ➔ Genesis Chapters 24-33
- ➔ Third Petition

# “The God of Abraham Praise”

LSB 798 sts. 1–4, 9



1 The God of A - br'ham praise, Who reigns en - throned a - bove;  
2 The God of A - br'ham praise, At whose su - preme com - mand  
3 The God of A - br'ham praise, Whose all - suf - fi - cient grace  
4 He by Him - self has sworn; I on His oath de - pend.  
△ 9 The whole tri - um - phant host Give thanks to God on high.



An - cient of ev - er - last - ing days And God of love.  
From earth I rise and seek the joys At His right hand.  
Shall guide me all my pil - grim days In all my ways.  
I shall, on ea - gle wings up - borne, To heav'n as - cend.  
“Hail, Fa - ther, Son, and Ho - ly Ghost!” They ev - er cry.



Je - ho - vah, great I AM! By earth and heav'n con - fessed;  
I all on earth for - sake, Its wis - dom, fame, and pow'r,  
He deigns to call me friend; He calls Him - self my God.  
I shall be - hold His face; I shall His pow'r a - dore  
Hail, A - br'ham's God and mine! I join the heav'n - ly lays:



I bow and bless the sa - cred name For - ev - er blest.  
And Him my on - ly por - tion make, My shield and tow'r.  
And He shall save me to the end Through Je - sus' blood.  
And sing the won - ders of His grace For - ev - er - more.  
All might and maj - es - ty are Thine And end - less praise!

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