



Cowboy's Rest Summer 2023

No, our summer camp theme isn't about bug-eyed intruders from outer space. But close! This year we'll be challenging our campers to be in the world, but "not of the world." (John 17:16) Focusing on the story of Abraham, who was "an alien in the land of promise," (Hebrews 11:9), we'll be reminding the students that we too are called to live as "strangers and exiles on the earth." (Hebrews 11:13) As Christians, we have an identity, a future and a mission that set us apart from the world and its lusts. Our Lord calls us to be so different, so counter-cultural, that while we may not have tentacles and ray-guns, we almost might as well. So, that's what this year's theme is all about. Now let the invasion begin!

Dear Camp Pastor/Teacher

In looking at the session assignments for this curriculum a couple of small changes will need to be made for scheduling of sessions in the high school camps.

- 1. In the original schedule from nearly 20 years ago there were some break-out seminars rather than a session for Thursday Morning. This will not be the case in 2023.*
- 2. To deal with this session add the suggestion is to add a session maybe titled the Confirmation of the Promise using Genesis 18 before the session titled The Caution to All Aliens.*

The alien theme can be augmented by our understanding of immigrant issues in our country.

- 1. Immigrants usually blend into the circumstances they find themselves in to the extent necessary to survive economically.*
- 2. Immigrants often "colonize" in an area settling close together for mutual aid and support.*
- 3. Immigrant populations often grow in neighborhoods over time.*
- 4. Immigrants have to deal with language, social, cultural, and religious differences in the dominate culture of the area.*

We are confident that you are capable of putting together lessons that will be faithful to the texts and helpful to the students that attend the camp. The commentary below on the session outlines we hope will be helpful in getting you thinking about the text of the lessons and are designed as just that. Because two decades have passed since this material was written feel free to update your commentary and teaching accordingly. However, the case that we are aliens, sojourners, pilgrims, and strangers in this world certainly has not gotten more difficult to make.

Thank you so much for agreeing to come and share your heart with our campers. May God's richest blessings be on you.

Cowboys Rest



Camper Memory Verses 2023

taken from Hebrews 11 (NIV)

TUESDAY

¹Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. ²This is what the ancients were commended for. ³By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. ⁸By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

WEDNESDAY

⁹By faith he made his home in the Promised Land like an alien in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹By 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. ¹²And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

THURSDAY

¹³All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. ¹⁴People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

FRIDAY

¹⁷By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, ¹⁸even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." ¹⁹Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

5-Day Teaching Schedule

MONDAY EVENING: THE CALL OF AN ALIEN

Key Texts: Genesis 11:26-12:8, Acts 7:2-8, II Corinthians 6:17-7:1, Hebrews 11:8-10

Key Events: God calls Abram out of Ur and Haran to the Promised Land.

TUESDAY MORNING: THE CHOICES OF AN ALIEN

Key Texts: Genesis 12:9-13:18, Luke 12:29-31, Colossians 3:1-4, Hebrews 11:13-16, Hebrews 13:14

Key Events: Lot chooses pasture land by worldly standards while Abram relies on God.

TUESDAY EVENING: THE CONSEQUENCES FOR AN ALIEN

Key Texts: Genesis 14-15, II Peter 2:18-22, I John 2:15-17

Key Events: Lot is taken captive, but Abram rescues him and receives further promises.

WEDNESDAY MORNING: THE COMPROMISE OF AN ALIEN

Key Texts: Genesis 16-17, Isaiah 40:31, Isaiah 55:8-9, Isaiah 64:4

Key Events: Abram and Sarai try to do God's work for Him. Ishmael is born.

WEDNESDAY EVENING: THE CAUTION TO ALL ALIENS

Key Texts: Genesis 18-19, Galatians 6:7-8, James 4:3-4, I Peter 2:11-12, II Peter 2:6-9

Key Events: Lot's attempts to befriend the world end in tragedy for his entire family.

THURSDAY MORNING: THE COMPLETION OF THE PROMISE TO AN ALIEN

Key Texts: Genesis 20-21, Mark 10:27, Romans 4:18-22, Hebrews 11:11-12

Key Events: God works the impossible and keeps His promise of an heir.

THURSDAY EVENING: THE COMPLIANCE OF AN ALIEN (Decision Night)

Key Texts: Genesis 22:1-19, John 1:29, Hebrews 11:17-19, James 2:21-22

Key Events: Abraham surrenders all, but God provides the sacrifice.

FRIDAY MORNING: THE CONCLUSION OF AN ALIEN'S MISSION

Key Texts: Genesis 22:20-25:11, Romans 4:16-17, Galatians 3:6-9, James 2:23

Key Events: Abraham lives a full life and is remembered as a friend of God.

6-Day Teaching Schedule (Youth Camps)

MONDAY EVENING: THE CALL OF AN ALIEN

Key Texts: Genesis 11:26-12:8, Acts 7:2-8, II Corinthians 6:17-7:1, Hebrews 11:8-10

Key Events: God calls Abram out of Ur and Haran to the Promised Land.

TUESDAY MORNING: THE CHOICES OF AN ALIEN

Key Texts: Genesis 12:9-13:18, Luke 12:29-31, Colossians 3:1-4, Hebrews 11:13-16, Hebrews 13:14

Key Events: Lot chooses pasture land by worldly standards while Abram relies on God.

TUESDAY EVENING: THE CONSEQUENCES FOR AN ALIEN

Key Texts: Genesis 14-15, II Peter 2:18-22, I John 2:15-17

Key Events: Lot is taken captive, but Abram rescues him and receives further promises.

WEDNESDAY MORNING: THE COMPROMISE OF AN ALIEN

Key Texts: Genesis 16-17, Isaiah 40:31, Isaiah 55:8-9, Isaiah 64:4

Key Events: Abram and Sarai try to do God's work for Him. Ishmael is born.

WEDNESDAY EVENING: THE COVENANT WITH AN ALIEN

Key Texts: Genesis 17, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Romans 4, Hebrews 8:16-9:15

Key Events: God's promise to Abraham foreshadows His wonderful New Covenant with us.

THURSDAY MORNING: THE CONFIRMATION OF THE PROMISE

Key Texts: Genesis 18:1-15

THURSDAY EVENING: THE CAUTION TO ALL ALIENS

Key Texts: Genesis 18-19, Galatians 6:7-8, James 4:3-4, I Peter 2:11-12, II Peter 2:6-9

Key Events: Lot's attempts to befriend the world end in tragedy for his entire family.

FRIDAY MORNING: THE COMPLETION OF THE PROMISE TO AN ALIEN

Key Texts: Genesis 20-21, Mark 10:27, Romans 4:18-22, Hebrews 11:11-12

Key Events: God works the impossible and keeps His promise of an heir.

FRIDAY EVENING: THE COMPLIANCE OF AN ALIEN (Decision Night)

Key Texts: Genesis 22:1-19, John 1:29, Hebrews 11:17-19, James 2:21-22

Key Events: Abraham surrenders all, but God provides the sacrifice.

SATURDAY MORNING: THE CONCLUSION OF AN ALIEN'S MISSION

Key Texts: Genesis 22:20-25:11, Romans 4:16-17, Galatians 3:6-9, James 2:23

Key Events: Abraham lives a full life and is remembered as a friend of God.

SESSION ONE: THE CALL OF AN ALIEN

Key Texts: Genesis 11:26-12:8, Acts 7:2-8, Hebrews 11:8-10, II Corinthians 6:17-7:1

“We’re going and I’m never knowing, never knowing where we’re going. To go back to where I was would just be wrong. I’m pressing on.” -- Relient K

Have you ever watched the zany sitcom *Third Rock from the Sun*? The show follows the misadventures of four aliens sent to live on Earth who try to pose as a “normal” human family. Of course, they don’t exactly blend in with the native people of Earth and hilarity ensues. (If available, and you would like to, show an appropriate clip from the pilot episode.)

The Bible tells the story of another family who stood out as aliens in a strange land. It’s the story of Abram and Sarai, and it’s found in the book of Genesis. When we first meet this couple they are living in the ancient city of Ur, somewhere near the Persian Gulf. Archaeology tells us that during this period (ca. the 21st century BC), Ur was a thriving center of commerce, art, and culture. In fact, its towering ziggurat was renowned throughout the ancient world. Unfortunately, the city was also the headquarters for the worship of a pagan moon goddess. The people of the land, including Abram’s family, had turned their back on God Most High and were worshipping idols of their own making. (Josh. 24:2)

Then comes The Call. While Abram is still living amidst the impotent idolatry of Ur, the all-powerful God of glory appears to him with a very specific message (Acts 7:2, Gen. 15:7). The LORD says, “Go forth from your country, and from your relatives, and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you...” (Gen. 12:1). In other words, “Hey Abram, I’m God and I want you to kiss your life in Ur goodbye and take off on a 1,500-mile journey for the land of ... well, actually, I’m not going to tell you your destination ‘til you get there. Sound like fun?”

Okay, maybe God didn’t come off as quite that flippant, but His command is still pretty crazy by worldly standards. Yet, with an extreme command comes an extreme promise. “And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless the one who blesses you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Gen. 12:2-3) Of course, the most extreme part of it all is that Abram obeys this command ... eventually.

Abram does say goodbye to the comfy but empty lifestyle of Ur. He does pack up all his earthly possessions and saddles up his family. And he does set out for God-Only-Knows-Where. Unfortunately, he only makes it halfway.

Genesis 11:27-32 records how Abram’s mini-caravan is delayed in Haran. You see, Abram had brought along his wife, Sarai, his nephew, Lot, and his aging father, Terah. For some reason, when this group reaches the oasis city of Haran they decide to take a little break from traveling ... a little break that lasts about fifteen years. Maybe it’s the fact that after Haran a vast desert lies across their path. Maybe it’s the fact that although Terah originally intended to go all the way to Canaan (Gen. 11:31), he is now too weak to press on any further. We don’t know for certain. What we do know is that in Haran, Abram’s obedience to God’s call is put on hold ... for a very long time.

Eventually, Terah passes away, and after burying his father, Abram finally resumes his journey toward the mysterious destination (Acts 7:4). Perhaps Genesis 12:1-3 takes place here and is God’s re-affirmation of His earlier call to Abram. Or perhaps God spoke only once to Abram, the first time while he was in Ur. Once again, we don’t really know. However, we do know that Abram is 75 years old when he finally sucks it up and moves on from Haran, crossing the desert and heading south.

Finally, after what must have been a long and grueling journey through a hostile country, Abram enters a land called Canaan and camps out near a city named Shechem. It’s a pretty

good country, all things considered. There's pastureland for Abram's rapidly growing flocks, and the fertile Jordan River is close by. 'Course, the land's not exactly empty. "The Canaanite was then in the land," (Gen. 12:6) and these warlike people in their fortified cities probably looked with suspicion and contempt upon the vagrants from Mesopotamia living in their quaint little tents.

Nonetheless, it's while Abram is camping near Shechem that God speaks to him in what may be the first time in fifteen years. And now that Abram has finally obeyed, God expands upon His earlier promise. "To your descendants I will give this land," God claims (Gen. 12:7), and in this one simple statement He says so very much. Not only does He tell Abram, "This is it! This is God-Only-Knows-Where which shall henceforth be known as The Promised Land." Not only does He reassure Abram that the seemingly invincible Canaanites won't be able to hinder His divine plans. God also reminds the childless septuagenarian that, hey, one of these days you're going to have a kid.

And Abram's response is beautiful. He builds an altar and bows in reverence to the One who makes the promise. Newly arrived and nearly alone in a strange land with strange customs, Abram's first recorded act is to worship the LORD. After a long journey and a longer delay, his obedience is finally complete. The Call has been answered. But the blessings, and the adventure, have just begun.

So what does this 4,100-year-old story have to say to us in the 21st century AD? Well, just as the LORD once commanded Abram to leave his pagan way of life behind and follow, so He calls us to be separated out of this world and live for Him. Like the location of the Promised Land, the specifics of God's plan for our lives may not be revealed upfront. But His call for us to leave the passions and pursuits of this world behind is clear and undeniable. Some of us are like young Abram in Ur. We need to hear the call for the first time and take action. Others are stalled in Haran, halfway between the old, worldly life and the promised land of sanctified living. We need to ask ourselves, what is my Terah? What needs to die in my life before I experience complete obedience? In either case, God has promised us an awesome inheritance and a great adventure if we will only step out in faith and live as aliens for Him. Will you answer His call this week?

SESSION TWO: THE CHOICES OF AN ALIEN

Key Texts: Genesis 12:9-13:18, Hebrews 11:13-16, Hebrews 13:14, Colossians 3:1-4, Luke 12:29-31

How does an alien live? Who do they hang out with? What do they buy? What kind of movies do they watch? Is their life really that different from those around them? These are questions that Christians young and old must wrestle with. And they are the same kind of decisions that Abram had to make in his day. Let's see how his lifestyle choices reflect his progress as an alien in Genesis chapters 12 and 13.

When adversity comes into Abram's life in the form of a famine, he chooses to seek help from Egypt (i.e. the world) without waiting for instructions from God. The consequences of this choice are nearly disastrous as Abram allows Pharaoh to take Sarai as his wife and thereby places the LORD's promise of an heir in jeopardy.

Later, when faced with another crisis of limited resources back in Canaan, Abram wisely relies on God and lets the LORD make the decisions. Although Abram has the right of first choice in pasture land, he allows his nephew Lot to choose. Whereas Lot selects grazing grounds with his eyes and his ambition, Abram is longing for a heavenly country, and so trusts in God to provide his earthly needs. The LORD rewards Abram's loose hold on the things of earth with the promise that one day all the land will belong to his descendants anyway.

As aliens, we too are called to let go of the things of this world and set our minds on the things above. Our lifestyle should be a stark contrast to the materialism and selfishness we see all around us. And God has promised that when we seek His kingdom first, everything else will fall into place. He gives His best to those who leave the choice to Him.

SESSION THREE: THE CONSEQUENCES FOR AN ALIEN

Key Texts: Genesis 14-15, II Peter 2:18-22, I John 2:15-17

The last session saw both Abram and Lot make choices about the direction in which their lives were headed. In this session, we begin to witness the consequences of these decisions. Lot, who chose by earthly standards and “pitched his tent toward Sodom,” soon finds himself living in the midst of this wicked city and growing entangled in its affairs. His captivity with worldly wealth soon leads to literal captivity when the armies of four Mesopotamian kings sack the city and take him hostage. His predicament is similar to that of the carnal Christian: although he has been set free from the power of sin, he foolishly “returns to his vomit” and is enslaved by iniquity once again (II Peter 2:22).

Abram, on the other hand, serves as an example of the wonderful freedom and blessing that come when we live only for the things above. Having already received God’s promise of future blessings, the peace-loving shepherd goes on to experience a very immediate miracle when he routs the Mesopotamian army with the help of only 318 men and one Most High God. The lesson for us is this: aliens are not pansies, and when the LORD is fighting the battles for them, look out!

Abram continues to model an alien’s utter dependence upon God when he tithes ten percent of the spoils of battle to Melchizedek the priest, and when he refuses to keep the remainder of this reward and returns it to the king of Sodom. Finally, Abram receives another promise from God that, although he forfeited Sodom’s treasures, his “reward shall be very great,” and his descendants shall be like the stars in the sky. (Gen. 15:1) As Abram’s life shows, an alien’s decisions may often seem foolish in the eyes of this world, but the consequences are simply heavenly.

SESSION FOUR: THE COMPROMISE OF AN ALIEN

Key Texts: Genesis 16, Isaiah 40:31, Isaiah 55:8-9, Isaiah 64:4

More than ten years have passed since God promised to make Abram a great nation, and still, he and his wife are childless. Well Sarai, for one, is sick of waiting. Probably figuring that “God helps those who help themselves,” she gives her maid Hagar to Abram as a surrogate wife in order to produce an heir. A son is born, but God makes it clear that Ishmael is not the promised child of the covenant. (Gen. 17:21) Indeed, Ishmael will bring nothing but trouble upon the other descendants of Abram, and the two lineages will always be at odds with each other. Still, God graciously blesses Ishmael and his mother, especially when Sarai treats them poorly. The LORD’s sovereign will cannot be undone, even when his servants screw up royally.

As aliens, we also need to remember that God is not bound by our timetables and limitations -- whether biological, economic, or social. He helps those who wait for His help, and His ways are definitely not our ways. Only as we start to break free from our instant gratification culture and learn to wait upon God will we ever lead a life that is truly out of this world.

SESSION FIVE: THE COVENANT WITH AN ALIEN

(Youth Camp Only)

Key Texts: Genesis 17, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Romans 4, Hebrews 8:16-9:15

God's covenant with Abram is not revealed all at once, nor is it an easy relationship to understand. However, it is rich with Messianic imagery and chock-full of applications for Christians living under the New Covenant today. Thus, this session will attempt to trace the development of the Abrahamic Covenant from God's initial call right up to the birth of Isaac.

The very first hint of a covenant between God and Abram is found in **Genesis 12** when God promises to bless Abram and make him a great nation if he will "go forth" from his father's house. One very interesting clause of God's promise is that through Abram all the nations of the earth will be blessed. The Apostle Paul shows us how this is fulfilled in Christ Jesus, Abram's ancestor, who made it possible for all people to be justified by faith (Galatians 3:6-9).

The next step in the covenant comes when Abram obeys God and arrives in the Promised Land. In **chapters 12 and 13**, the LORD promises that He will give the entire land to Abram's descendants who will be as numerous as the dust of the earth. It is interesting that both of these promises come shortly after Abram has separated from someone (first his father's household, then Lot). We too must be separated from this world in order to begin a relationship with God and claim His promises.

In **chapter 15** we find the first official statement of the Abrahamic Covenant when God appears to Abram after his defeat of the Mesopotamians. Although the elderly wanderer has no children, he believes in the LORD and His promise of innumerable descendants, and this belief is credited to him as righteousness. However, God is not content with a mere prediction on His part. He commands Abram to sacrifice several animals and then makes a blood covenant with him, guaranteeing that the twin promises of offspring and land will both come to pass.

Just as God's covenant with Abram required faith on the nomad's part, so His new covenant is entered into by faith on our part. And just as Abram was justified or declared righteous by his faith, so we follow in his footsteps when we admit that there is nothing we can do to earn salvation, and simply trust in God for the righteousness that comes through faith alone (Romans 3:21-24).

Another interesting parallel between God's pledge to Abram and His New Covenant with us is that both are sealed with blood. However, whereas Abram had to provide the sacrifices for the original covenant himself, God has sealed the New Covenant with His own blood (Luke 22:20). Jesus' atoning work on the cross guarantees us both cleansing and blessing far better than the blood of any goat or calf could (Hebrews 9:11-14).

But let's press on, for God's covenant with Abram is not yet complete. Fourteen years after the events of Genesis 15, God reaffirms His promises, this time with a physical requirement on Abram's part. **Genesis 17** recounts how God institutes the sign of circumcision as a symbol of His everlasting covenant with Abram's descendants. Oh, and we've got to stop calling him Abram, because God now changes his name to Abraham ("Father of Many"), and Sarai's name to Sarah ("Princess").

So, how do these developments parallel the New Covenant that we now enjoy? Well, first of all, the idea of circumcision doesn't just relate to the body. Yes, God's intention in Genesis 17 was for His covenant to be in Abraham's flesh (17:13). However, His purpose with the New Covenant is that it would be written on our hearts (Jer. 31:33). So, the circumcision of the New Covenant is a circumcision of the heart. It's a cutting away of all that is not God's and dedication of the entire life to Him (Deut. 30:6, Romans 2:8-9). Each of us must be circumcised in our hearts *daily* as we crucify our fleshly nature and put on the new self (Gal. 5:25, Col. 3:10).

Speaking of new selves, just as Abraham and Sarah received new identities when they entered into a covenant with God, so we too become new people when we are reconciled to God through Christ (II Cor. 5:17). We don't just "clean up our acts" or "get it together." No, we are transformed into brand new, holy, unearthly (dare I say "extraterrestrial?") beings. In short, we are made into what we were created to be.

Wow, so that got a little long-winded. Anyway, the point is, there are a lot of similarities between God's covenant with Abraham and His covenant with us. And just as surely as He fulfilled His pledges to Abraham, so He will keep His promises to us.

But can you imagine what it must have been like for Abraham those 25-plus years before the birth of Isaac, receiving all these promises of infinite descendants and still having no child to claim them through? We know from Genesis 17:17-18 that at this point his faith has begun to waver. He certainly doesn't understand how a 90-year-old woman and a century-old man can have a child. But God is not put off by Abraham's incredulity. In fact, He comes down to reaffirm His promises personally, and He brings with Him both great news and terrible news...

SESSION SIX: THE CONFIRMATION OF THE PROMISE TO AN ALIEN **(Youth Camp Only)**

Key Texts: Genesis 18 For the shorter camps, this text is merged with the next lesson and is of a more secondary importance.

One afternoon in Abraham's 99th year, three travelers visit his camp ... three travelers who just happen to be the LORD and two angels. Their announcement that the waiting is almost over and that Sarah will bear a son within a year is met not with joyous praise but with cynical laughter. Nevertheless, the LORD assures the couple that His promise shall be fulfilled. Then, as He and Abraham walk away from the camp, God reveals some very troubling news: He's planning to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah due to their "exceedingly grave" sin (Gen. 18:20). In a surprising and compassionate move, Abraham humbly "haggles" with God for the lives of the men and women of the plain, asking Him to spare them if just ten righteous people can be found.

While Abraham and Sarah are given a date with a promise here in Genesis 18 it is hard for them to believe that now after they are so old that they would have a child. Even though this has been the promise from the call Sarah laughs at the prospect. It must have been a cynical laugh because the Lord reacts to it. Sarah here represents us when we fail to believe and act on the promises God has given us in His Word.

Abraham also bargains with God regarding the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah and negotiates with God regarding how few righteous people it will take to spare the destruction of these two cities.

SESSION SEVEN: THE CAUTION TO ALL ALIENS

Key Texts: Genesis 18-19, Galatians 6:7-8, James 4:3-4, I Peter 2:11-12, II Peter 2:6-9

One afternoon in Abraham's 99th year, three travelers visit his camp ... three travelers who just happen to be the LORD and two angels. Their announcement that the waiting is almost over and that Sarah will bear a son within a year is met not with joyous praise but with cynical laughter. Nevertheless, the LORD assures the couple that His promise shall be fulfilled. Then, as He and Abraham walk away from the camp, God reveals some very troubling news: He's planning to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah due to their "exceedingly grave" sin (Gen. 18:20). In a surprising and compassionate move, Abraham humbly "haggles" with God for the

lives of the men and women of the plain, asking Him to spare them if just ten righteous people can be found.

The two angels meanwhile make their way into Sodom where they encounter the gross immorality of the place firsthand. They also witness the pathetic impotence of a lone “righteous” man trying so hard to befriend this world. Lot is supposedly a leader in the community, but when he finally speaks up for the most basic standard of morality and decency, he is met only with ridicule and the threat of violence from his neighbors. Like some of us, Lot has sold out to the world, and now his witness is a joke at best. So deep is his enthrallment with earthly things that even after the men of Sodom try to kill him (or worse), Lot still hesitates to leave the doomed city. Ultimately, he and his family have to be physically dragged away from both their folly and the fiery ruin that descends upon it. Lot’s wife perishes when she fails to heed the angels’ warning and looks back upon her beloved city. Lot and his daughters, on the other hand, are eventually saved, though “as through fire.” (1 Cor. 3:15) However, the remainder of their lives will be plagued by fear, depravity, and futility.

So how does this tragic story speak to aliens today? Well, in a number of ways. First, we can learn a lot from the prayerful example of Abraham. Although he knew how wicked Sodom was, he still pleaded with the LORD to spare it. He “stood in the gap” before God (Ezek. 22:30), and as a direct result of his prayers, at least three people were saved. (Gen. 19:29) Will we likewise commit to pray for our schools and workplaces? Though there be less than ten righteous people there, will we love our peers and co-workers anyway?

Next, the account of Sodom and Gomorrah is a sobering reminder that sin will not go unpunished. When the prevailing philosophy of the day is “if it feels good do it,” this story of broken absolutes and resulting judgment is one that all of us need to meditate on. Perhaps this would be an opportune time to divide up the guys and the girls and focus specifically on the issue of sexual sin and its insidious consequences, both short and long-term. Our society is not far from Sodom when it comes to promiscuity and licentiousness, and a reminder of God’s standard of purity for His children is long overdue.

Finally, this story serves as an admonition to all Christians to never look back. By God’s grace, we have been saved from the death that is slavery to sin. To try to befriend the evil system of this world is to voluntarily return to our captivity and to take sides against our Savior. Let us turn our back on this world and press on as strangers and sojourners. If Christ has set us free, then let us be free indeed! (John 8:36)

SESSION EIGHT: THE COMPLETION OF THE PROMISE TO AN ALIEN

Key Texts: Genesis 20-21, Mark 10:27, Romans 4:18-22, Hebrews 11:11-12

At long last, God’s promise to Abraham is fulfilled. Approximately thirty years after making the initial pledge in Ur, the LORD does “for Sarah as He had promised” and the chosen heir is born. Nothing can stop God’s sovereign will from being accomplished, not the couple’s impossible age, not Sarah’s barren womb, not even Abraham’s “last minute” stupidity in Gerar. (Gen. 20) “What God had promised, he [is] able to perform,” and perform it He does on the joyous birthday of Isaac (Rom. 4:21).

So too in our lives, God has made promises that we can count on Him to keep. He has vowed to provide for His children, to discipline us, to keep us from the evil one, and to return and retrieve us someday, just to name a few. As aliens, all our hopes rest in the faithfulness of our God. Do we really believe that “He who promised is faithful?” (Hebrews 10:23) Do we really believe that He has something better than this world in store for us? LORD, grant us the faith to believe your promises ... and then to live like it.

SESSION NINE: THE COMPLIANCE OF AN ALIEN

(Decision Night)

Key Texts: Genesis 22:1-19, John 1:29, Hebrews 11:17-19, James 2:21-22

“I want a faith like that, to see the dead rise, or to see You pass by. I want a faith like that. Whatever the cost, I’ll suffer the loss. I want a faith like that.” -- Jonah 33

In the last session, we talked a lot about an alien’s faith in God’s promises. But what does that faith really look like? How does it translate into action? To what extremes of obedience will it go? The answer to all of these questions is found in a single image from Genesis 22: a wind-swept peak in the land of Moriah, a trembling Isaac tied to an altar, a stone-faced Abraham, knife upraised. *This* is faith in action. *This* is the complete surrender of an alien, the total abandonment of the ways and wisdom of this world.

Think about it. *God* had promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and the dust of the earth. *God* had specifically spelled out that through Isaac these descendants would be named (Gen. 17:19, 21:12). *God* had worked an amazing miracle in the bodies of Abraham and Sarah to bring forth His chosen heir of the covenant. And now *God* is ordering Abraham to sacrifice this child of promise, to kill his one and only beloved son. It doesn’t make sense! It’s cruel and barbaric! It completely invalidates the last 40 years of faithful waiting! And yet, here is Abraham, knife in hand, ready to strike. God commanded it. And Abraham is going to do it.

You see, Abraham’s faith has been ‘*perfected*’ to the point that whatever the LORD asks of him, no matter how painful, he is ready to complete it (James 2:21). He trusts God absolutely. There is no sacrifice he will not make, no separation he will not undergo. It doesn’t matter that this command makes no earthly sense. God can raise the dead. And even if He doesn’t, His ways are not Abraham’s ways. He is the LORD, and Abraham is His servant.

The above is not intended to paint Abraham in a perfect light. He is still human after all, and faith is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8). But this account is meant to make us ask, “Do I have faith like that? Am I ready to follow God wherever He leads? Am I willing to give up anything and everything to obey Him?” And that’s exactly what living as an alien is all about. It means letting go of the crap of this world and finding our meaning, our inheritance, our *everything* in Him.

Of course, the story doesn’t end with the freeze-frame of verse 10. The angel of the LORD intervenes at the last possible second and reveals that this is all a test of Abraham’s reverence and obedience to God. Then Abraham discovers a ram caught in a nearby thicket and gratefully sacrifices it in the place of his son. This last event beautifully points ahead to another substitutionary sacrifice made on a mountain in the land of Moriah some 2,000 years later. On that day, the LORD once again provided a sacrifice: Himself. And on that day, an only begotten Son, beloved by His Father, was indeed offered up.

So, as we close our second-to-last session together, there’s a few questions we need to ask ourselves. First, have I accepted that awesome sacrifice on my behalf? Have I believed on the LORD Jesus Christ and confessed Him as the LORD of my life? Have I asked Him to transform me into the new, godly person that He created me to be?

And second, if I have, then am I becoming that new person more and more each day? Am I being conformed to the image of Christ? Or is there something holding me back? Is there something in my life -- a goal, a relationship, a possession -- that I am unwilling to offer up on the altar of surrender? Is my faith too small to believe that the LORD will provide for me if I sacrifice everything? Is there something I need to give to Him right now?

Let us consider these questions prayerfully. Then, like Abraham, let us put our faith into action.

SESSION TEN: THE CONCLUSION OF AN ALIEN'S MISSION

Key Texts: Genesis 22:20-25:11, Romans 4:16-17, Galatians 3:6-9, James 2:23

The latter years of Abraham's life are just as busy and blessed as his earlier ones. Genesis chapters 21-25 recount how the aging patriarch makes a covenant with the ruler Abimelech, bids farewell to his beloved Sarah, arranges a marriage for his son Isaac, marries a woman named Keturah, and fathers six more sons ... all after the age of 100! While we don't have time to dwell on each of these events during this session, we can pause to learn a few things from the nuptials of Isaac and Rebekah.

First, it's interesting that Abraham insisted that his servant find a wife for Isaac outside of the land of Canaan. An alien to the end, Abraham feared the corruption of the Canaanite religions and refused to let his son marry a daughter of the land. So too should Christians be wary of close relationships with non-believers. Be it business partnerships or marriages, the dangers of becoming unequally yoked are just as real now as they were in Abraham's day. (II Cor. 6:14-16)

Next, it's exciting for all Christian singles to note that God had a specific spouse picked out for Isaac in advance. And what a spouse she turned out to be. Not only was Rebekah "very beautiful" and a virgin, but she had a tireless servant's heart to boot. And who doesn't feel just a twinge of romance in Genesis 24:67 when Isaac meets and marries his bride and *then* discovers that he loves her? The entire story is an example of how wonderful arranged marriages can be ... divinely arranged that is.

Ultimately, though, our focus remains on Abraham, and the narrative returns to our protagonist one last time ... in order to record his death. At the extremely "ripe old age" of 175, Abraham breathes his last, having been blessed by the LORD in every way (Gen. 24:1). Not only is Abraham's faithfulness rewarded with great material blessings in this life, but with eternal rewards in the next. And ultimately, when Christ reconciles all things to the Father, Abraham the alien finally finds the country that he has searched for all his life. Abraham the wanderer finally makes it home.

Of course, Abraham's legacy continues on in the Scriptures long after he has left the earthly scene. He has the unique honor of being the only man in the Old Testament to be called the "friend of God" (James 2:23). Indeed, the LORD Himself was not ashamed to bestow this title upon him (Isaiah 41:8). Through our obedience to Christ, may we too aspire to such a close relationship with our Creator (John 15:14).

Abraham's legacy also lives on in each of us when we trust in Jesus for salvation. The Apostle Paul makes it clear that the old nomad is the father of all who believe (Rom. 4:16-17, Gal. 3:6-9). The righteousness of Abraham is the righteousness that comes through faith, and it is this righteousness that Christians all over the world are now both experiencing and awaiting (Rom. 4:24).

You know, it's pretty amazing that we're still talking about someone who lived over 4,000 years ago. And one of the reasons that Abraham is still remembered today is because his life was so radically different from the world around him. He took God at His Word. He let go of the things of earth. And as a result, in his quiet, unassuming way, he changed the world forever.

Will the same be said of you?