

# The Covenant *With* Abraham



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Genesis 15–19:29; Rom. 4:3, 4, 9, 22; Gal. 4:21–31; Rom 4:11; Rom. 9:9; Amos 4:11.*

**Memory Text:** “But Abram said, ‘Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’” (*Genesis 15:2, NKJV*).

**W**ith Genesis 15, we come to the crucial moment when God formalizes His covenant with Abraham. The Abrahamic covenant is the second covenant, after the covenant with Noah.

Like Noah’s covenant, Abraham’s covenant involves other nations, as well, for ultimately, the covenant with Abraham is part of the everlasting covenant, which is offered to all humanity (*Gen. 17:7, Heb. 13:20*).

This episode of Abraham’s life is full of fear and laughter. Abram is afraid (*Gen. 15:1*), as are Sarah (*Gen. 18:15*) and Hagar (*Gen. 21:17*). Abram laughs (*Gen. 17:17*), and Sarah (*Gen. 18:12*), and Ishmael, too (*Gen. 21:9, ESV*). These chapters resonate with human sensitivity and warmth. Abram is passionate about the salvation of the wicked Sodomites; he is caring toward Sarah, Hagar, and Lot; and he is hospitable toward the three foreigners (*Gen. 18:2–6*).

It is in this context that Abram, whose name implies nobility and respectability, will have his name changed into Abraham, which means “father of many nations” (*Gen. 17:5*). Thus, we see here more hints of the universal nature of what God plans to do through His covenant with Abraham.

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 14.

## The Faith of Abraham

**Read** Genesis 15:1–21 and Romans 4:3, 4, 9, 22. How does Abram reveal what it means to live by faith? What is the meaning of the sacrifice that God had Abram perform?

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God’s first response to Abram’s concern about an heir (*Gen. 15:1–3*) is that he will have a son from his “own body” (*Gen. 15:4, NKJV*). The same language is used by the prophet Nathan to refer to the seed of the future Messianic King (*2 Sam. 7:12*). Abram was reassured and “believed in the LORD” (*Gen. 15:6*), because he understood that the fulfillment of God’s promise depended not on his own righteousness but on God’s (*Gen. 15:6; compare with Rom. 4:5, 6*).

This notion is extraordinary, especially in that culture. In the religion of the ancient Egyptians, for instance, judgment was made on the basis of counting one’s human works of righteousness against the righteousness of the goddess Maat, who represented divine righteousness. In short, you had to earn “salvation.”

God then sets up a sacrificial ceremony for Abram to perform. Basically, the sacrifice points to Christ’s death for our sins. Humans are saved by grace, the gift of God’s righteousness, symbolized by these sacrifices. But this particular ceremony conveys specific messages for Abram. The preying of the vultures on the sacrificial animals (*Gen. 15:9–11*) means that Abram’s descendants will suffer slavery for a period of “ ‘four hundred years’ ” (*Gen. 15:13*), or four generations (*Gen. 15:16*). Then in the fourth generation, Abram’s descendants “ ‘shall return here’ ” (*Gen. 15:16, NKJV*).

The last scene of the sacrificial ceremony is dramatic: “a burning torch that passed between those pieces” (*Gen. 15:17, NKJV*). This extraordinary wonder signifies God’s commitment to fulfill His covenant promise of giving land to Abram’s descendants (*Gen. 15:18*).

The boundaries of this Promised Land, “ ‘from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates’ ” (*Gen. 15:18, NKJV*) remind us of the boundaries of the Garden of Eden (*compare with Gen. 2:13, 14*). This prophecy has, therefore, more in view than just the Exodus and a homeland for Israel. On the distant horizon of this prophecy, in Abraham’s descendants taking the country of Canaan, looms the idea of the end-time salvation of God’s people, who will return to the Garden of Eden.

**How can we learn to keep focused on Christ and His righteousness as our only hope of salvation? What happens if we try to start counting up our good works?**

## Abraham's Doubts

**Read** Genesis 16:1–16. What is the significance of Abram's decision to go with Hagar, even despite God's promise to him? How do the two women represent two attitudes of faith (*Gal. 4:21–31*)?

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When Abram doubted (*Gen. 15:2*), God unambiguously reassured him that he would have a son. Years later, Abram is still without a son. Even after God's last powerful prophecy, Abram seems to have lost his faith: he does not believe anymore that it will be possible for him to have a son with Sarai. Sarai, feeling hopeless, takes the initiative and urges him to resort to a common practice of that time in the ancient Near East: take a surrogate. Hagar, Sarai's servant, is appointed for this service. The system works. Ironically, this human strategy seemed more efficient than did faith in God's promises.

The passage describing Sarai's relation to Abram echoes the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The two texts share a number of common motifs (Sarai, like Eve, is active; Abram, like Adam, is passive) and share common verbs and phrases ("heed the voice," "take," and "give"). This parallel between the two stories implies God's disapproval of this course of action.

The apostle Paul refers to this story to make his point about works versus grace (*Gal. 4:23–26*). In both accounts, the result is the same: the immediate reward of human work outside the will of God leads to future troubles. Note that God is absent during the whole course of action. Sarai speaks about God but never speaks to Him; nor does God speak to either of them. This absence of God is striking, especially after the intense presence of God in the previous chapter.

God then appears to Hagar but only after she has left the house of Abram. This unexpected appearance discloses God's presence in spite of human attempts to work without Him. The reference to "the Angel of the LORD" (*Gen. 16:7, NKJV*) is a title that is often identified with the LORD, *YHWH* (see *Gen. 18:1, 13, 22*). This time it is God who takes the initiative and announces to Hagar that she will give birth to a son, Ishmael, whose name means God hears (*Gen. 16:11*). Ironically, the story, which ends with the idea of hearing (*shama'*), echoes the hearing at the beginning of the story, when Abram "heeded" (*shama'*) the voice of Sarai (*Gen. 16:2*).

**Why is it so easy for us to have the same lack of faith that Abram had here?**

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## The Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant

**Read** Genesis 17:1–19 and Romans 4:11. What is the spiritual and prophetic significance of the circumcision rite?

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Abram’s lack of faith, as seen in the preceding story (*Genesis 16*), broke the flow of Abram’s spiritual journey with God. During that time God was silent. But now, God speaks again to Abram. God reconnects with Abram and brings him back to the point when He made a covenant with Abram (*Gen. 15:18*).

Now, though, God gives him the sign of that covenant. The meaning of circumcision has been long discussed by scholars, but because the rite of circumcision involves the shedding of blood (*see Exod. 4:25*), it could be understood in the context of sacrifice, signifying that righteousness was imputed to him (*compare with Rom. 4:11*).

It also is significant that this covenant, signified by circumcision, is described in terms that point back to the first Messianic prophecy (*compare Gen. 17:7 with Gen. 3:15*). The parallel between the two texts suggests that God’s promise to Abram concerns more than just the physical birth of a people; it contains the spiritual promise of salvation for all the peoples of the earth. And the promise of the “everlasting covenant” (*Gen. 17:7*) refers to the work of the Messianic Seed, the sacrifice of Christ that ensures eternal life to all who claim it by faith and all that faith entails (*compare with Rom. 6:23 and Titus 1:2*).

Interestingly, this promise of an eternal future is contained in the change of the names of Abram and Sarai. The names of Abram and Sarai referred just to their present status: Abram means “exalted father” and Sarai means “my princess” (the princess of Abram). The change of their names into “Abraham” and “Sarah” referred to the future: Abraham means “father of many nations” and Sarah means “the princess” (for everyone). In parallel, but not without some irony, the name of Isaac (“he will laugh”) is a reminder of Abraham’s laughter (the first laughter recorded in the Scriptures, *Gen. 17:17*); it is a laughter of skepticism or, maybe, of wonder. Either way, though he believed in what the Lord had clearly promised him, Abraham still struggled with living it out in faith and trust.

**How can we learn to keep on believing even when, at times, we struggle with that belief, as did Abraham? Why is it important that we not give up, despite times of doubt?**

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## The Son of Promise

The last scene of circumcision involved everyone: not only Ishmael—but also all the males of Abraham’s household were circumcised (*Gen. 17:23–27*). The word *kol*, “all,” “every,” is repeated four times (*Gen. 17:23, 27*). It is against this inclusive background that God appears to Abraham to confirm the promise of a son, “Isaac.”

**Read Genesis 18:1–15 and Romans 9:9. What lessons of hospitality do we learn from Abraham’s reception of his visitors? How do you explain God’s response to Abraham’s hospitality?**

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It is not clear whether Abraham knew who these strangers were (*Heb. 13:2*), even though he acted toward them as if God Himself were among them. He was sitting “in the tent door in the heat of the day” (*Gen. 18:1, NKJV*), and because visitors are rare in the desert, he was probably longing to meet with them. Abraham ran toward the men (*Gen. 18:2*), although he was 99 years old. He called one of these persons Adonai, “my Lord” (*Gen. 18:3*), a title often used for God (*Gen. 20:4, Exod. 15:17*). He rushed around them in the preparation of the meal (*Gen. 18:6, 7*). He stood next to them, attentive to their needs and ready to serve them (*Gen. 18:8*).

Abraham’s behavior toward heavenly strangers will become an inspiring model of hospitality (*Heb. 13:2*). In fact, Abraham’s attitude of reverence conveys a philosophy of hospitality. Showing respect and care toward strangers is not just a nice gesture of courtesy. The Bible emphasizes that it is a religious duty, as if directed toward God Himself (*compare with Matt. 25:35–40*). Ironically, God is identified more with the hungry and needy foreigner than with the generous one who receives them.

On the other hand, the divine intrusion into the human sphere denotes His grace and love toward humanity. This appearance of God anticipates Christ, who left His heavenly home and became a human servant to reach humankind (*Phil. 2:7, 8*). God’s appearance here provides evidence for the certainty of His promise (*Gen. 18:10, NKJV*). He sees Sarah, who hides herself “behind him” (*Gen. 18:10*), and knows her most intimate thoughts (*Gen. 18:12*). He knows that she laughed, and the word “laugh” is His last word. Her skepticism becomes the place where He will fulfill His word.

**Dwell more on the idea that “God is identified more with the hungry and needy foreigner than with the generous one who receives them.” Why is this concept so important for us to remember?**

## Lot in Sodom

**Read** Genesis 18:16–19:29. How does Abraham’s prophetic ministry affect his responsibility toward Lot?

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God’s promise of a son to Abraham has just been reconfirmed. Yet, instead of enjoying the good news, he engages God in a passionate discussion about the fate of Lot in Sodom. Abraham not only is a prophet to whom God reveals His will; but he also is a prophet who intercedes on behalf of the wicked. The Hebrew phrase “stood before the LORD” (*Gen. 18:22, NKJV*) is an idiom for praying.

In fact, Abraham challenges God and bargains with Him to save Sodom, where his nephew resides. Moving from 50 down to 10, God would have saved the people of Sodom if only 10 Sodomites had been righteous.

Of course, when we read the story of what happened when the two angels came to Lot to warn him of what was coming (*Gen. 19:1–10*), we can see just how sick and evil the people had become. It truly was a wicked place, as were many of the nations around them; one reason why, eventually, they were driven from the land (*see Gen. 15:16*).

“And now the last night of Sodom was approaching. Already the clouds of vengeance cast their shadows over the devoted city. But men perceived it not. While angels drew near on their mission of destruction, men were dreaming of prosperity and pleasure. The last day was like every other that had come and gone. Evening fell upon a scene of loveliness and security. A landscape of unrivaled beauty was bathed in the rays of the declining sun. The coolness of eventide had called forth the inhabitants of the city, and the pleasure-seeking throngs were passing to and fro, intent upon the enjoyment of the hour.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 157, 158.

In the end, God saved only Lot, his wife, and his two daughters (*Gen. 19:15*), almost half the minimum of 10. The sons-in-law, who did not take Lot’s warning seriously, remained in the city (*Gen. 19:14*).

That beautiful country was, then, destroyed. The Hebrew verb *hafakh*, “overthrew,” occurs several times in this passage (*Gen. 19:21, 25, 29*) and characterizes the destruction of Sodom (*Deut. 29:23, Amos 4:11*). The idea is that the country has been “reversed.” Just as the Flood “reversed” the original creation (*Gen. 6:7*), the destruction of Sodom is a “reversal” of the Garden of Eden (*Gen. 13:10*). In the destruction of Sodom, we are given a precursor of end-time destruction, as well (*see Jude 7*).

**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Law and the Covenants,” pp. 370–373, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

Abraham’s patient and tenacious plea with God on behalf of the people of Sodom (*Gen. 18:22–33*) should encourage us to pray for the wicked, even though they appear to be in a hopeless condition of sin. Furthermore, God’s attentive response to Abraham’s insistence, and His willingness to forgive for the sake of only “ten” righteous men is a “revolutionary” concept, as pointed out by Gerhard Hasel:

“In an extremely revolutionary manner the old collective thinking, which brought the guiltless member of the guilty association under punishment, has been transposed into something new: the presence of a remnant of righteous people could have a preserving function for the whole. . . . For the sake of the righteous remnant Yahweh would in his righteousness [*tседаqah*] forgive the wicked city. This notion is widely expanded in the prophetic utterance of the Servant of Yahweh who works salvation ‘for many.’ ”—Gerhard F. Hasel, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea From Genesis to Isaiah*, 3rd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1980), pp. 150, 151.

“All around us are souls going down to ruin as hopeless, as terrible, as that which befell Sodom. Every day the probation of some is closing. Every hour some are passing beyond the reach of mercy. And where are the voices of warning and entreaty to bid the sinner flee from this fearful doom? Where are the hands stretched out to draw him back from death? Where are those who with humility and persevering faith are pleading with God for him? The spirit of Abraham was the spirit of Christ. The Son of God is Himself the great Intercessor in the sinner’s behalf. He who has paid the price for its redemption knows the worth of the human soul.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 140.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Only the rainbow and circumcision are called “sign of the covenant.” What are the common points and the differences between the two covenants?
- 2 Though called of God, and though often used in the New Testament as the example of what it means to live by faith, Abraham at times faltered. What lessons should we learn and not learn from his example?
- 3 Some people argue against the idea that God will punish the lost, saying that this act would be against God’s love. How do we, as those who believe that—yes, God will punish the lost—respond to the argument that He doesn’t?

## A Teacher's Prayer

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

A school friend told Selinah that she should worship Jesus. “You need to go to church because Jesus is coming, and when He comes, He will take His own,” she said. The friend also said only two churches exist in the world—the Seventh-day Adventist Church and another church. Selinah, whose parents were not particularly religious, chose the other church because it had the larger building in her village in northern Botswana.

After some time, a relative, a boy around her age, invited Selinah to the Adventist church. Selinah’s friends at the other church cautioned her against going. “Don’t go to that church,” said one. “You won’t come back to your own church,” said another. “Why would I leave my church?” Selinah asked.

On Sabbath morning, Selinah walked with the boy to church. The worship service had begun when they arrived. It was so different to Selinah. The preacher talked to God like he was talking to a friend. The handshakes after the worship service surprised her. It was as if the church members had been expecting her. Learning that the preacher would conduct a series of sermons, she came back for what turned out to be an evangelistic series. She listened with amazement as the preacher used slides to show that the beasts of Daniel 7 represented world kingdoms up through Jesus’ second coming. After the meetings ended, she never returned to her former church. She was baptized and joined the Adventist Church.

Selinah Oreneile Nkwae grew up and became a schoolteacher. More than anything she wanted to teach children about Jesus at an Adventist school. But there was no Adventist school, so she taught at government schools for 34 years. After retiring, she prayed earnestly about how to be a good witness for God, and she led several evangelistic efforts that resulted in a number of baptisms. But she couldn’t forget her desire to teach at an Adventist school.

One day, her husband saw a newspaper advertisement seeking teachers for a new Adventist school in Francistown. Selinah applied and was accepted at Eastern Gate Primary School, which was constructed with a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering in 2015. God had answered her prayers. “The daily prayer of all the teachers is for the kids to see God’s character in us,” Selinah said.



*This mission story illustrates the following components of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “I Will Go” strategic plan: Mission Objective No. 4, “To strengthen Seventh-day Adventist institutions in upholding freedom, wholistic health, and hope through Jesus, and restoring in people the image of God,” and Spiritual Growth Objective No. 6, “To increase accession, retention, reclamation, and participation of children, youth, and young adults.” Read more: [IWillGo2020.org](http://IWillGo2020.org).*



**Key Texts:** *Genesis 15:6, Genesis 17:5, Genesis 18:23.*

**Study Focus:** *Genesis 15–19, Rom. 4:2–11, Amos 4:11.*

## ***Part I: Overview***

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**Introduction:** In this section we get into the heart of Abraham’s religious experience. This is the moment God makes His covenant with Abram, which is God’s second covenant after His covenant with Noah (*Gen. 6:18–9:20*). The Abrahamic covenant contains the same requirements as the Noahic covenant. However, unlike the covenant with Noah, the Abrahamic covenant starts with a sacrificial ceremony associated with the promise of a son and a homeland. The covenant is confirmed by a sign. The Abrahamic covenant is, however, different from the covenant with Noah, as well, and contains new elements. It has two sacrificial ceremonies. The sign is the circumcision, and Abram receives the new name of Abraham. Furthermore, the biblical narrative offers two different perspectives of that covenant. While in the covenant with Noah the focus is on God, and the person of Noah is subdued, the covenant with Abraham includes Abraham’s perspective, and, as a result, the course of that covenant develops in a more complicated manner.

### **Lesson Themes:**

1. **The Tension of Faith.** Abraham’s faith is made of questions and doubts; Abraham believes in God in spite of himself. Abraham’s laughter is made of irony and awe. Abraham’s prayer to God is made of submission and challenges.
2. **The Laws of Hospitality.** Abraham’s care for his foreign guests contrasts with the Sodomites’ callousness and threats toward the foreigners.
3. **The Passion of Intercession.** Abraham pleads for the wicked in the city of Sodom, hoping that there are enough righteous within to avert destruction.

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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### **Abram Believes in the Lord**

Abram’s faith begins with fear and continues with doubts and questions. What Abram fears most is the unknown, which is his future, something he cannot control. This is why Abram relies on the present, thus making

his servant Eliezer his heir (*Gen. 15:2*). So, when God speaks to Abram, He uses a number of expressions that point to the future. The phrase “do not be afraid” often is associated with the promise of descendants. The same promise for the future also is contained in the word *magen*, “shield” (*Gen. 15:1*), which echoes the verb *magan*, “deliver” (*Gen. 14:20*), which has been used in connection to his past victory. Thus, we see that the God who saved Abram in the past is the same God who will save him in the future. The vision of God as his future inspires in Abram faith in the future: “Abram believed.”

The Hebrew verb *he'emin*, “believed,” describes more than a sentimental or intellectual process or the mere reference to a creed. In Hebrew, “to believe” is relational, as implied in the root *'aman*, “firm,” “reliable.” Relying on God, Abram “believed” that he would have descendants. It is this faith that God “accounted” as “righteousness.” In other words, God “counted” (*ESV*) this faith as having the same value as righteousness. This view makes sense against the background of ancient Egyptian beliefs. Whereas in ancient Egypt, the weight of human righteousness was evaluated on the basis of counting human works against the weight of the Maat, the divine righteousness. In the case of Abram, his righteousness is evaluated on the basis of the divine works for him. What makes Abram righteous is not the sum of his deeds but his willingness to rely on God’s deeds for him (*Rom. 4:2–4*).

### **Abraham Laughs With the Lord**

Abraham’s immediate reaction to the divine announcement is silent prostration and awe (*Gen. 17:17*). This is the second time that Abraham prostrates in silence (*compare Gen. 17:3*). This time, however, his prostration is associated with laughter, the first laughter recorded in the Bible. It is not clear whether this laughter indicates skepticism or expresses his wonder. The fact that laughter takes place in the context of Abraham’s act of worship suggests that wonder is intended. Yet, as soon as Abraham speaks, skepticism prevails. He proposes a reasonable solution. Abraham refers to Ishmael. Abraham’s skeptical recommendation requires God to become specific. God’s promise does not concern Ishmael. In an echo of Abraham’s questions, God responds explicitly with the name of Isaac (*Gen. 17:19*). Ironically, Isaac means “he laughs,” resonating with Abraham’s laughter.

But this time it is God who laughs, for the name Isaac implies the name of God, as Semitic and biblical linguistic studies of names suggest. In parallel to the name Ishmael, “God has heard,” Isaac’s name also must have carried, at least implicitly, the name of God: “[God] has laughed.” God’s laughter resonates, then, with Abraham’s laughter. Later, Sarah also will laugh. The context of Sarah’s laughter adds to the wonder that is implied in the previous situations. Sarah, who is hiding within the tent, hears

about the unbelievable news of birth and then laughs about it. Something strange then happens. Although Sarah had laughed “within herself” (*Gen. 18:12, NKJV*), her most intimate thoughts are known by the Visitor (*Gen. 18:10–13*). This exceptional capacity indicates to Abraham and Sarah that they are in the presence of the Lord, which guarantees the wonder of the miraculous birth. To Abraham’s first laughter made of trembling doubt and awe, God responded with a laughter made of irony and promise.

### **Abraham Cooks for the Lord**

For the first time, Abraham receives heavenly guests without knowing it. His actions will be remembered as a model of hospitality (*compare Heb. 13:2*). Instead of engaging right away in the covenant promise, which is the reason for His visit, God enters the human sphere. He will be seen, met, and fed by Abraham. This is a time of siesta. Abraham is sitting before the tent, as if he is waiting, hoping for someone to come. In the desert, not many people pass by. So, when Abraham sees someone from far away, he runs, which is extraordinary, considering his great age (he is 99 years old) and his just having been circumcised (*Gen. 17:24*). As soon as Abraham has met with the guests, he busily attends to them and prepares a meal for them. After providing water to wash his guests’ feet (*Gen. 18:4*), Abraham selects the best food for the meal (*Gen. 18:6, 7*). Abraham involves all his family in this work. Sarah prepares the bread (*Gen. 18:6*), and the young man, probably Ishmael, prepares the calf (*Gen. 18:8*). Yet, Abraham humbly qualifies the feast as “a morsel of bread” (*Gen. 18:5*). Obviously, Abraham’s passion and zeal toward the three visitors derives from his intuition that they hold a special status. The way he addresses one of the visitors as Adonai, “my Lord” (*Gen. 18:2, 3, NKJV*), suggests that perception. The fact that Abraham offers food and water to the Visitor does not necessarily exclude his recognition of the divine identity. The “human” expression of the visitors, who physically stand (*Gen. 18:2*), eat (*Gen. 18:8*), and have articulate conversations (*Gen. 18:9*), is a part of the divine strategy of the incarnation of God, who comes down to humans. Abraham then stands by them (*Gen. 18:8*), attentive to their needs and ready to serve them.

### **Abraham Bargains Against the Lord**

The verb “stand,” which was just used to describe Abraham serving his guests (*Gen. 18:8*), reappears now to characterize Abraham’s attitude before God (*Gen. 18:22*). Actually, the preposition “before,” which follows the verb “stand,” is normally used to describe reverence before God and praying to Him (*Deut. 10:8, 1 Kings 17:1, Zech. 3:1*). This instance is the first time in the Bible that one person prays on behalf of another

person. Even Noah had kept quiet in similar circumstances (*Gen. 6:13–22*). The Hebrew verb *wayyigash*, “came near,” suggests Abraham’s hesitation and slow approach to God (*Gen. 18:22, 23*). Abraham is bold yet remains respectfully conscious of God’s distance. Tactfully, he addresses God with a total of seven questions. Abraham engages God in a bargaining session, moving from 50 down to 10. It has been suggested on the basis of Amos 5:3 that 50 stands for half of a small city, which contains a minimum of 100 men (*compare Judg. 20:10*). Abraham starts his challenge with the assumption of equal numbers of righteous and wicked in the city. When Abraham reaches the number 10 (*Gen. 18:32*), he understands that he has now come to the limit and therefore decides that he will not go beyond this number. The number 10 symbolizes the idea of minimum. Significantly, the number 10 is represented by the *yod*, the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet (*see Matt. 5:18*). Later the number 10 will become in Judaism the minimum required for the worshiping community (*minyan*). That this minimum of ten righteous would be enough to save the collective community is a concept that prefigures the ministry of the Suffering Servant, who will “justify many” (*Isa. 53:11*). After six responses God abruptly ends His conversation with Abraham. Although God consented to consult with humans, He remains sovereign in His judgment.

### ***Part III: Life Application***

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**Abraham Believes in the Lord.** How can we train people to have faith? Why is biblical faith concerned, essentially, with the future? How would you counsel someone who just has lost a loved one to have faith? How can you relate personal faith to hope?

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**Abraham Laughs With the Lord.** Discuss the argument that has sometimes been presented that laughter is from the devil. Search in the Bible (Old Testament and New Testament) for instances of laughter and humor.

Why are laughter and humor compatible with true religion? Why is the rejection of laughter often found among religious peoples?

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**Abraham Cooks for the Lord.** How does Abraham's zeal to prepare good food inspire mission and worship? Find in the Bible (Old Testament and New Testament) moments when food and meals played a crucial role in the ceremonial rites of a covenant with God. Why is food so important in the Bible? Why is asceticism incompatible with biblical values?

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**Abraham Bargains Against the Lord.** Why was Abraham's boldness and challenge of God's will an act of faith? How would you apply this example to your experience of prayer? Find cases in the Bible and in history in which a religious person would bargain and make a deal with God.

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