

Genesis
St. Jerome Adult Bible Study
Lesson 4 – Answers
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1. Last week's lesson about Abraham's response to God's promises was interesting for two reasons: First, when Abram fears for his safety and passes Sarai off as his sister, he shows a lack of trust in God yet God seems to overlook Abram's fault and reiterates His promise; and second, Abraham shows great faith by following the Lord into Canaan.
- 2a&b. It was Sarai who suggested that Abraham father a child with Hagar, her maidservant. In those times, it was culturally and practically highly important that men produce male offspring for the continuation of his lineage and the preservation of his material goods.
3. Eventually, Sarai became upset with Hagar because Hagar became haughty and disrespectful towards Sarai. In Hagar's eyes, she herself was Abram's wife and the mother-to-be of his firstborn; she considered Sarai to be inferior because of Sarai's barrenness.

Christians see this relationship as very significant:

Galatians 4:21 – 31 ²¹Tell me, you who want to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? ²²For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the freeborn woman. ²³The son of the slave woman was born naturally, the son of the freeborn through a promise. ²⁴Now this is an allegory. These women represent two covenants. One was from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; this is Hagar. ²⁵Hagar represents Sinai, a mountain in Arabia; it corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery along with her children. ²⁶But the Jerusalem above is freeborn, and she is our mother. ²⁷For it is written: "Rejoice, you barren one who bore no children; break forth and shout, you who were not in labor; for more numerous are the children of the deserted one than of her who has a husband." ²⁸Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of the promise. ²⁹But just as then the child of the flesh persecuted the child of the spirit, it is the same now. ³⁰But what does the scripture say? "Drive out the slave woman and her son! For the son of the slave woman shall not share the inheritance with the son of the freeborn." ³¹Therefore, brothers, we are children not of the slave woman but of the freeborn woman.

4. God's response to Hagar in Genesis 6:7 – 14 was both a blessing and a curse. A blessing because God, through His messenger, promises Hagar that her son will be a patriarch of great nations and she herself will be blessed. It was a curse because He told her that she must return to Abram and Sarai to live as their servant – that cannot have been easy for her.
5. Throughout the Scriptures, the metaphors of sight and hearing are used extensively, especially in the Gospels when Jesus complains about the "blindness" and "deafness" of the Pharisees. The metaphors begin in Genesis 16:11: *Ishmael*: in Hebrew the name means "God has heard" and Genesis 16:13: *The God of Vision*: In Hebrew, *el-roi*; hence the

name of the spring. *Remained alive*: for the ancient notion that a person died on seeing God.

6. God seems to attend to my needs but always in His own way and not always in the way I want. For example, when I ask for patience, He gives me trials to practice it and I get patience!
7. The practice of Circumcision had great religious significance for the Hebrews because it was a commandment from God signifying his covenant with them:

¹⁰This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you that you must keep: every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹Circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that shall be the mark of the covenant between you and me. ¹²Throughout the ages, every male among you, when he is eight days old, shall be circumcised, including houseborn slaves and those acquired with money from any foreigner who is not of your blood.

¹³Yes, both the houseborn slaves and those acquired with money must be circumcised. Thus my covenant shall be in your flesh as an everlasting pact.

¹⁴If a male is uncircumcised, that is, if the flesh of his foreskin has not been cut away, such a one shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”

And, when much of the Pentateuch was written down in the 6th century BC during their exile the Jews were pleased to be different from the Babylonians. From the Holman Bible Dictionary:

Ancient Near Eastern background Several Semitic and non-Semitic peoples practiced circumcision according to biblical and other sources. Jeremiah depicts Egyptians, Edomites, Ammonites, Moabites, and the desert-dwelling Arabians as circumcised peoples (Jer. 9:25-26; compare Ezek. 32:17-32). On the other hand Philistines, Assyrians, and Babylonians are counted among the uncircumcised. That the Canaanites are not mentioned in either regard is noteworthy. Evidence of their perspective of circumcision is lacking. In modern times the practice exists among Mohammedan Arabs and many African and Australian tribes, as well as much of Western society.

Israelite practice The circumcision of Abraham and the male members of his entourage followed the repetition of the covenant promise (see Gen. 15) of land and national descendants (Gen. 17). Isaac, Ishmael, and other descendants of the patriarchal family were circumcised (Gen. 17:23-27). Moses' circumcision took place only immediately prior to his confrontation with the Pharaoh (Ex. 4:24-26). The tie between land and circumcision in the covenant is reflected in the purification of Israelites at Gilgal following the entry of Israel into the Promised Land (Josh. 5:2-9). Passover was limited to those who had been circumcised (Ex. 12:48; Josh. 5:10-11). Ethical implications of circumcision can be observed in the metaphorical usage of the term. The uncircumcised are those who are insensitive to God's leadership. Circumcision of the heart implies total devotion to God (Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4); however, the uncircumcised ear cannot hear so as to respond to the Lord (Jer. 6:10); and the uncircumcised of lips cannot speak (Ex. 6:12). Circumcision was therefore an external sign of an internal singularity of devotion of Yahweh.

8. In Genesis 17, God changes the name “Abram” (father is exalted) to “Abraham” (father of multitudes) and Sarai (princess) to “Sarah” (princess). God also promises Abraham a son by Sarah, at which Abraham laughs. God reiterates His promise and tells Abraham that he will name the boy “Isaac” which means “laughter.” It is a divine pun. [One remembers

Zechariah who was struck dumb when he questions the angel about the conception of John (Luke 1:5 – 20)]

9. In Genesis 18, Abraham is visited by three men but the text is confusing about who the men are. In verse 1, the Lord is with Abraham but in verse 2 Abraham sees three men; again, in verse 16 Abraham is walking with the three but in 22 it's just him and the Lord. However, in light of New Testament Scriptures (which did not exist at the time of the writing of the Pentateuch) Christians can see the Trinity in this story. Clearly, as we have the whole of the Bible and we read the Old Testament with Christian eyes, there are many references to what we know as the Savior. One must wonder, however, what the ancient Jews believed of this story and others.

10.

11.

12. The Lord made promises to Abraham and to Sarah that they would have a son. Abraham's reaction was to laugh, finding it amusing that two people so old could have a child; then – as he was wont to do – bargained with God. From Genesis 17:16 – 18:

¹⁶I will bless her, and I will give you a son by her. Him also will I bless; he shall give rise to nations, and rulers of peoples shall issue from him.” ¹⁷Abraham prostrated himself and laughed as he said to himself, “Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Or can Sarah give birth at ninety?” ¹⁸Then Abraham said to God, “Let but Ishmael live on by your favor!”

Sarah, too, laughed but at the thought of having sexual pleasure at her age. Then, she lied about having laughed. From Genesis 18:9 – 15:

⁹“Where is your wife Sarah?” they asked him. “There in the tent,” he replied. ¹⁰One of them said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah will then have a son.” Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent, just behind him. ¹¹Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years, and Sarah had stopped having her womanly periods. ¹²So Sarah laughed to herself and said, “Now that I am so withered and my husband is so old, am I still to have sexual pleasure?” ¹³But the Lord said to Abraham: “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Shall I really bear a child, old as I am?’ ¹⁴Is anything too marvelous for the Lord to do? At the appointed time, about this time next year, I will return to you, and Sarah will have a son.” ¹⁵Because she was afraid, Sarah dissembled, saying, “I didn't laugh.” But he said, “Yes you did.”

13.

14. Scriptures describe a special relationship between God and Abraham, calling Abraham God's friend:

2 Chronicles 20:7 - ⁷Was it not you, our God, who drove out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and gave it forever to the descendants of Abraham, your friend?

Isaiah 41:8 - ⁸ But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, offspring of Abraham my friend—

James 2:23 - ²³Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called “the friend of God.”

15. When Abraham bargains with God for the preservation of Sodom, he does so with the best of intentions: the welfare of the people. God, indeed, shows fairness and justice by agreeing

that He will not destroy the city if there are righteous people there. Unknown to Abraham, of course, was the fact that, except for Lot and his wife and maiden daughters, there were no righteous people. The lesson to be learned here is that God will answer our prayers when our will is in tune with His.

16. The scene in Sodom when Lot welcomes visitors to his home clearly contrasts gracious (perhaps too gracious) hospitality with the opposite attitude by the townspeople. Today, in our culture, we are scandalized at the thought of Lot's offering of his daughters to the rapists and we are equally disturbed by the evil desires of the men who insist on having sex with the visitors. But the lesson is obvious: Welcome all of God's creation and treat it with respect.
17. Lot's daughters, fearing childlessness and seeing their father as their only source of a male companion, get him drunk, lay with him, and bear sons by him. One names her son "Moab" (which sounds like the Hebrew word for "from my father" and, thus, a pun). The other daughter names her son "Ammon" (a play on a Hebrew word meaning "son of my kin"). The descendants of the two sons would be insulted by their incestuous origins.
18. Several Biblical commentaries claim that Sarah (Sarai) was the half-sister of Abraham, the daughter of Terah. It is not clear from Scripture itself – it seems that when Abraham told Pharaoh that Sarah was his sister, he was lying to protect himself.