



## Introduction

Abraham is the first of the patriarchs (founding fathers) of the Hebrew nation and his story is told in chapters 12 to 25 of Genesis. Abram and Sarai (as they were originally known) were called by God to leave their home in the city of Ur in Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq) and go to a new home in the west, in the land of Canaan. They were to settle here and become the forebears of a great nation. God promised them a family 'more numerous than the stars in the sky or the grains of sand along the beach' (Genesis 22:17, CEV). This promise seemed an impossible dream for many, many years, because the couple had no children, until a miracle child did arrive to them in their old age. Isaac, whose name means laughter, was that child and indeed they did laugh for joy at the fulfilment of the promise. The story of Abraham is one of pilgrimage into the unknown, trust in a God who is unseen, some mysterious experiences, dramatic rescues, battles, patient waiting for a child and various tests and temptations to give up believing. Abraham and Sarah's story has been an inspiration to people of faith down the ages, and Abraham is indeed revered as a patriarch by Jewish, Muslim and Christian believers.

## Preparation

Use the retelling of the Abraham story from The Barnabas Children's Bible, pages 19 to 30, stories 10 to 21, in particular:

- Story 11 (The promised land)
- Story 13 (God's promise)
- Story 18 (Sarah has a son)
- Story 19 (God tests Abraham)

## Development

### One

Most of us know the route we are going to take when we set off on a journey. We have maps, satellite navigation or computer printouts of the directions. So it is hard to imagine what Abraham's journey was like, across miles and miles of desert to an unknown destination. He had to put his trust in a God he could not see but whom he believed was close to him whenever he turned to him in prayer.

As a class, play a game which involves one child guiding another blindfolded child around a maze of chairs and desks in the classroom. What did feel it like for the blindfolded person to have to trust someone else? Who would they rather be giving the directions - their best friend or someone they don't quite know so well?

## Two

Abraham's journey was long but he did have some 'signposts' to help him. These included the city of Haran first of all, to which he moved with his father. There was also a river to follow (the river Euphrates). Finally there would have been a number of watering holes (oases) along the way.

Open up a map of the Middle East to show the class the route Abraham took. (NB: You can find such a map in the back of some Bibles.) This way is known as the 'fertile crescent' because there were either rivers that they could follow or wells they could aim for. Nevertheless, Abraham didn't really know what sort of new land lay ahead.

Use a large sand tray to recreate a model of the journey with the class. Work with the children to create some simple craft items that mark the main features on the way. Use for example:

- some blocks of wood together to create the cities (Ur and Haran) and smaller blocks for the towns (Shechem, Bethel, Ai, Hebron)
- a few palm trees here and there along the route (use a plasticine base, pipe cleaner trunks and some long drooping leaves at the top)
- the rivers
- occasional oasis pools
- some camels and other animals
- plus figures for Abraham, Sarah and the extended family of servants and relatives that went with them

## Three

Here is a piece of class drama that you could use to explore the story as a group in the hall and thus re-enact the whole trip to Canaan. It comes from our [Idea Hub website](http://brf.org.uk/resources). Read the story from The Barnabas Children's Bible first in preparation (stories 11 and 13).

[Abraham - walk the story](#)

## Four

Abraham must have experienced many fears and worries on this long journey, as well as doubts later on when they had to wait so long for the child that was promised.

- I wonder what kept Abraham going?
- I wonder what went through his mind day after day on the journey?

Talk about these questions with the class. Have they ever had to wait ages for something and began to wonder if would ever happen? Have they had to face some unknown challenges that were worrying?

Abraham talked with God wherever he was. The story says that he built a small altar (an ordered pile

of stones) to mark these special places.

With the older classes, hot seat some of the main characters and others from among Abraham's extended family. Include Abraham himself, Sarah, Lot (his nephew), some of his servants and some of the people who lived in the towns he passed by. Here are some ideas for questions:

- Why do you keep going?
- What are your greatest fears?
- What is your main hope?
- What does it feel like to be so far from home?

## Five

Abraham had at least two strange experiences once he reached the Promised Land.

The first of these as a visit by three strangers who appeared out of the desert to tell him that a miracle baby would be born to them in a year's time (Genesis 18).

How did they know? Who were they? The Bible describes them as 'angels of the Lord' (see The Barnabas Children's Bible, story 15). Read this story with the class.

Now ask the class to imagine what Abraham's diary entry for that day would have been. What did he think about it all? Perhaps this was God coming to him in a way that he could see after all?

You might like to show the icon of 'the hospitality of Abraham' by Andre Rublev to older classes (there are several examples on the web). This icon also known as the icon of the Trinity, and it celebrates this story. Many Christians have seen this visit as a way that God appeared in three persons to Abraham.

## Six

The second strange experience was when God tested Abraham (Genesis 22).

Isaac had been born and was now a young boy. It seems that God decided to put Abraham's loyalty to the test. Was God still more important to him than this child? Would he be prepared to give his boy back to God, if God asked? What a hard test!

Read the story in The Barnabas Children's Bible, story 19.

In the first strange experience, the angels told Abraham that there was nothing too hard for God.

Now in this second experience Abraham had to show that there was nothing more valuable to him than God - not even his longed-for a child.

It seems a sad and lonely story. What do the children think of it? What things or people do they value



most in life? Would they be prepared to give them up, if God ask them to?

Christians believe that God should always come first and, because God is love, this is not a bad thing, but nevertheless it is easy to think that other things (which we can see) are more important than God (whom we can't see).

- Tell the story from Isaac's point of view. What did he think his father was up to?
- Tell the story from Sarah's point of view. She was back in town wondering what her husband was going to do.
- Tell the story from Abraham's point of view. What thoughts went through his mind?
- Tell the story from God's point of view. What was God trying to find out about Abraham?

## Seven

Abraham is a hugely respected figure in the Old Testament story. Jews call themselves 'children of Abraham' and Christians see in Abraham a pattern for their faith in God and God's call on their lives.

Look back at what the class has learnt together about Abraham and his story. Reflect on...

- which part of the story they liked the best?
- which part of the story they thought was the most important?
- which parts of the story are like things that they have experienced?
- which parts of this story they'd like to leave out? Why?

If they were trying to tell the story of Abraham to someone who hadn't heard it before, using a series of pictures, what key pictures and symbols would they choose?

For example:

Sand, stars, camels and sheep, altars of stone, angels, tents, a baby and so forth.