

References for *Life and Ministry Meeting Workbook*

FEBRUARY 3-9

TREASURES FROM GOD'S WORD | GENESIS 12-14

“A Covenant That Affects You”

(Genesis 12:1, 2) And Jehovah said to A'bram: “Go out from your land and away from your relatives and from the house of your father to the land that I will show you. ² I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great, and you will become a blessing.

it-1 522 ¶4 Covenant

Covenant With Abraham. The covenant with Abraham apparently went into effect when Abram (Abraham) crossed the Euphrates on his way to Canaan. The Law covenant was made 430 years later. (Ga 3:17) Jehovah had spoken to Abraham when he was living in Mesopotamia, in Ur of the Chaldeans, telling him to travel to the country that God would show him. (Ac 7:2, 3; Ge 11:31; 12:1-3) Exodus 12:40, 41 (LXX) tells us that at the end of 430 years of dwelling in Egypt and in the land of Canaan, “on this very day” Israel, who had been in slavery in Egypt, went out. The day they were delivered from Egypt was Nisan 14, 1513 B.C.E., the date of the Passover. (Ex 12:2, 6, 7) This would seem to indicate that Abraham crossed the Euphrates River on his way to Canaan on Nisan 14, 1943 B.C.E., and evidently that is when the Abrahamic covenant took effect. God appeared to Abraham again after he had traveled into Canaan as far as Shechem and enlarged on the promise, saying, “To your *seed* I am going to give this land,” thereby giving an indication of the connection of this covenant with the promise in Eden, and revealing that the “seed” would take a human course, that is, would run through

a human line of descent. (Ge 12:4-7) Other enlargements by Jehovah were later expressed, as recorded at Genesis 13:14-17; 15:18; 17:2-8, 19; 22:15-18.

(Genesis 12:3) I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who calls down evil on you, and all the families of the ground will certainly be blessed by means of you.”

w89 7/1 3 ¶4

Why You Should Know the Truth About Abraham

That is a staggering promise, and Abraham heard it uttered on at least two other occasions. (Genesis 18:18; 22:18) In order to fulfill it, God will even resurrect from the dead representatives of families that have died out. Life for such resurrected ones will truly be a blessing, since most of them will come back to an earthly situation resembling the Paradise that man originally lost. Thereafter, they will be taught how to gain the blessing of everlasting life.—Genesis 2:8, 9, 15-17; 3:17-23.

(Genesis 13:14-17) Jehovah said to A'bram, after Lot had separated from him: “Raise your eyes, please, and look from the place where you are, to the north and south, east and west, ¹⁵ because all the land that you see, I will give to you and your offspring as a lasting possession. ¹⁶ And I will make your offspring like the dust particles of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust particles of the earth, then your offspring could be counted. ¹⁷ Get up, travel through the length and breadth of the land, for to you I am going to give it.”

it-2 213 ¶3 Law

On the basis of related historical evidence, some scholars believe that, in transferring land,

the buyer was shown the land from a vantage point, the exact boundaries being designated. When the buyer said, "I see," he indicated legal acceptance. When Jehovah gave Abraham the promise of receiving the land of Canaan, Abraham was first told to look in all four directions. Abraham did not say, "I see," perhaps because God said that he would give the Promised Land to Abraham's seed, later on. (Ge 13:14, 15) Moses, as the legal representative of Israel, was told to "see" the land, which, if the view just discussed is correct, would indicate legal transfer of the land to Israel, for them to take it under Joshua's leadership. (De 3:27, 28; 34:4; consider also Satan's offer to Jesus at Mt 4:8.) Another action appearing to have similar legal flavor was: walking across the land or entering it for the purpose of taking possession. (Ge 13:17; 28:13) In certain ancient documents, the number of trees on a piece of land was listed at each real-estate sale.—Compare Ge 23:17, 18.

Digging for Spiritual Gems

(Genesis 13:8, 9) So A'bram said to Lot: "Please, there should be no quarreling between me and you and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers. ⁹ Is not the whole land available to you? Please, separate from me. If you go to the left, then I will go to the right; but if you go to the right, then I will go to the left."

w16.05 5 ¶12

Settle Differences in a Spirit of Love

¹² A Scriptural account in which God's servants peacefully resolved a potentially divisive issue is the one mentioned earlier involving Abraham and his nephew Lot. Both men possessed livestock, and their shepherds apparently quarreled about grazing land. Eager to eliminate tensions, Abraham offered Lot first choice of the areas where their respective households would settle. (Gen. 13:1, 2, 5-9) What a good example! Abraham sought peace, not his own interests. Did

he lose out because of his generosity? Not at all. Immediately after this incident with Lot, Jehovah promised Abraham great blessings. (Gen. 13:14-17) God will never allow his servants to suffer lasting loss for acting in harmony with divine principles and settling differences in a spirit of love.

(Genesis 14:18-20) And Mel-chiz'e-dek king of Sa'lem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of the Most High God. ¹⁹ Then he blessed him and said: "Blessed be A'bram by the Most High God, Maker of heaven and earth; ²⁰ And praised be the Most High God, Who has handed your oppressors over to you!" And A'bram gave him a tenth of everything.

(Hebrews 7:4-10) See how great this man was to whom Abraham, the family head, gave a tenth out of the best spoils. ⁵ True, according to the Law, those of the sons of Le'vi who receive their priestly office have a commandment to collect tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, even though these are descendants of Abraham. ⁶ But this man who did not trace his genealogy from them took tithes from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises. ⁷ Now it is undeniable that the lesser one is blessed by the greater. ⁸ And in the one case, it is men who are dying who receive tithes, but in the other case, it is someone of whom witness is given that he lives. ⁹ And it could be said that even Le'vi, who receives tithes, has paid tithes through Abraham, ¹⁰ for he was still a future descendant of his forefather when Mel-chiz'e-dek met him.

it-2 683 ¶1

Priest

Melchizedek king of Salem was a priest (*kohen*) extraordinary. The Bible gives no record of his ancestry, his birth, or his death. His priesthood was not by inheritance, and he had no

predecessors or successors in office. Melchizedek held both the office of king and of priest. His priesthood was greater than the Levitical priesthood, for Levi, in effect, paid tithes to Melchizedek, since he was still in the loins of Abraham when Abraham offered tithes to Melchizedek and was blessed by him. (Ge 14:18-20; Heb 7:4-10) In these things Melchizedek foreshadowed Jesus Christ, the “priest forever according to the manner of Melchizedek.”—Heb 7:17.

Bible Reading

(Genesis 12:1-20) And Jehovah said to A'bram: “Go out from your land and away from your relatives and from the house of your father to the land that I will show you. ² I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great, and you will become a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who calls down evil on you, and all the families of the ground will certainly be blessed by means of you.” ⁴ So A'bram went just as Jehovah had told him, and Lot went with him. A'bram was 75 years old when he left Ha'ran. ⁵ A'bram took his wife Sar'ai and Lot the son of his brother and all the goods that they had accumulated and the people whom they had acquired in Ha'ran, and they set out for the land of Ca'naan. When they reached the land of Ca'naan, ⁶ A'bram traveled through the land as far as the site of She'chem, near the big trees of Mo'reh. At that time the Ca'naan-ites were in the land. ⁷ Jehovah then appeared to A'bram and said: “To your offspring I am going to give this land.” So he built an altar there to Jehovah, who had appeared to him. ⁸ Later he moved from there to the mountainous region east of Beth'el and pitched his tent with Beth'el on the west and A'i on the east. There he built an altar to Jehovah and began to call on the name

of Jehovah. ⁹ Afterward, A'bram broke camp and journeyed toward the Neg'eb, moving his camp from one place to another. ¹⁰ Now a famine arose in the land, and A'bram went down toward Egypt to reside there for a while, because the famine in the land was severe. ¹¹ As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sar'ai: “Please listen! I know what a beautiful woman you are. ¹² So when the Egyptians see you, they will surely say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me but keep you alive. ¹³ Please say you are my sister, so that it may go well with me because of you, and my life will be spared.” ¹⁴ As soon as A'bram entered Egypt, the Egyptians noticed that the woman was very beautiful. ¹⁵ And the princes of Phar'aoh also saw her, and they began praising her to Phar'aoh, so that the woman was taken to the house of Phar'aoh. ¹⁶ He treated A'bram well because of her, and he acquired sheep, cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels. ¹⁷ Then Jehovah struck Phar'aoh and his household with severe plagues because of Sar'ai, A'bram's wife. ¹⁸ So Phar'aoh called A'bram and said: “What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? ¹⁹ Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I was about to take her as my wife? Here is your wife. Take her and go!” ²⁰ So Phar'aoh gave his men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had.

FEBRUARY 10-16

TREASURES FROM GOD'S WORD | GENESIS 15-17

“Jehovah Renamed Abram and Sarai —Why?”

(Genesis 17:1) When A'bram was 99 years old, Jehovah appeared to A'bram and said to

him: “I am God Almighty. Walk before me and prove yourself faultless.

it-1 817

Fault, Faultfinding

On the other hand, man’s ways and productions are often faulty. Sin and error are the legacy all men have inherited from Adam. (Ro 5:12; Ps 51:5) But Jehovah, himself faultless, “well knows the formation of us, remembering that we are dust,” and is merciful. (Ps 103:13, 14) He regarded faithful, obedient Noah as “faultless among his contemporaries.” (Ge 6:9) He commanded Abraham, “Walk before me and prove yourself faultless.” (Ge 17:1) Although both these men were imperfect and died, they were viewed as faultless by Jehovah, who “sees what the heart is.” (1Sa 16:7; compare 2Ki 20:3; 2Ch 16:9.) He commanded Israel: “You should prove yourself faultless with Jehovah your God.” (De 18:13; 2Sa 22:24) He provided his faultless Son (Heb 7:26) as a ransom sacrifice, and on this basis He can call those exercising faith and obedience “righteous,” or faultless, while at the same time maintaining his position as the righteous and faultless Judge.—Ro 3:25, 26; see INTEGRITY; PERFECTION.

(Genesis 17:3-5) At this A’bram fell face-down, and God continued to speak with him, saying: ⁴ “As for me, look! my covenant is with you, and you will certainly become a father of many nations. ⁵ Your name will no longer be A’bram; your name will become Abraham, for I will make you a father of many nations.

it-1 31 ¶1

Abraham

Time passed. They had now been in Canaan for about ten years, yet Sarah continued barren. She therefore proposed to substitute her Egyptian maidservant Hagar so that she might have a child by her. Abraham consented. And so in 1932 B.C.E., when Abraham was 86 years

old, Ishmael was born. (Ge 16:3, 15, 16) More time passed. In 1919 B.C.E., when Abraham was 99 years old, as a sign or seal to testify to the special covenant relationship existing between himself and Abraham, Jehovah commanded that all the males of Abraham’s household be circumcised. At the same time Jehovah changed his name from Abram to Abraham, “because a father of a crowd of nations I will make you.” (Ge 17:5, 9-27; Ro 4:11) Soon after, three materialized angels, whom Abraham received hospitably in the name of Jehovah, promised that Sarah herself would conceive and give birth to a son, yes, within the coming year!—Ge 18:1-15.

(Genesis 17:15, 16) Then God said to Abraham: “As for your wife Sar’ai, you must not call her Sar’ai, because Sarah will become her name. ¹⁶ I will bless her and also give you a son by her; I will bless her and she will become nations; kings of peoples will come from her.”

w09 2/1 13

What Is in a Name?

God himself changed the names of certain adults for prophetic purposes. For example, he changed the name of Abram, meaning “Father Is Exalted,” to Abraham, meaning “Father of a Multitude.” True to his name, Abraham did become the father of many nations. (Genesis 17:5, 6) Consider, too, Abraham’s wife, Sarai, possibly meaning “Contentious.” How happy she must have been when God renamed her “Sarah,” meaning “Princess,” alluding to her becoming an ancestress of kings.—Genesis 17:15, 16.

Digging for Spiritual Gems

(Genesis 15:13, 14) Then He said to A’bram: “Know for certain that your offspring will be foreigners in a land not theirs and that the people there will enslave them and afflict

them for 400 years. ¹⁴ But I will judge the nation they will serve, and after that they will go out with many goods.

it-1 460-461

Chronology

Jehovah told Abram (Abraham): “You may know for sure that your seed will become an alien resident in a land not theirs, and they will have to serve them, and these will certainly afflict them for four hundred years.” (Ge 15:13; see also Ac 7:6, 7.) This was stated prior to the birth of the promised heir or “seed,” Isaac. In 1932 B.C.E. Ishmael was born to Abram by the Egyptian servant girl Hagar, and in 1918 B.C.E. Isaac was born. (Ge 16:16; 21:5) Counting back 400 years from the Exodus, which marked the end of the ‘afflicting’ (Ge 15:14), would bring us to 1913 B.C.E., and at that time Isaac was about five years old. It appears that Isaac was weaned then and, already “an alien resident” in a land not his, he now experienced the start of the foretold affliction in the form of Ishmael’s “poking fun,” Ishmael being about 19. (Ge 21:8, 9) Although in modern times Ishmael’s mocking of Abraham’s heir might be viewed as inconsequential, such was not the case in patriarchal times. This is evidenced by Sarah’s reaction and God’s approval of her insistence that Hagar and her son Ishmael be sent away. (Ge 21:10-13) The very fact that this incident was recorded in detail in the divine record also points to its marking the commencement of the prophesied 400-year period of affliction that would not end until the Exodus.—Ga 4:29.

(Genesis 15:16) But they will return here in the fourth generation, because the error of the Am’or-ites has not yet reached its full measure.”

it-1 778 ¶4

Exodus

“In the fourth generation.” We must remember that Jehovah told Abraham that in the

fourth generation his descendants would return to Canaan. (Ge 15:16) In the entire 430 years from the time when the Abrahamic covenant took effect to the Exodus there were more than four generations, even considering the long life spans that they enjoyed during that time, according to the record. But it was only 215 years that the Israelites were *actually in Egypt*. The ‘four generations’ following their entering Egypt can be calculated in this way, using as an example just one tribe of Israel, the tribe of Levi: (1) Levi, (2) Kohath, (3) Amram, and (4) Moses. —Ex 6:16, 18, 20.

Bible Reading

(Genesis 15:1-21) After this the word of Jehovah came to A’bram in a vision, saying: “Do not fear, A’bram. I am a shield for you. Your reward will be very great.” ² A’bram replied: “Sovereign Lord Jehovah, what will you give me, seeing that I continue childless and the one who will inherit my house is a man of Damascus, E·li·e’zer?” ³ A’bram added: “You have given me no offspring, and a member of my household is succeeding me as heir.” ⁴ But look! Jehovah’s word in reply to him was, “This man will not succeed you as heir, but your own son will succeed you as heir.” ⁵ He now brought him outside and said: “Look up, please, to the heavens and count the stars, if you are able to do so.” Then he said to him: “So your offspring will become.” ⁶ And he put faith in Jehovah, and He counted it to him as righteousness. ⁷ Then he added: “I am Jehovah, who brought you out of Ur of the Chal-de’ans to give you this land as your possession.” ⁸ To this he said: “Sovereign Lord Jehovah, how will I know that I will take possession of it?” ⁹ He replied to him: “Take for me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” ¹⁰ So he took all of these and cut them in

two and put each part opposite the other, but he did not cut up the birds. ¹¹ Then the birds of prey began to descend on the carcasses, but A'bram kept driving them away. ¹² When the sun was about to set, a deep sleep fell upon A'bram and a great and frightening darkness descended on him. ¹³ Then He said to A'bram: "Know for certain that your offspring will be foreigners in a land not theirs and that the people there will enslave them and afflict them for 400 years. ¹⁴ But I will judge the nation they will serve, and after that they will go out with many goods. ¹⁵ As for you, you will go to your forefathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. ¹⁶ But they will return here in the fourth generation, because the error of the Am'or-ites has not yet reached its full measure." ¹⁷ When the sun had set and it had become very dark, a smoking furnace appeared, and a fiery torch passed between the pieces. ¹⁸ On that day Jehovah made with A'bram a covenant, saying: "To your offspring I will give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Eu·phra'tes: ¹⁹ the land of the Ken'ites, the Ken'iz-zites, the Kad'mon-ites, ²⁰ the Hit'tites, the Per'iz-zites, the Reph'a-im, ²¹ the Am'or-ites, the Ca'naan-ites, the Gir'ga-shites, and the Jeb'u-sites."

FEBRUARY 17-23

TREASURES FROM GOD'S WORD | GENESIS 18-19

"The Judge of All the Earth' Destroys Sodom and Gomorrah"

(Genesis 18:23-25) Then Abraham approached and said: "Will you really sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴ Suppose there are 50 righteous men within the city. Will you, then, sweep them away and not pardon the place for the sake of the 50 right-

eous who are inside it? ²⁵ It is unthinkable that you would act in this manner by putting the righteous man to death with the wicked one so that the outcome for the righteous man and the wicked is the same! It is unthinkable of you. Will the Judge of all the earth not do what is right?"

w17.04 18 ¶1

"The Judge of All the Earth" Always Does What Is Right

"WILL the Judge of all the earth not do what is right?" (Gen. 18:25) With that question, Abraham expressed confidence that Jehovah would render perfect justice in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham was convinced that Jehovah would never act unjustly by "putting the righteous man to death with the wicked one." Such an act was "unthinkable" to Abraham. Some 400 years later, Jehovah said of himself: "The Rock, perfect is his activity, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness who is never unjust; righteous and upright is he." —Deut. 31:19; 32:4.

(Genesis 18:32) Finally he said: "Jehovah, please, do not become hot with anger, but let me speak just once more: Suppose only ten are found there." He answered: "I will not destroy it for the sake of the ten."

w18.08 30 ¶4

Patience—Endurance With a Purpose

Of course, when it comes to exercising patience, Jehovah is the most outstanding example for us to follow. (2 Pet. 3:15) There are many accounts in God's Word of times when Jehovah displayed great patience. (Neh. 9:30; Isa. 30:18) For instance, how did Jehovah react when Abraham questioned His decision to destroy Sodom? First of all, Jehovah did not interrupt as Abraham spoke. Instead, Jehovah listened patiently to each of Abraham's questions and concerns. Then, Jehovah showed that he had listened as he repeated Abraham's concerns and assured

him that He would not destroy Sodom even if just ten righteous men were found in that city. (Gen. 18:22-33) What a fine example of patient listening and of not overreacting!

(Genesis 19:24, 25) Then Jehovah made it rain sulfur and fire on Sod'om and Go-mor'-rah—it came from Jehovah, from the heavens. ²⁵ So he overthrew these cities, yes, the entire district, including all the inhabitants of the cities and the plants of the ground.

w10 11/15 26 ¶12

Jehovah Is Our Sovereign Lord!

¹² We can be certain that Jehovah will soon assert his sovereignty. He will not endlessly tolerate wickedness, and we know that we are living in the last days. Jehovah took action against the wicked during the Flood. He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah and Pharaoh and his forces. Sisera and his army and Sennacherib and his Assyrian troops were no match for the Most High. (Gen. 7:1, 23; 19:24, 25; Ex. 14:30, 31; Judg. 4:15, 16; 2 Ki. 19:35, 36) We can therefore be confident that Jehovah God will not indefinitely put up with disrespect for his name and mistreatment of his Witnesses. Furthermore, we now see evidence of the sign of Jesus' presence and of the conclusion of this wicked system of things.—Matt. 24:3.

Digging for Spiritual Gems

(Genesis 18:1) Afterward, Jehovah appeared to him among the big trees of Mam're while he was sitting at the entrance of the tent during the hottest part of the day.

(Genesis 18:22) Then the men left from there and went toward Sod'om, but Jehovah remained with Abraham.

w88 5/15 23 ¶4-5

Has Anyone Seen God?

Now it is possible to understand why Abraham addressed the materialized angelic spokesman

of God as if he were talking to Jehovah God himself. Since this angel spoke precisely what God wanted to have said to Abraham and was there personally representing Him, the Biblical record could say that “Jehovah appeared to him.”—Genesis 18:1.

Remember that an angelic spokesman for God could transmit His messages just as precisely as a telephone or a radio can transmit our words to another person. Hence, it can be understood how Abraham, Moses, Manoah, and others could speak with a materialized angel as if they were talking to God. While such individuals were able to see these angels and the glory of Jehovah reflected by them, they were not able to see God. Therefore, this in no way contradicts the apostle John's statement: “No man has seen God at any time.” (John 1:18) What these men saw were angelic representatives and not God himself.

(Genesis 19:26) But Lot's wife, who was behind him, began to look back, and she became a pillar of salt.

w19.06 20 ¶3

Help Others Deal With Stress

³ Lot made a bad decision when he chose to live among the grossly immoral people of Sodom. **(Read 2 Peter 2:7, 8.)** The region was prosperous, but Lot paid a high price for moving to Sodom. (Gen. 13:8-13; 14:12) His wife apparently became so attached to the city or to some of the people living there that she disobeyed Jehovah. She lost her life when God rained fire and sulfur on the region. And think of Lot's two daughters. They were engaged to men who died in Sodom. Lot lost his home, his possessions and, most painful of all, his wife. (Gen. 19:12-14, 17, 26) During this stressful period, did Jehovah lose patience with Lot? No.

Bible Reading

(Genesis 18:1-19) Afterward, Jehovah appeared to him among the big trees of Mam're

while he was sitting at the entrance of the tent during the hottest part of the day. ² He looked up and saw three men standing some distance from him. When he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to meet them, and he bowed down to the ground. ³ Then he said: "Jehovah, if I have found favor in your eyes, please do not pass by your servant. ⁴ Please, let a little water be brought and have your feet washed; then recline under the tree. ⁵ Seeing that you have come here to your servant, let me bring a piece of bread so that you may refresh yourselves. Then you may go on your way." At this they said: "All right. You may do as you have spoken." ⁶ So Abraham hurried to the tent to Sarah and said: "Quick! Get three measures of fine flour, knead the dough, and make loaves of bread." ⁷ Next Abraham ran to the herd and chose a tender and good young bull. He gave it to the attendant, who hurried to prepare it. ⁸ He then took butter and milk and the young bull that he had prepared and set the food before them. Then he stood by them under the tree as they were eating. ⁹ They said to him: "Where is your wife Sarah?" He replied: "Here in the tent." ¹⁰ So one of them continued: "I will surely return to you next year at this time, and look! your wife Sarah will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the tent entrance, which was behind the man. ¹¹ Abraham and Sarah were old, being advanced in years. Sarah was past the age of childbearing. ¹² So Sarah began to laugh to herself, saying: "After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I really have this pleasure?" ¹³ Then Jehovah said to Abraham: "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Am I really going to give birth even though I am old?' ¹⁴ Is anything too extraordinary for Jehovah? I will return to you next year at this appointed time, and Sarah will have a son." ¹⁵ But Sarah denied it, say-

ing, "I did not laugh!" for she was afraid. At this he said: "Yes! You did laugh." ¹⁶ When the men got up to leave and looked down toward Sod'om, Abraham was walking with them to escort them. ¹⁷ Jehovah said: "Am I keeping hidden from Abraham what I am going to do? ¹⁸ Why, Abraham is surely going to become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed by means of him. ¹⁹ For I have come to know him in order that he may command his sons and his household after him to keep Jehovah's way by doing what is right and just, so that Jehovah may bring about what he has promised concerning Abraham."

FEBRUARY 24–MARCH 1

TREASURES FROM GOD'S WORD | GENESIS 20-21

"Jehovah Always Does What He Promises"

(Genesis 21:1-3) Jehovah turned his attention to Sarah just as he had said, and Jehovah did for Sarah what he had promised.

² So Sarah became pregnant and then bore a son to Abraham in his old age at the appointed time God had promised him. ³ Abraham named his newborn son, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac.

wp17.5 14-15

God Called Her "Princess"

Was Sarah's laughter evidence that she lacked faith? Not at all. The Bible says: "By faith also Sarah received power to conceive offspring, even when she was past the age, since she considered Him faithful who made the promise." (Hebrews 11:11) Sarah knew Jehovah; she knew that he could fulfill any promise that he made. Who of us does not need more faith of that kind? We do well to get to know the God of the Bible better. As we do, we will see that Sarah

was right to have the faith that she did. Jehovah truly is faithful and carries out his every promise—at times, he might even do so in ways that surprise us into amazed or incredulous laughter!

“LISTEN TO HER”

At 90 years of age, Sarah finally got to relish the moment she had longed for all her adult life. She bore a son to her beloved husband, now a century old! Abraham named the baby Isaac, or “Laughter,” just as God had said. We may picture Sarah’s weary but glowing smile as she explained: “God has brought me laughter; everybody hearing of it will laugh with me.” (Genesis 21:6) This miraculous gift from Jehovah surely delighted her till the end of her days. However, it also brought her great responsibilities.

When Isaac was five years old, the family held a feast to mark the occasion of the weaning of the child. But not all was well. We read that Sarah “kept noticing” a troubling pattern of behavior. Ishmael, the 19-year-old son of Hagar, kept mocking little Isaac. This was not mere playful teasing. The apostle Paul was later inspired to call Ishmael’s behavior persecution. Sarah saw this bullying for what it was: a serious threat to the well-being of her son. Sarah knew well that Isaac was more than just her son; he was assigned a key role in Jehovah’s purpose. So she mustered up courage and spoke forthrightly to Abraham. She asked him to send Hagar and Ishmael away.—Genesis 21:8-10; Galatians 4:22, 23, 29.

How did Abraham respond? We read: “What she said about his son was very displeasing to Abraham.” He was fond of Ishmael, and he could not see past his own fatherly emotions on this issue. However, Jehovah saw the matter clearly, so he intervened. We read: “Then God said to Abraham: ‘Do not be displeased by what Sarah is saying to you about the boy and about your slave girl. Listen to her, for what will be

called your offspring will be through Isaac.’” Jehovah assured Abraham that Hagar and the boy would be provided for. Faithful Abraham complied.—Genesis 21:11-14.

(Genesis 21:5-7) Abraham was 100 years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ⁶ Then Sarah said: “God has brought me laughter; everybody hearing of it will laugh with me.” ⁷ And she added: “Who would have said to Abraham, ‘Sarah will certainly nurse children’? Yet, I have given birth to a son for him in his old age.”

(Genesis 21:10-12) So she said to Abraham: “Drive out this slave girl and her son, for the son of this slave girl is not going to be an heir along with my son, with Isaac!” ¹¹ But what she said about his son was very displeasing to Abraham. ¹² Then God said to Abraham: “Do not be displeased by what Sarah is saying to you about the boy and about your slave girl. Listen to her, for what will be called your offspring will be through Isaac.”

(Genesis 21:14) So Abraham got up early in the morning and took bread and a skin bottle of water and gave it to Ha’gar. He set these on her shoulder and then sent her away along with the boy. So she departed and wandered about in the wilderness of Be’er-she’ba.

Digging for Spiritual Gems

(Genesis 20:12) And besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father but not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife.

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“What a Beautiful Woman You Are”

Sarah was the half sister of Abraham. Terah was father to both of them, but they had different mothers. (Genesis 20:12) While such a marriage is improper today, it is important to keep in mind how different things were back

then. Humans were closer to the perfection that Adam and Eve had enjoyed but lost. For such robust people, marriage between close relatives evidently did not present genetic dangers to offspring. Some 400 years later, though, life spans were similar to ours. At that time, the Mosaic Law outlawed all sexual unions between close relatives.—Leviticus 18:6.

(Genesis 21:33) After that he planted a tamarisk tree at Be'er-she'ba, and there he called on the name of Jehovah, the everlasting God.

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Abraham—An Example for All Who Seek God's Friendship

⁹ Abram responded with another act of faith. As the account says: "He built an altar there to Jehovah." (Genesis 12:7) Likely, this included offering up an animal sacrifice, for the Hebrew word for "altar" means "place of sacrifice." Later, Abram repeated these acts of faith in other parts of the land. In addition, he 'called on the name of Jehovah.' (Genesis 12:8; 13:18; 21:33) The Hebrew phrase "call on the name" also means "declare (preach) the name." Abram's household as well as the Canaanites must have heard him boldly declare the name of his God, Jehovah. (Genesis 14:22-24) Likewise, all who seek God's friendship today must call upon his name in faith. This would include sharing in public preaching, "always offer[ing] to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips which make public declaration to his name."—Hebrews 13:15; Romans 10:10.

Bible Reading

(Genesis 20:1-18) Now Abraham moved his camp from there to the land of the Neg'eb and began dwelling between Ka'desh and Shur. While he was residing at Ge'rar, ² Abraham repeated concerning his wife Sarah: "She is my sister." So A-bim'e-lech king of Ge'rar sent for Sarah and took her. ³ Afterward, God came by night to A-bim'e-lech in

a dream and said to him: "Here you are as good as dead because of the woman whom you have taken, since she is married and belongs to another man." ⁴ However, A-bim'e-lech had not gone near her. So he said: "Jehovah, will you kill a nation that is really innocent?" ⁵ Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister,' and did she too not say, 'He is my brother'? I did this with an honest heart and innocent hands." ⁶ Then the true God said to him in the dream: "I know that you did this with an honest heart, so I held you back from sinning against me. That is why I did not allow you to touch her. ⁷ Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will make supplication for you and you will keep living. But if you are not returning her, know that you will surely die, you and all who are yours." ⁸ A-bim'e-lech got up early in the morning and called all his servants and told them all these things, and they became very frightened. ⁹ Then A-bim'e-lech called Abraham and said to him: "What have you done to us? What sin have I committed against you that you would bring upon me and my kingdom such a great sin? What you have done to me was not right." ¹⁰ And A-bim'e-lech went on to say to Abraham: "What were your intentions when you did this thing?" ¹¹ Abraham said: "It was because I said to myself, 'Surely there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.' ¹² And besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father but not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife. ¹³ So when God caused me to wander from the house of my father, I said to her: 'Let this be how you show loyal love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother."'" ¹⁴ A-bim'e-lech then took sheep and cattle and male and female servants and gave them to Abraham, and he returned his wife Sarah to him.

¹⁵ A·bim'e·lech also said: "Here my land is available to you. Dwell wherever you please."

¹⁶ And to Sarah he said: "Here I give 1,000 pieces of silver to your brother. It is a sign of your innocence to all who are with you and before everybody, and you are cleared of reproach." ¹⁷ And Abraham began to make supplication to the true God, and God healed A·bim'e·lech and his wife and his slave girls, and they began having children; ¹⁸ for Jehovah had made all the women of the house of A·bim'e·lech barren because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.