

## WEEK 3

### *Some Questions to reflect on before reading the text*

- When you were growing up, who had the final say in the family?
- Have you ever come up with what seemed like a good solution to a problem & then watched it go sour?
- Do you enjoy looking at the stars? Do you have any fond memories of looking up into the night sky?

### **Reading: Genesis 15:1–11, 17-18; 16:1-16**

#### **God's Covenant with Abram**

15 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.'<sup>2</sup> But Abram said, 'O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, & the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?'<sup>3</sup> & Abram said, 'You have given me no offspring, & so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.'<sup>4</sup> But the word of the LORD came to him, 'This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.'<sup>5</sup> He brought him outside & said, 'Look towards heaven & count the stars, if you are able to count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.'<sup>6</sup> & he believed the LORD; & the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.

7 Then he said to him, 'I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess.'<sup>8</sup> But he said, 'O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?'<sup>9</sup> He said to him, 'Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtle-dove, & a young pigeon.'<sup>10</sup> He brought him all these & cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two.<sup>11</sup> & when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away....

17 When the sun had gone down & it was dark, a smoking fire-pot & a flaming torch passed between these pieces.<sup>18</sup> On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,....

## The Birth of Ishmael

16 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian slave-girl whose name was Hagar,<sup>2</sup> & Sarai said to Abram, 'You see that the LORD has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my slave-girl; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.' & Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.<sup>3</sup> So, after Abram had lived for ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave-girl, & gave her to her husband Abram as a wife.<sup>4</sup> He went in to Hagar, & she conceived; & when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress.<sup>5</sup> Then Sarai said to Abram, 'May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my slave-girl to your embrace, & when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you & me!'<sup>6</sup> But Abram said to Sarai, 'Your slave-girl is in your power; do to her as you please.' Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, & she ran away from her.

7 The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur.<sup>8</sup> & he said, 'Hagar, slave-girl of Sarai, where have you come from & where are you going?' She said, 'I am running away from my mistress Sarai.'<sup>9</sup> The angel of the LORD said to her, 'Return to your mistress, & submit to her.'<sup>10</sup> The angel of the LORD also said to her, 'I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude.'<sup>11</sup> & the angel of the LORD said to her,

'Now you have conceived & shall bear a son;  
you shall call him Ishmael,  
for the Lord has given heed to your affliction.  
12 He shall be a wild ass of a man,  
with his hand against everyone,  
& everyone's hand against him;  
& he shall live at odds with all his kin.'

<sup>13</sup>So she named the LORD who spoke to her, 'You are El-roi'; for she said, 'Have I really seen God & remained alive after seeing him?'....

15 Hagar bore Abram a son; & Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael.<sup>16</sup> Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

**After reading the text, you may wish to consider the following:**

*Choose questions according to your interest & time*

- Abram says to God, “*What will you give me, because I have no heir?*” (cf. 15:2). Why does he add the part about not having an heir?
- Would God’s statement in 15:5 strengthen Abram’s faith or strain it further? Why?
- God says he brought Abram out of Ur (15:7), yet there was no report of divine guidance to Terah (cf 11:31). What does this apparent discrepancy suggest about how God sometimes guides our lives?
- In this reading, what are the indications that God is awesome? That he knows people in a personal way? That he is someone to whom people can freely speak their minds?
- To whom does God speak in this reading? What does this suggest about the kinds of people that God views as important?

**After session 3, you may wish to consider the following**

*Questions for Application*

- Why does God place so much importance on whether Abram believes him (15:6)? Why is faith important in our own relationship with God?
- What sorts of doubts about God & his promises do you sometimes experience? Do you ask questions of God, as Abram did? What has been most helpful to you in strengthening your faith? What could you do to strengthen other people’s faith in God?
- Look back at your answer to q.4 in the “Careful reading” section. What picture of God emerges from the verses that you identified? What does this picture mean for your own relationship with God?

- When have you tried to achieve a legitimate goal in a questionable or unworthy way? What did you learn from the experience? How might you apply what you learned to some aspect of your life at present?
- In what situations is it important for a person to insist on being treated with respect? Why? Can this be done in a way that is also humble?