



READING GUIDE — WEEK 2

ABRAHAM: GOD BUILDS A NATION

Genesis 12-13, 15-17, 21-22, 32-33, 35; Romans 4; Hebrews 11

GOD Genesis 12

THE CALL OF ABRAM

1 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you.² I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others.³ I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."

4 So Abram departed as the LORD had instructed, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.⁵ He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all his wealth—his livestock and all the people he had taken into his household at Haran—and headed for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in Canaan,⁶ Abram traveled through the land as far as Shechem. There he set up camp beside the oak of Moreh. At that time, the area was inhabited by Canaanites.

7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your descendants.*" And Abram built an altar there and dedicated it to the LORD, who had appeared to him.⁸ After that, Abram traveled south and set up camp in the hill country, with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. There he built another altar and dedicated it to the LORD, and he worshiped the LORD.⁹ Then Abram continued traveling south by stages toward the Negev.

ABRAM AND SARAI IN EGYPT

10 At that time a severe famine struck the land of Canaan, forcing Abram to go down to Egypt, where he lived as a foreigner.¹¹ As he was approaching the border of Egypt, Abram said to his wife, Sarai, "Look, you are a very beautiful woman.¹² When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife. Let's kill

him; then we can have her!'"¹³ So please tell them you are my sister. Then they will spare my life and treat me well because of their interest in you."

14 And sure enough, when Abram arrived in Egypt, everyone noticed Sarai's beauty.¹⁵ When the palace officials saw her, they sang her praises to Pharaoh, their king, and Sarai was taken into his palace.¹⁶ Then Pharaoh gave Abram many gifts because of her—sheep, goats, cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels.

17 But the LORD sent terrible plagues upon Pharaoh and his household because of Sarai, Abram's wife.¹⁸ So Pharaoh summoned Abram and accused him sharply. "What have you done to me?" he demanded. "Why didn't you tell me she was your wife?¹⁹ Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' and allow me to take her as my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and get out of here!"²⁰ Pharaoh ordered some of his men to escort them, and he sent Abram out of the country, along with his wife and all his possessions.

Genesis 13

ABRAM AND LOT SEPARATE

1 So Abram left Egypt and traveled north into the Negev, along with his wife and Lot and all that they owned.² (Abram was very rich in livestock, silver, and gold.)³ From the Negev, they continued traveling by stages toward Bethel, and they pitched their tents between Bethel and Ai, where they had camped before.⁴ This was the same place where Abram had built the altar, and there he worshiped the LORD again.

5 Lot, who was traveling with Abram, had also become very wealthy with flocks of sheep and goats, herds of cattle, and many tents.⁶ But the land could not

support both Abram and Lot with all their flocks and herds living so close together.⁷ So disputes broke out between the herdsmen of Abram and Lot. (At that time Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land.)

⁸ Finally Abram said to Lot, "Let's not allow this conflict to come between us or our herdsmen. After all, we are close relatives!⁹ The whole countryside is open to you. Take your choice of any section of the land you want, and we will separate. If you want the land to the left, then I'll take the land on the right. If you prefer the land on the right, then I'll go to the left."

¹⁰ Lot took a long look at the fertile plains of the Jordan Valley in the direction of Zoar. The whole area was well watered everywhere, like the garden of the LORD or the beautiful land of Egypt. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.)¹¹ Lot chose for himself the whole Jordan Valley to the east of them. He went there with his flocks and servants and parted company with his uncle Abram.¹² So Abram settled in the land of Canaan, and Lot moved his tents to a place near Sodom and settled among the cities of the plain.¹³ But the people of this area were extremely wicked and constantly sinned against the LORD.

¹⁴ After Lot had gone, the LORD said to Abram, "Look as far as you can see in every direction—north and south, east and west.¹⁵ I am giving all this land, as far as you can see, to you and your descendants* as a permanent possession.¹⁶ And I will give you so many descendants that, like the dust of the earth, they cannot be counted!¹⁷ Go and walk through the land in every direction, for I am giving it to you."

¹⁸ So Abram moved his camp to Hebron and settled near the oak grove belonging to Mamre. There he built another altar to the LORD.

Genesis 15

THE LORD'S COVENANT PROMISE TO ABRAM

¹ Some time later, the LORD spoke to Abram in a vi-

sion and said to him, "Do not be afraid, Abram, for I will protect you, and your reward will be great."

² But Abram replied, "O Sovereign LORD, what good are all your blessings when I don't even have a son? Since you've given me no children, Eliezer of Damascus, a servant in my household, will inherit all my wealth.³ You have given me no descendants of my own, so one of my servants will be my heir."

⁴ Then the LORD said to him, "No, your servant will not be your heir, for you will have a son of your own who will be your heir."⁵ Then the LORD took Abram outside and said to him, "Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That's how many descendants you will have!"

⁶ And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith.

⁷ Then the LORD told him, "I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as your possession."

⁸ But Abram replied, "O Sovereign LORD, how can I be sure that I will actually possess it?"

⁹ The LORD told him, "Bring 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 Abram presented all these to him and killed them. Then he cut each animal down the middle and laid the halves side by side; he did not, however, cut the birds in half.¹¹ Some vultures swooped down to eat the carcasses, but Abram chased them away.

¹² As the sun was going down, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a terrifying darkness came down over him.¹³ Then the LORD said to Abram, "You can be sure that your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land, where they will be oppressed as slaves for 400 years.¹⁴ But I will punish the nation that enslaves them, and in the end they will come away with great wealth.¹⁵ (As for you, you will die in peace and be

buried at a ripe old age.)¹⁶ After four generations your descendants will return here to this land, for the sins of the Amorites do not yet warrant their destruction."

¹⁷ After the sun went down and darkness fell, Abram saw a smoking firepot and a flaming torch pass between the halves of the carcasses.¹⁸ So the LORD made a covenant with Abram that day and said, "I have given this land to your descendants, all the way from the border of Egypt* to the great Euphrates River—¹⁹ the land now occupied by the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites,²⁰ Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites,²¹ Amorites, Canaanites, Gergashites, and Jebusites."

Genesis 16

THE BIRTH OF ISHMAEL

¹ Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had not been able to bear children for him. But she had an Egyptian servant named Hagar.² So Sarai said to Abram, "The LORD has prevented me from having children. Go and sleep with my servant. Perhaps I can have children through her." And Abram agreed with Sarai's proposal.³ So Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian servant and gave her to Abram as a wife. (This happened ten years after Abram had settled in the land of Canaan.)

⁴ So Abram had sexual relations with Hagar, and she became pregnant. But when Hagar knew she was pregnant, she began to treat her mistress, Sarai, with contempt.⁵ Then Sarai said to Abram, "This is all your fault! I put my servant into your arms, but now that she's pregnant she treats me with contempt. The LORD will show who's wrong—you or me!"

⁶ Abram replied, "Look, she is your servant, so deal with her as you see fit." Then Sarai treated Hagar so harshly that she finally ran away.

⁷ The angel of the LORD found Hagar beside a spring of water in the wilderness, along the road to

Shur.⁸ The angel said to her, "Hagar, Sarai's servant, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress, Sarai," she replied.

⁹ The angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit to her authority."¹⁰ Then he added, "I will give you more descendants than you can count."

¹¹ And the angel also said, "You are now pregnant and will give birth to a son. You are to name him Ishmael (which means 'God hears'), for the LORD has heard your cry of distress.¹² This son of yours will be a wild man, as untamed as a wild donkey! He will raise his fist against everyone, and everyone will be against him. Yes, he will live in open hostility against all his relatives."

¹³ Thereafter, Hagar used another name to refer to the LORD, who had spoken to her. She said, "You are the God who sees me."* She also said, "Have I truly seen the One who sees me?"¹⁴ So that well was named Beer-lahai-roi (which means "well of the Living One who sees me"). It can still be found between Kadesh and Bered.

¹⁵ So Hagar gave Abram a son, and Abram named him Ishmael.¹⁶ Abram was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born.

Genesis 17

ABRAM IS NAMED ABRAHAM

¹ When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am El-Shaddai—'God Almighty.' Serve me faithfully and live a blameless life.² I will make a covenant with you, by which I will guarantee to give you countless descendants."

³ At this, Abram fell face down on the ground. Then God said to him,⁴ "This is my covenant with you: I

will make you the father of a multitude of nations!
5 What's more, I am changing your name. It will no longer be Abram. Instead, you will be called Abraham,* for you will be the father of many nations.6 I will make you extremely fruitful. Your descendants will become many nations, and kings will be among them!

7 "I will confirm my covenant with you and your descendants* after you, from generation to generation. This is the everlasting covenant: I will always be your God and the God of your descendants after you.8 And I will give the entire land of Canaan, where you now live as a foreigner, to you and your descendants. It will be their possession forever, and I will be their God."

THE MARK OF THE COVENANT

9 Then God said to Abraham, "Your responsibility is to obey the terms of the covenant. You and all your descendants have this continual responsibility.10 This is the covenant that you and your descendants must keep: Each male among you must be circumcised.11 You must cut off the flesh of your foreskin as a sign of the covenant between me and you.12 From generation to generation, every male child must be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. This applies not only to members of your family but also to the servants born in your household and the foreign-born servants whom you have purchased.13 All must be circumcised. Your bodies will bear the mark of my everlasting covenant.14 Any male who fails to be circumcised will be cut off from the covenant family for breaking the covenant."

SARAI IS NAMED SARAH

15 Then God said to Abraham, "Regarding Sarai, your wife—her name will no longer be Sarai. From now on her name will be Sarah.*16 And I will bless her and give you a son from her! Yes, I will bless her richly, and she will become the mother of many nations. Kings of nations will be among her descendants."

17 Then Abraham bowed down to the ground, but he laughed to himself in disbelief. "How could I become a

father at the age of 100?" he thought. "And how can Sarah have a baby when she is ninety years old?"18 So Abraham said to God, "May Ishmael live under your special blessing!"

19 But God replied, "No—Sarah, your wife, will give birth to a son for you. You will name him Isaac,* and I will confirm my covenant with him and his descendants as an everlasting covenant.20 As for Ishmael, I will bless him also, just as you have asked. I will make him extremely fruitful and multiply his descendants. He will become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation.21 But my covenant will be confirmed with Isaac, who will be born to you and Sarah about this time next year."22 When God had finished speaking, he left Abraham.

23 On that very day Abraham took his son, Ishmael, and every male in his household, including those born there and those he had bought. Then he circumcised them, cutting off their foreskins, just as God had told him.24 Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised,25 and Ishmael, his son, was thirteen.26 Both Abraham and his son, Ishmael, were circumcised on that same day,27 along with all the other men and boys of the household, whether they were born there or bought as servants. All were circumcised with him.

Genesis 21

THE BIRTH OF ISAAC

1 The LORD kept his word and did for Sarah exactly what he had promised.2 She became pregnant, and she gave birth to a son for Abraham in his old age. This happened at just the time God had said it would.3 And Abraham named their son Isaac.4 Eight days after Isaac was born, Abraham circumcised him as God had commanded.5 Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born.

6 And Sarah declared, "God has brought me laughter.* All who hear about this will laugh with me.7 Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah

would nurse a baby? Yet I have given Abraham a son in his old age!"

HAGAR AND ISHMAEL ARE SENT AWAY

8 When Isaac grew up and was about to be weaned, Abraham prepared a huge feast to celebrate the occasion.⁹ But Sarah saw Ishmael—the son of Abraham and her Egyptian servant Hagar—making fun of her son, Isaac.*¹⁰ So she turned to Abraham and demanded, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son. He is not going to share the inheritance with my son, Isaac. I won't have it!"

11 This upset Abraham very much because Ishmael was his son.¹² But God told Abraham, "Do not be upset over the boy and your servant. Do whatever Sarah tells you, for Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted.¹³ But I will also make a nation of the descendants of Hagar's son because he is your son, too."

14 So Abraham got up early the next morning, prepared food and a container of water, and strapped them on Hagar's shoulders. Then he sent her away with their son, and she wandered aimlessly in the wilderness of Beersheba.

15 When the water was gone, she put the boy in the shade of a bush.¹⁶ Then she went and sat down by herself about a hundred yards* away. "I don't want to watch the boy die," she said, as she burst into tears.

17 But God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, "Hagar, what's wrong? Do not be afraid! God has heard the boy crying as he lies there.¹⁸ Go to him and comfort him, for I will make a great nation from his descendants."

19 Then God opened Hagar's eyes, and she saw a well full of water. She quickly filled her water container and gave the boy a drink.

20 And God was with the boy as he grew up in the wilderness. He became a skillful archer,²¹ and he settled in the wilderness of Paran. His mother arranged for him to marry a woman from the land of Egypt.

ABRAHAM'S COVENANT WITH ABIMELECH

22 About this time, Abimelech came with Phicol, his army commander, to visit Abraham. "God is obviously with you, helping you in everything you do,"

Abimelech said.²³ "Swear to me in God's name that you will never deceive me, my children, or any of my descendants. I have been loyal to you, so now swear that you will be loyal to me and to this country where you are living as a foreigner."

24 Abraham replied, "Yes, I swear to it!"²⁵ Then Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well that Abimelech's servants had taken by force from Abraham's servants.

26 "This is the first I've heard of it," Abimelech answered. "I have no idea who is responsible. You have never complained about this before."

27 Abraham then gave some of his sheep, goats, and cattle to Abimelech, and they made a treaty.²⁸ But Abraham also took seven additional female lambs and set them off by themselves.²⁹ Abimelech asked, "Why have you set these seven apart from the others?"

30 Abraham replied, "Please accept these seven lambs to show your agreement that I dug this well."³¹ Then he named the place Beersheba (which means "well of the oath"), because that was where they had sworn the oath.

32 After making their covenant at Beersheba, Abimelech left with Phicol, the commander of his army, and they returned home to the land of the Philistines.³³ Then Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he worshiped the LORD, the Eternal God.*³⁴ And Abraham lived as a foreigner in Philistine country for a long time.

Genesis 22

ABRAHAM'S FAITH TESTED

1 Some time later, God tested Abraham's faith. "Abraham!" God called.

"Yes," he replied. "Here I am."

2 "Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you."

3 The next morning Abraham got up early. He saddled his donkey and took two of his servants with him, along with his son, Isaac. Then he chopped wood for a fire for a burnt offering and set out for the place God

had told him about.⁴ On the third day of their journey, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.⁵ "Stay here with the donkey," Abraham told the servants. "The boy and I will travel a little farther. We will worship there, and then we will come right back."

⁶ So Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac's shoulders, while he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them walked on together,⁷ Isaac turned to Abraham and said, "Father?"

"Yes, my son?" Abraham replied.

"We have the fire and the wood," the boy said, "but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?"

⁸ "God will provide a sheep for the burnt offering, my son," Abraham answered. And they both walked on together.

⁹ When they arrived at the place where God had told him to go, Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood on it. Then he tied his son, Isaac, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood.¹⁰ And Abraham picked up the knife to kill his son as a sacrifice.¹¹ At that moment the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Yes," Abraham replied. "Here I am!"

¹² "Don't lay a hand on the boy!" the angel said. "Do not hurt him in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld from me even your son, your only son."

¹³ Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. So he took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering in place of his son.¹⁴ Abraham named the place Yahweh-Yireh (which means "the LORD will provide"). To this day, people still use that name as a proverb: "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."

¹⁵ Then the angel of the LORD called again to Abraham from heaven.¹⁶ "This is what the LORD says: Because you have obeyed me and have not withheld even your son, your only son, I swear by my own name that¹⁷ I will certainly bless you. I will multiply your descendants* beyond number, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will conquer the cities of their enemies.¹⁸ And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed—all because you have obeyed me."

¹⁹ Then they returned to the servants and traveled

back to Beersheba, where Abraham continued to live.

²⁰ Soon after this, Abraham heard that Milcah, his brother Nahor's wife, had borne Nahor eight sons.²¹ The oldest was named Uz, the next oldest was Buz, followed by Kemuel (the ancestor of the Arameans),²² Kesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel.²³ (Bethuel became the father of Rebekah.) In addition to these eight sons from Milcah,²⁴ Nahor had four other children from his concubine Reumah. Their names were Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.

Genesis 32

¹ *As Jacob started on his way again, angels of God came to meet him.² When Jacob saw them, he exclaimed, "This is God's camp!" So he named the place Mahanaim.*

JACOB SENDS GIFTS TO ESAU

³ Then Jacob sent messengers ahead to his brother, Esau, who was living in the region of Seir in the land of Edom.⁴ He told them, "Give this message to my master Esau: 'Humble greetings from your servant Jacob. Until now I have been living with Uncle Laban,⁵ and now I own cattle, donkeys, flocks of sheep and goats, and many servants, both men and women. I have sent these messengers to inform my lord of my coming, hoping that you will be friendly to me.'"

⁶ After delivering the message, the messengers returned to Jacob and reported, "We met your brother, Esau, and he is already on his way to meet you—with an army of 400 men!"⁷ Jacob was terrified at the news. He divided his household, along with the flocks and herds and camels, into two groups.⁸ He thought, "If Esau meets one group and attacks it, perhaps the other group can escape."

⁹ Then Jacob prayed, "O God of my grandfather Abraham, and God of my father, Isaac—O LORD, you told me, 'Return to your own land and to your relatives.' And you promised me, 'I will treat you kindly.'¹⁰ I am not worthy of all the unfailing love and faithfulness you have shown to me, your servant. When I left home and crossed the Jordan River, I owned nothing except a walking stick. Now my house-

hold fills two large camps!¹¹ O LORD, please rescue me from the hand of my brother, Esau. I am afraid that he is coming to attack me, along with my wives and children.¹² But you promised me, 'I will surely treat you kindly, and I will multiply your descendants until they become as numerous as the sands along the sea-shore—too many to count.'"

¹³ Jacob stayed where he was for the night. Then he selected these gifts from his possessions to present to his brother, Esau: ¹⁴ 200 female goats, 20 male goats, 200 ewes, 20 rams, ¹⁵ 30 female camels with their young, 40 cows, 10 bulls, 20 female donkeys, and 10 male donkeys. ¹⁶ He divided these animals into herds and assigned each to different servants. Then he told his servants, "Go ahead of me with the animals, but keep some distance between the herds."

¹⁷ He gave these instructions to the men leading the first group: "When my brother, Esau, meets you, he will ask, 'Whose servants are you? Where are you going? Who owns these animals?'" ¹⁸ You must reply, 'They belong to your servant Jacob, but they are a gift for his master Esau. Look, he is coming right behind us.'"

¹⁹ Jacob gave the same instructions to the second and third herdsmen and to all who followed behind the herds: "You must say the same thing to Esau when you meet him. ²⁰ And be sure to say, 'Look, your servant Jacob is right behind us.'"

Jacob thought, "I will try to appease him by sending gifts ahead of me. When I see him in person, perhaps he will be friendly to me." ²¹ So the gifts were sent on ahead, while Jacob himself spent that night in the camp.

JACOB WRESTLES WITH GOD

²² During the night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two servant wives, and his eleven sons and crossed the Jabbok River with them. ²³ After taking them to the other side, he sent over all his possessions.

²⁴ This left Jacob all alone in the camp, and a man came and wrestled with him until the dawn began to break. ²⁵ When the man saw that he would not win the match, he touched Jacob's hip and wrenched it out of its socket. ²⁶ Then the man said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking!"

But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

²⁷ "What is your name?" the man asked.

He replied, "Jacob."

²⁸ "Your name will no longer be Jacob," the man told him. "From now on you will be called Israel,* because you have fought with God and with men and have won."

²⁹ "Please tell me your name," Jacob said.

"Why do you want to know my name?" the man replied. Then he blessed Jacob there.

³⁰ Jacob named the place Peniel (which means "face of God"), for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared." ³¹ The sun was rising as Jacob left Peniel,* and he was limping because of the injury to his hip. ³² (Even today the people of Israel don't eat the tendon near the hip socket because of what happened that night when the man strained the tendon of Jacob's hip.)

Genesis 33

JACOB AND ESAU MAKE PEACE

¹ Then Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming with his 400 men. So he divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and his two servant wives. ² He put the servant wives and their children at the front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last. ³ Then Jacob went on ahead. As he approached his brother, he bowed to the ground seven times before him. ⁴ Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. And they both wept.

⁵ Then Esau looked at the women and children and asked, "Who are these people with you?"

"These are the children God has graciously given to me, your servant," Jacob replied. ⁶ Then the servant wives came forward with their children and bowed before him. ⁷ Next came Leah with her children, and they bowed before him. Finally, Joseph and Rachel came forward and bowed before him.

⁸ "And what were all the flocks and herds I met as I came?" Esau asked.

Jacob replied, "They are a gift, my lord, to ensure

your friendship."

9 "My brother, I have plenty," Esau answered. "Keep what you have for yourself."

10 But Jacob insisted, "No, if I have found favor with you, please accept this gift from me. And what a relief to see your friendly smile. It is like seeing the face of God!11 Please take this gift I have brought you, for God has been very gracious to me. I have more than enough." And because Jacob insisted, Esau finally accepted the gift.

12 "Well," Esau said, "let's be going. I will lead the way."

13 But Jacob replied, "You can see, my lord, that some of the children are very young, and the flocks and herds have their young, too. If they are driven too hard, even for one day, all the animals could die.14 Please, my lord, go ahead of your servant. We will follow slowly, at a pace that is comfortable for the livestock and the children. I will meet you at Seir."

15 "All right," Esau said, "but at least let me assign some of my men to guide and protect you."

Jacob responded, "That's not necessary. It's enough that you've received me warmly, my lord!"

16 So Esau turned around and started back to Seir that same day.17 Jacob, on the other hand, traveled on to Succoth. There he built himself a house and made shelters for his livestock. That is why the place was named Succoth (which means "shelters").

18 Later, having traveled all the way from Paddan-aram, Jacob arrived safely at the town of Shechem, in the land of Canaan. There he set up camp outside the town.19 Jacob bought the plot of land where he camped from the family of Hamor, the father of Shechem, for 100 pieces of silver.*20 And there he built an altar and named it El-Elohe-Israel.*

Genesis 35

Jacob's Return to Bethel

1 Then God said to Jacob, "Get ready and move to Bethel and settle there. Build an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother, Esau."

2 So Jacob told everyone in his household, "Get rid of

all your pagan idols, purify yourselves, and put on clean clothing.3 We are now going to Bethel, where I will build an altar to the God who answered my prayers when I was in distress. He has been with me wherever I have gone."

4 So they gave Jacob all their pagan idols and earrings, and he buried them under the great tree near Shechem.5 As they set out, a terror from God spread over the people in all the towns of that area, so no one attacked Jacob's family.

6 Eventually, Jacob and his household arrived at Luz (also called Bethel) in Canaan.7 Jacob built an altar there and named the place El-bethel (which means "God of Bethel"), because God had appeared to him there when he was fleeing from his brother, Esau.

8 Soon after this, Rebekah's old nurse, Deborah, died. She was buried beneath the oak tree in the valley below Bethel. Ever since, the tree has been called Allon-bacuth (which means "oak of weeping").

9 Now that Jacob had returned from Paddan-aram, God appeared to him again at Bethel. God blessed him,10 saying, "Your name is Jacob, but you will not be called Jacob any longer. From now on your name will be Israel.*" So God renamed him Israel.

11 Then God said, "I am El-Shaddai—'God Almighty.' Be fruitful and multiply. You will become a great nation, even many nations. Kings will be among your descendants!12 And I will give you the land I once gave to Abraham and Isaac. Yes, I will give it to you and your descendants after you."13 Then God went up from the place where he had spoken to Jacob.

14 Jacob set up a stone pillar to mark the place where God had spoken to him. Then he poured wine over it as an offering to God and anointed the pillar with olive oil.15 And Jacob named the place Bethel (which means "house of God"), because God had spoken to him there.

THE DEATHS OF RACHEL AND ISAAC

16 Leaving Bethel, Jacob and his clan moved on toward Ephrath. But Rachel went into labor while they were still some distance away. Her labor pains were intense.17 After a very hard delivery, the midwife finally exclaimed, "Don't be afraid—you have another son!"18 Rachel was about to die, but with her last

breath she named the baby Ben-oni (which means "son of my sorrow"). The baby's father, however, called him Benjamin (which means "son of my right hand").¹⁹ So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).²⁰ Jacob set up a stone monument over Rachel's grave, and it can be seen there to this day.

²¹ Then Jacob* traveled on and camped beyond Migdal-eder.²² While he was living there, Reuben had intercourse with Bilhah, his father's concubine, and Jacob soon heard about it.

These are the names of the twelve sons of Jacob:

²³ The sons of Leah were Reuben (Jacob's oldest son), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun.

²⁴ The sons of Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin.

²⁵ The sons of Bilhah, Rachel's servant, were Dan and Naphtali.

²⁶ The sons of Zilpah, Leah's servant, were Gad and Asher. These are the names of the sons who were born to Jacob at Paddan-aram.

²⁷ So Jacob returned to his father, Isaac, in Mamre, which is near Kiriath-arba (now called Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had both lived as foreigners.²⁸ Isaac lived for 180 years.²⁹ Then he breathed his last and died at a ripe old age, joining his ancestors in death. And his sons, Esau and Jacob, buried him.

Romans 4

THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM

¹ Abraham was, humanly speaking, the founder of our Jewish nation. What did he discover about being made right with God?² If his good deeds had made him acceptable to God, he would have had something to boast about. But that was not God's way.³ For the Scriptures tell us, "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith."*

⁴ When people work, their wages are not a gift, but something they have earned.⁵ But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners.⁶ David also spoke of this when he described the happiness of those

who are declared righteous without working for it:

⁷ "Oh, what joy for those
whose disobedience is forgiven,
whose sins are put out of sight.

⁸ Yes, what joy for those
whose record the LORD has cleared of sin."*

⁹ Now, is this blessing only for the Jews, or is it also for uncircumcised Gentiles?* Well, we have been saying that Abraham was counted as righteous by God because of his faith.¹⁰ But how did this happen? Was he counted as righteous only after he was circumcised, or was it before he was circumcised? Clearly, God accepted Abraham before he was circumcised!

¹¹ Circumcision was a sign that Abraham already had faith and that God had already accepted him and declared him to be righteous—even before he was circumcised. So Abraham is the spiritual father of those who have faith but have not been circumcised. They are counted as righteous because of their faith.¹² And Abraham is also the spiritual father of those who have been circumcised, but only if they have the same kind of faith Abraham had before he was circumcised.

¹³ Clearly, God's promise to give the whole earth to Abraham and his descendants was based not on his obedience to God's law, but on a right relationship with God that comes by faith.¹⁴ If God's promise is only for those who obey the law, then faith is not necessary and the promise is pointless.¹⁵ For the law always brings punishment on those who try to obey it. (The only way to avoid breaking the law is to have no law to break!)

¹⁶ So the promise is received by faith. It is given as a free gift. And we are all certain to receive it, whether or not we live according to the law of Moses, if we have faith like Abraham's. For Abraham is the father of all who believe.¹⁷ That is what the Scriptures mean when God told him, "I have made you the father of many nations."* This happened because Abraham believed in the God who brings the dead back to life and who creates new things out of nothing.

¹⁸ Even when there was no reason for hope, Abraham kept hoping—believing that he would become the father of many nations. For God had said to him,

"That's how many descendants you will have!"*19 And Abraham's faith did not weaken, even though, at about 100 years of age, he figured his body was as good as dead—and so was Sarah's womb.

20 Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God.21 He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises.22 And because of Abraham's faith, God counted him as righteous.23 And when God counted him as righteous, it wasn't just for Abraham's benefit. It was recorded24 for our benefit, too, assuring us that God will also count us as righteous if we believe in him, the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.25 He was handed over to die because of our sins, and he was raised to life to make us right with God.

Hebrews 11

GREAT EXAMPLES OF FAITH

1 Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.2 Through their faith, the people in days of old earned a good reputation.

3 By faith we understand that the entire universe was formed at God's command, that what we now see did not come from anything that can be seen.

4 It was by faith that Abel brought a more acceptable offering to God than Cain did. Abel's offering gave evidence that he was a righteous man, and God showed his approval of his gifts. Although Abel is long dead, he still speaks to us by his example of faith.

5 It was by faith that Enoch was taken up to heaven without dying—"he disappeared, because God took him."* For before he was taken up, he was known as a person who pleased God.6 And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.

7 It was by faith that Noah built a large boat to save his family from the flood. He obeyed God, who warned him about things that had never happened before. By his faith Noah condemned the rest of the world, and he received the righteousness that comes by

faith.

8 It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going.9 And even when he reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith—for he was like a foreigner, living in tents. And so did Isaac and Jacob, who inherited the same promise.10 Abraham was confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God.

11 It was by faith that even Sarah was able to have a child, though she was barren and was too old. She believed* that God would keep his promise.12 And so a whole nation came from this one man who was as good as dead—a nation with so many people that, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore, there is no way to count them.

13 All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it. They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth.14 Obviously people who say such things are looking forward to a country they can call their own.15 If they had longed for the country they came from, they could have gone back.16 But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

17 It was by faith that Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice when God was testing him. Abraham, who had received God's promises, was ready to sacrifice his only son, Isaac,18 even though God had told him, "Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted."*19 Abraham reasoned that if Isaac died, God was able to bring him back to life again. And in a sense, Abraham did receive his son back from the dead.

20 It was by faith that Isaac promised blessings for the future to his sons, Jacob and Esau.

21 It was by faith that Jacob, when he was old and dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons and bowed in worship as he leaned on his staff.

22 It was by faith that Joseph, when he was about to die, said confidently that the people of Israel would

leave Egypt. He even commanded them to take his bones with them when they left.

23 It was by faith that Moses' parents hid him for three months when he was born. They saw that God had given them an unusual child, and they were not afraid to disobey the king's command.

24 It was by faith that Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.²⁵ He chose to share the oppression of God's people instead of enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin.²⁶ He thought it was better to suffer for the sake of Christ than to own the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to his great reward.²⁷ It was by faith that Moses left the land of Egypt, not fearing the king's anger. He kept right on going because he kept his eyes on the one who is invisible.²⁸ It was by faith that Moses commanded the people of Israel to keep the Passover and to sprinkle blood on the doorposts so that the angel of death would not kill their firstborn sons.

29 It was by faith that the people of Israel went right through the Red Sea as though they were on dry ground. But when the Egyptians tried to follow, they were all drowned.

30 It was by faith that the people of Israel marched around Jericho for seven days, and the walls came crashing down.

31 It was by faith that Rahab the prostitute was not destroyed with the people in her city who refused to obey God. For she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

32 How much more do I need to say? It would take too long to recount the stories of the faith of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and all the prophets.³³ By faith these people overthrew kingdoms, ruled with justice, and received what God had promised them. They shut the mouths of lions,³⁴ quenched the flames of fire, and escaped death by the edge of the sword. Their weakness was turned to strength. They became strong in battle and put whole armies to flight.³⁵ Women received their loved ones back again from death.

But others were tortured, refusing to turn from God in order to be set free. They placed their hope in a better life after the resurrection.³⁶ Some were jeered at, and their backs were cut open with whips. Others were

chained in prisons.³⁷ Some died by stoning, some were sawed in half,* and others were killed with the sword. Some went about wearing skins of sheep and goats, destitute and oppressed and mistreated.³⁸ They were too good for this world, wandering over deserts and mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground.

39 All these people earned a good reputation because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised.⁴⁰ For God had something better in mind for us, so that they would not reach perfection without us.