**Genesis 12-22: Abraham and the Anxiety of Faith**

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1. Transition.
2. The tree of knowledge. This happens on the first day of creation *of man*, which is the sixth day of creation. This is not just the “aftermath” of creation, but the day of creation – it is imperative that we make choices, as independent beings, created in the image of God. Israel comes from divinity, from wrestling with divinity (Genesis 2:16-17). You are free to eat from any of the trees of the garden[**i**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/2#01002016-i)17except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. From that tree you shall not eat; when you eat from it you shall die.[**\***](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/2#01002017-1) [**j**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/2#01002017-j)
3. Readings of the Fall.
4. Maimonides said that knowing good and evil is itself a good. Metaphysically speaking, when we “know” anything we appropriate something outside of ourselves and take it into ourselves. But knowing about good and evil, the ability to make moral distinctions (itself good), differs from committing evil, (which is bad).
5. Moses Mendelssohn. He said that we are created with the faculties of reason and of desire. There is an ambivalence. Jews say that people should have knowledge of good and evil.
6. Preternatural Gifts. Learning about good and evil is good. When God turns to man and woman, to scold them, he says (Genesis 3:16): To the woman he said: I will intensify your toil in childbearing; in pain**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/3%22%20%5Cl%20%2201003016-1)** you shall bring forth children. Yet your urge shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you. 17To the man he said: Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, You shall not eat from it, Cursed is the ground[**\***](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/3#01003017-1) because of you! In toil you shall eat its yield all the days of your life.[**h**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/3#01003017-h) 18Thorns and thistles it shall bear for you, and you shall eat the grass of the field. 19By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread, Until you return to the ground, from which you were taken; For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.[**i**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/3#01003019-i)
7. Rainbows are natural, i.e., “hard wired” into creation. The refraction of light. The Bible adds a gloss: God said that destruction shall never come again.
8. Pain in childbirth is as “hard-wired” into creation as the rainbow. The pain is linked to the sin of Eve.
9. So why is the loss of the preternatural gifts linked to moral evil? It is not suffering for suffering’s sake, but suffering as a way to knowledge.
10. We can control the pain. Pain in childbirth is not an absolute punishment. No two women experience pain the same way. Some want an epidural.
11. Have we done something wrong in the modern era by dulling pain?
12. James Cassidy: medical people in England protested against anesthesia in the Victorian Age.
13. The phrase, “He shall rule over you” is not a command.
14. Poverty and the Curse. Some people in the first world have less pain than those in impoverished countries.
15. Not everyone has pain. Not everyone has thorns and thistles, and works by the sweat of the brow. Work is a blessing. Work doesn’t have to be a curse.
16. Knowledge of good and bad is not evil. God is making the point that the need to face up to the challenges of the hard world.
17. Introduction to Genesis 12-22. There is a mythic, timeless quality about Genesis 1-11, but there is a difference starting in chapter 12. The biblical narrative shifts to a chronological sense. We are talking about a clan and a people.
18. The call of Abram (Genesis 12:1-4). The LORD said to Abram: Go forth**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/12%22%20%5Cl%20%2201012001-1)** from your land, your relatives, and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you.[**a**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/12#01012001-a)2**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/12%22%20%5Cl%20%2201012002-1)** I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.[**b**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/12#01012002-b)3**[c](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/12%22%20%5Cl%20%2201012003-c)** I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the families of the earth will find blessing in you.[**\***](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/12#01012003-1) 4**[d](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/12%22%20%5Cl%20%2201012004-d)** Abram went as the LORD directed him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.
19. Introduction of Abram (Genesis 11). Abram and Nahor took wives; the name of Abram’s wife was Sarai,**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/11%22%20%5Cl%20%2201011029-1)** and the name of Nahor’s wife was Milcah, daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah.[**c**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/11#01011029-c)30Sarai was barren; she had no child. 31Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot, son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and brought them out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to go to the land of Canaan. But when they reached Haran, they settled there.**[d](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/11%22%20%5Cl%20%2201011031-d)**32The lifetime of Terah was two hundred and five years; then Terah died in Haran.
20. Why Abram? The Jewish tradition has never felt comfortable with the idea that Abram was chosen at random. Before God chose Abram, Abram must have chosen God. This is a Jewish assumption about works over grace.
21. The rabbis assumed that Abram chose God first. Every Jewish child knows the difference between Scripture and interpretation. Abram (the rabbis said) grew skeptical of idolatry. How was skepticism planted in Abram’s heart? He finally realized that the idols of Ur were false. The rabbis said that in Ur, people wanted idols – they wanted symbolic water jugs, signifying their attachment to water – and Abram broke up the water jugs, claiming that one water jug had smashed the others. Abram was not interested in the idols, but in the real God.
22. Maimonides. He was a follower of Averroes and Avicenna. Maimonides said that Abram reasoned his way out of error to the truth, namely, that his native land was idolatrous. The true idea of God had become clouded. Abram reached out and struggled with God. God said, “Go forth from your native land and your father’s house, and go to the land I will show you.” In other words, *separate yourself!* God will help him find a better society. If you can’t find one, go to a mountain top.
23. Abram reaches out to God, and God to Abram.
	1. In the Hebrew Bible, the relationship is not simple. He went forth as God commanded him. Genesis 12: Abram took his wife Sarai, his brother’s son Lot, all the possessions that they had accumulated, and the persons they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan,6**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/12%22%20%5Cl%20%2201012006-1)** Abram passed through the land as far as the sacred place at Shechem, by the oak of Moreh. The Canaanites were then in the land. 7The LORD appeared to Abram and said: To your descendants I will give this land. So Abram built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him.**[e](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/12%22%20%5Cl%20%2201012007-e)**8From there he moved on to the hill country east of Bethel, pitching his tent with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. He built an altar there to the LORD and invoked the LORD by name.9Then Abram journeyed on by stages to the Negeb.**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/12%22%20%5Cl%20%2201012009-1)**
24. Abram prays, and moves south to the Negeb.
25. From Bethel to the Negeb went through the hill country, near Jerusalem. It is the Hebron Road.
	1. The Soujourn in Egypt (Genesis 12). There was famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, since the famine in the land was severe.**[f](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/12%22%20%5Cl%20%2201012010-f)**11When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai: “I know that you are a beautiful woman.12When the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘She is his wife’; then they will kill me, but let you live.13Please say, therefore, that you are my sister,**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/12%22%20%5Cl%20%2201012013-1)** so that I may fare well on your account and my life may be spared for your sake.”[**g**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/12#01012013-g)14When Abram arrived in Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful.15When Pharaoh’s officials saw her they praised her to Pharaoh, and the woman was taken into Pharaoh’s house.16Abram fared well on her account, and he acquired sheep, oxen, male and female servants, male and female donkeys, and camels.**\*** 17But the LORD struck Pharaoh and his household with severe plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife.**[h](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/12%22%20%5Cl%20%2201012017-h)**18Then Pharaoh summoned Abram and said to him: “How could you do this to me! Why did you not tell me she was your wife?19Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I took her for my wife? Now, here is your wife. Take her and leave! 20Then Pharaoh gave his men orders concerning Abram, and they sent him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him.
26. Was Abram turning Sarai over to the Egyptians? Yes, so that he might thrive in Egypt.
27. But Pharaoh was afflicted by guilt. He calls upon Abram, returns Sarai.
28. Why is this narrative here?
	* 1. There is a famine. Abram does not turn to God. He turns Sarai over to the Egyptians. “He is living by his own wits.” He tells a lie.
		2. Abram sets his wife up to be taken. Pharaoh rightly judges the situation. Eddie: “No one has a ‘lock’ on morality – Pharaoh is the moral individual here.”
29. Conclusion. Eddie believes that the moral of the story is this: “You have to live your life; you can’t expect God to solve your problems. His choice is to starve, to be killed, or to turn over his wife.” All’s well that ends well?
30. The Father of the Hebrew People (Genesis 15).
	1. The situation of Abram and Sara. The question of progeny.
31. Genesis 11:30. Abram and Nahor took wives; the name of Abram’s wife was Sarai,[**\***](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/11#01011029-1) and the name of Nahor’s wife was Milcah, daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah.[**c**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/11#01011029-c)30Sarai was barren; she had no child.
32. Genesis 15:1. Some time afterward, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: Do not fear, Abram! I am your shield; I will make your reward very great. 2But Abram said, “Lord GOD, what can you give me, if I die childless and have only a servant of my household, Eliezer of Damascus?”
	* 1. Abram is being passive aggressive. Abram is angry with God. God had promised him progeny and reneged. But Abram doesn’t express it openly.
		2. The servant Eliezer will inherit. But God had said that Abram would have children. The baton is passing to a man of Damascus.
33. Abram’s Faith (Genesis 15:3 ff). Abram continued, “Look, you have given me no offspring, so a servant of my household will be my heir.”4Then the word of the LORD came to him: No, that one will not be your heir; your own offspring will be your heir.**[a](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/15%22%20%5Cl%20%2201015004-a)**5He took him outside and said: Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so, he added, will your descendants be.**[b](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/15%22%20%5Cl%20%2201015005-b)**6**[c](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/15%22%20%5Cl%20%2201015006-c)** Abram put his faith in the LORD, who attributed it to him as an act of righteousness.[**\***](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/15#01015006-1)
34. There is a difference between Eliezer and Abram. Abram had received the promise, not Eliezer.
35. God says that he will honor his promise. “So shall your offspring be.”
	1. The Promise of the Land (Genesis 15:7). He then said to him: I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as a possession.**[d](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/15%22%20%5Cl%20%2201015007-d)**8“Lord GOD,” he asked, “how will I know that I will possess it?”
36. Why does God promise land? Land provides a livelihood.
37. Why is God so particular, rather than universal? Why this individual, Abram? Why not a universal message? Why land to a nomad? Abram stops in Canaan.
	1. The Contract (Genesis 15:12 ff). He then said to him: I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as a possession.[**d**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/15#01015007-d)8“Lord GOD,” he asked, “how will I know that I will possess it?”9**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/15%22%20%5Cl%20%2201015009-1)** He answered 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.[**e**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/15#01015009-e)10He brought him all these, split them in two, and placed each half opposite the other; but the birds he did not cut up.11Birds of prey swooped down on the carcasses, but Abram scared them away.12As the sun was about to set, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a great, dark dread descended upon him.
	2. The Future (Genesis 15: 13-16). [**\***](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/15#01015013-1) Then the LORD said to Abram: Know for certain that your descendants will reside as aliens in a land not their own, where they shall be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years.[**f**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/15#01015013-f)14But I will bring judgment on the nation they must serve, and after this they will go out with great wealth.**[g](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/15%22%20%5Cl%20%2201015014-g)**15You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace; you will be buried at a ripe old age.16In the fourth generation**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/15%22%20%5Cl%20%2201015016-1)** your descendants will return here, for the wickedness of the Amorites is not yet complete.[**h**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/15#01015016-h)
38. Abram is given a personal promise: wealth, peace, descendents.
39. But there are some problems to come: the iniquity of the Amorites.
	1. The Treaty (Genesis 15:17). When the sun had set and it was dark, there appeared a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch, which passed between those pieces.18**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/15%22%20%5Cl%20%2201015018-1)** On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the Great River, the Euphrates,[**i**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/15#01015018-i)19**[j](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/15%22%20%5Cl%20%2201015019-j)** the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites,20the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,21the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.

Coffee Break

1. The Anxiety of Abram.
	1. The biblical text manifests Abram’s doubts about God. He also has his independence.
	2. The Birth of Ishmael (Genesis 16). Ha-gar is “the foreigner.” Abram’s wife Sarai had borne him no children. Now she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar.**[a](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/16%22%20%5Cl%20%2201016001-a)**2Sarai said to Abram: “The LORD has kept me from bearing children. Have intercourse with my maid; perhaps I will have sons through her.” Abram obeyed Sarai.**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/16%22%20%5Cl%20%2201016002-1)** [**b**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/16#01016002-b)3Thus, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, his wife Sarai took her maid, Hagar the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife.4He had intercourse with her, and she became pregnant. As soon as Hagar knew she was pregnant, her mistress lost stature in her eyes.**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/16%22%20%5Cl%20%2201016004-1)** [**c**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/16#01016004-c)
2. Hagar was property in the ancient world. Sarai makes the request that he have intercourse with Hagar. To Breuer, “God’s not in the picture.” Is this correct? Doesn’t God work with us by giving us the possibility of using the gifts we have been given? Isn’t that the way we work out our relationship with God? Isn’t God the “goal of transcendence” (Rahner), the end by whom we are given the means to transcend what we were?
3. Is Hagar less because she makes Sarai envious?
	1. The Birth of Ishmael (Genesis 16:5-15). So Sarai said to Abram: “This outrage against me is your fault. I myself gave my maid to your embrace; but ever since she knew she was pregnant, I have lost stature in her eyes. May the LORD decide between you and me!”6Abram told Sarai: “Your maid is in your power. Do to her what you regard as right.” Sarai then mistreated her so much that Hagar ran away from her. 7The LORD’s angel**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/16%22%20%5Cl%20%2201016007-1)** found her by a spring in the wilderness, the spring on the road to Shur,[**e**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/16#01016007-e)8and he asked, “Hagar, maid of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?” She answered, “I am running away from my mistress, Sarai.”9But the LORD’s angel told her: “Go back to your mistress and submit to her authority.10I will make your descendants so numerous,” added the LORD’s angel, “that they will be too many to count.”**[f](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/16%22%20%5Cl%20%2201016010-f)**11Then the LORD’s angel said to her: “You are now pregnant and shall bear a son; you shall name him Ishmael,**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/16%22%20%5Cl%20%2201016011-1)** For the LORD has heeded your affliction. 12He shall be a wild ass of a man, his hand against everyone, and everyone’s hand against him; Alongside**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/16%22%20%5Cl%20%2201016012-1)** all his kindred shall he encamp.”[**g**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/16#01016012-g) 13To the LORD who spoke to her she gave a name, saying, “You are God who sees me”;**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/16%22%20%5Cl%20%2201016013-1)** she meant, “Have I really seen God and remained alive after he saw me?”[**h**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/16#01016013-h)14That is why the well is called Beer-lahai-roi.**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/16%22%20%5Cl%20%2201016014-1)** It is between Kadesh and Bered. 15Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram named the son whom Hagar bore him Ishmael.**[i](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/16%22%20%5Cl%20%2201016015-i)**
4. Ishmael: a prophecy to Hagar: “The Lord has paid heed to your sufferings.” He will be “a wild ass of a man.”
5. Hagar is blessed, but the prophecy is complicated.

1. The Covenant.
	1. What the Covenant Was (Genesis 17:1-9). When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said: I am God the Almighty. Walk in my presence and be blameless.**[a](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/17%22%20%5Cl%20%2201017001-a)**2Between you and me I will establish my covenant, and I will multiply you exceedingly.**[b](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/17%22%20%5Cl%20%2201017002-b)** 3Abram fell face down and God said to him:4For my part, here is my covenant with you: you are to become the father of a multitude of nations.**[c](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/17%22%20%5Cl%20%2201017004-c)**5No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham,**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/17%22%20%5Cl%20%2201017005-1)** for I am making you the father of a multitude of nations.[**d**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/17#01017005-d)6I will make you exceedingly fertile; I will make nations of you; kings will stem from you.7I will maintain my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout the ages as an everlasting covenant, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.**[e](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/17%22%20%5Cl%20%2201017007-e)**8I will give to you and to your descendants after you the land in which you are now residing as aliens, the whole land of Canaan, as a permanent possession; and I will be their God.**[f](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/17%22%20%5Cl%20%2201017008-f)**9God said to Abraham: For your part, you and your descendants after you must keep my covenant throughout the ages.
2. What does it mean “to walk in my presence and be blameless”? Was it easy?
3. The meaning of covenant.
	* 1. *Berith* appears in many circumstances. Nations make covenants at the end of conflict. But this is a covenant, not between nations, but between a man and God.
		2. Powerful nations impose their terms. Breuer: “Forget UN resolutions, by the way; you just take over the enemy’s property.” Covenants come when it’s no longer in our interest to continue fighting.
4. Multitude of Nations.
5. Father of a multitude of nations. By adding the “hah” because it means “multitude.”
6. Abraham is not to become an empire. “He is not to be compared to Egypt; he is “the father of a multitude of nations.”
7. Abraham will be bound to this God. He is committed. God is offering the commitment. The covenant is not from Abraham. God chose to “bind himself” to Abraham.
8. Nations and Descendants. What did Breuer mean by saying that Abraham’s nation is not to become an empire?
	* + - 1. He means that Abraham’s people will be one people, one nation, among other nations.
				2. Breuer is drawing upon other sources, apart from Genesis 17.
9. Circumcision.
	1. How? (Genesis 17:10-14). This is the covenant between me and you and your descendants after you that you must keep: every male among you shall be circumcised.**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/17%22%20%5Cl%20%2201017010-1)** [**g**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/17#01017010-g)11Circumcise the flesh of your foreskin. That will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.**[h](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/17%22%20%5Cl%20%2201017011-h)**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 descendants.**[i](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/17%22%20%5Cl%20%2201017012-i)**13Yes, both the houseborn slaves and those acquired with money must be circumcised. Thus my covenant will be in your flesh as an everlasting covenant.14If a male is uncircumcised, that is, if the flesh of his foreskin has not been cut away, such a one will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.
		* 1. Circumcision? The males sexual organ is the means of procreation, the means of bringing life into the world. “That part of the body that is most crucial and intimate.” Sexual intimacy is “to know.”
			2. Intimacy and knowledge go hand in hand. The male sexual organ is the place where one’s belongingness to God is marked.
	2. Eliezer of Damascus. When Abraham is older, he sends Eliezer off to find a wife for his child. Abraham put his hand on Eliezer’s “thigh,” that is, under one’s tunic, touching the male sexual organ. It is also a way of signing a contract. Circumcision is a mark of an agreement.
	3. Name Changing of Sarai: the relation between Israel and Ishmael. God further said to Abraham: As for Sarai your wife, do not call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah.**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/17%22%20%5Cl%20%2201017015-1)**16I will bless her, and I will give you a son by her. Her also will I bless; she will give rise to nations, and rulers of peoples will issue from her.**[j](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/17%22%20%5Cl%20%2201017016-j)**17Abraham fell face down and laughed**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/17%22%20%5Cl%20%2201017017-1)** as he said to himself, “Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah give birth at ninety?”[**k**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/17#01017017-k)18So Abraham said to God, “If only Ishmael could live in your favor!”19God replied: Even so, your wife Sarah is to bear you a son, and you shall call him Isaac. It is with him [with laughter?] that I will maintain my covenant as an everlasting covenant and with his descendants after him.**[l](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/17%22%20%5Cl%20%2201017019-l)**20Now as for Ishmael, I will heed you: I hereby bless him. I will make him fertile and will multiply him exceedingly. He will become the father of twelve chieftains, and I will make of him a great nation.**[m](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/17%22%20%5Cl%20%2201017020-m)**21But my covenant I will maintain with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you by this time next year.**[n](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/17%22%20%5Cl%20%2201017021-n)**22When he had finished speaking with Abraham, God departed from him.
		* 1. Sarai/Sarah, the “princess,” is to be the means of the people. Abraham laughs: great joy? Skepticism?
			2. “Oh, that Ishmael may live by your favor.” Could it be a prayer to God, “Don’t abandon Ishmael?” Or it could be Abraham’s passive aggression toward God: “You’re going to let Ishmael lord it over Isaac?” (“He laughs”).
			3. You’re going to bear a son, and his name will be laughter. “The joke, God, is on you.”
	4. The Visitation (Genesis 18:1-5). The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oak of Mamre, as he sat in the entrance of his tent, while the day was growing hot.2Looking up, he saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them; and bowing to the ground,**[a](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/18%22%20%5Cl%20%2201018002-a)**3he said: “Sir,**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/18%22%20%5Cl%20%2201018003-1)** [my Lord?] if it please you, do not go on past your servant.4Let some water be brought, that you may bathe your feet, and then rest under the tree.5Now that you have come to your servant, let me bring you a little food, that you may refresh yourselves; and afterward you may go on your way.” “Very well,” they replied, “do as you have said.”
		* 1. The appearance is the appearance of “my lords.”
			2. From Abraham we learn *hesed* and hospitality.
			3. Sarah is in the tent: she will have a son. She laughs the laugh of skepticism.
	5. The Promise of a Son to Sarah (Genesis 18: 9-15). “Where is your wife Sarah?” they asked him. “There in the tent,” he replied.10One of them**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/18%22%20%5Cl%20%2201018010-1)** said, “I will 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.[**b**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/18#01018010-b)11Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years, and Sarah had stopped having her menstrual periods.**[c](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/18%22%20%5Cl%20%2201018011-c)**12So Sarah laughed**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/18%22%20%5Cl%20%2201018012-1)** to herself and said, “Now that I am worn out and my husband is old, am I still to have sexual pleasure?”13But the LORD said to Abraham: “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will 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.”**[d](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/18%22%20%5Cl%20%2201018014-d)**15Sarah lied, saying, “I did not laugh,” because she was afraid. But he said, “Yes, you did.”
		* 1. Abram is anxious and skeptical, but the biblical text expects that.
			2. Sarah lied.
	6. The Negotiation over Sodom (Genesis 8:16-19). With Abraham walking with them to see them on their way, the men set out from there and looked down toward Sodom.17The LORD considered: Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do,18now that he is to become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth are to find blessing in him?**[e](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/18%22%20%5Cl%20%2201018018-e)**19Indeed, I have singled him out that he may direct his children and his household in the future to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD may put into effect for Abraham the promises he made about him.20
		* 1. The covenant is in place. Should the Lord share with other nations the blessings with which he will bless his own nation?
			2. Or should he let Sodom destroy itself?
	7. The Negotiation with God over Sodom (Genesis 18: 20-33). So the LORD said: The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave,[**\***](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/18#01018020-1)21that I must go down to see whether or not their actions are as bad as the cry against them that comes to me. I mean to find out. 22As the men turned and walked on toward Sodom, Abraham remained standing before the LORD.23Then Abraham drew near and said: “Will you really sweep away the righteous with the wicked?24Suppose there were fifty righteous people in the city; would you really sweep away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people within it?25Far be it from you to do such a thing, to kill the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike! Far be it from you! Should not the judge of all the world do what is just?”**[g](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/18%22%20%5Cl%20%2201018025-g)**26The LORD replied: If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.27Abraham spoke up again: “See how I am presuming to speak to my Lord, though I am only dust and ashes!**[h](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/18%22%20%5Cl%20%2201018027-h)**28What if there are five less than fifty righteous people? Will you destroy the whole city because of those five?” I will not destroy it, he answered, if I find forty-five there.29But Abraham persisted, saying, “What if only forty are found there?” He replied: I will refrain from doing it for the sake of the forty.30Then he said, “Do not let my Lord be angry if I go on. What if only thirty are found there?” He replied: I will refrain from doing it if I can find thirty there.31Abraham went on, “Since I have thus presumed to speak to my Lord, what if there are no more than twenty?” I will not destroy it, he answered, for the sake of the twenty.32But he persisted: “Please, do not let my Lord be angry if I speak up this last time. What if ten are found there?” For the sake of the ten, he replied, I will not destroy it.**[i](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/18%22%20%5Cl%20%2201018032-i)** 33The LORD departed as soon as he had finished speaking with Abraham, and Abraham returned home.
		* 1. The “what if?” question. What if there may be innocent people in Sodom?
			2. Why can’t God arrange to save the innocent? “Far be it” – far be retribution – from the Lord. God should not be the God of retribution.
			3. There is now a covenant. “Marriage changes everything.” Abraham has questions for God, and can change God.
			4. Abraham stops at ten. If there are ten just Sodomites, he will relent. But earlier he asked, “Will you really sweep away the righteous with the wicked?” Why doesn’t Abraham bargain with God until no one suffers? God bargains and doesn’t insist on the principle, “I will not allow innocent suffering.”
10. The Testing of Abraham.
	1. The challenge itself (Genesis 22). Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test and said to him: Abraham! “Here I am!” he replied.**[a](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/22%22%20%5Cl%20%2201022001-a)**2Then God said: Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There offer him up as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you.**[b](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/22%22%20%5Cl%20%2201022002-b)**
		* 1. With Sodom, Abraham stands up to God. But here God stands up to him.
			2. God’s command is “the absurdity of absurdities.”
	2. Preparation (Genesis 22:3-8). Early the next morning Abraham saddled his donkey, took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac, and after cutting the wood for the burnt offering, set out for the place of which God had told him. 4On the third day Abraham caught sight of the place from a distance.5Abraham said to his servants: “Stay here with the donkey, while the boy and I go on over there. We will worship and then come back to you.”6So Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, while he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two walked on together,7Isaac spoke to his father Abraham. “Father!” he said. “Here I am,” he replied. Isaac continued, “Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?”8“My son,” Abraham answered, “God will provide the sheep for the burnt offering.” Then the two walked on together.
		* 1. The command to kill the son is not just a “test” but a breaking of the covenant and the erasure of the future.
			2. God is potentially destroying the relationship with the people.