

THE   
PRESENT  
WORD  
ADULT BIBLE LESSONS

LEADER'S GUIDE

FALL 2024

WORSHIP IN THE  
COVENANT COMMUNITY

# ABRAM BUILDS AN ALTAR AT MAMRE

## Daily Bible Readings

<b>M</b>	Aug. 26	2 Cor. 1:16–24	God's Promises Are Always "Yes"
<b>T</b>	Aug. 27	Gen. 12:1–9	A New Life of Obedience
<b>W</b>	Aug. 28	Gen. 12:10–20	Fear Not Faith
<b>Th</b>	Aug. 29	Phil. 4:10–19	God Will Fully Satisfy Your Needs
<b>F</b>	Aug. 30	Col. 2:6–12	Walk in Christ with Thanksgiving
<b>Sa</b>	Aug. 31	Ps. 16	God Gives a Goodly Heritage

## MAIN IDEA

How do we honor opportunities that arise with solemnity and gratefulness? Abram built altars to mark those occasions on which God called him to greater faithfulness.

## BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Genesis 12–13

## A VERSE TO REMEMBER

So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the LORD. (Gen. 13:18)

## PREPARING TO LEAD

- Pray for participants and for yourself as leader. Reflect on lesson 1, "Abram Builds an Altar at Mamre" (Participant's Book, p. 1).
- Familiarize yourself with the context of the Scripture. Following the introductory verses in Genesis 11:30–32, which begins with the announcement that Sarai was barren and then recounts that Terah, Abram's father, took his family from Ur to Teran, Genesis 12–13 mark the beginning of the story of Abram.
- Provide Bibles, Participant's Books, Worship Leaflets for lesson 1, name tags, paper, and pens.
- As in past quarters, the lessons in this quarter suggest that participants respond in a journal. If possible, contact participants in advance and suggest that they bring a tablet or a paper journal. Provide writing paper for those who do not bring one.

- Obtain a white pillar candle to serve as a Christ candle, as well as a means to light it.
- On newsprint or a board, post the following open-ended prompt: A time when I experienced a powerful worship experience or spiritual moment was . . .
- Step 6 offers additional options from which to choose.

## LEADING THE LESSON

### Opening Worship

#### 1. Gathering

- Greet participants and provide name tags. Invite participants to reflect in silence on the posted open-ended prompt.
- Distribute Bibles, Participant’s Books, Worship Leaflets, pens, and paper for lesson 1.
- Formulate and get consensus on some simple ground rules for the study (for example, welcoming diverse points of view, maintaining confidentiality, and so on).
- Call attention to the open-ended prompt. Invite volunteers to respond with one word or a brief phrase that names the moment they identified. For example, someone might name an experience at a church camp by saying, “camp vesper service.” Point out that the group will have an opportunity later to connect these moments to the lesson.

#### 2. Morning Prayer 1

Worship Leaflet, lesson 1

- Light the candle, noting that it is a tangible reminder of Christ, the light of the world.
- Encourage participants to settle into silence.
- Invite volunteers to lead portions of Morning Prayer from the Worship Leaflet, beginning with the Opening Sentences and ending after the Hymn.

Teaching Tip
<p>While some study groups continue to meet during the summer months, others take a break and resume in the fall. If your group has not been meeting, allow some time for participants to catch up with one another. You may want to provide coffee, tea, and doughnuts and invite participants to arrive to class fifteen minutes early for a time of fellowship. Also be alert for participants new to the group, and be ready for informal introductions.</p>

## SCRIPTURE

Genesis 13:8–18

**13:8** Then Abram said to Lot, “Let there be no strife between you and me and between your herders and my herders, for we are kindred. <sup>9</sup>Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.” <sup>10</sup>Lot looked about him and saw that the plain of the Jordan was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar; this was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. <sup>11</sup>So Lot chose for himself all the plain of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward, and they separated from each other. <sup>12</sup>Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the plain and moved his tent as far as Sodom. <sup>13</sup>Now the people of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD.

<sup>14</sup>The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Raise your eyes now, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, <sup>15</sup>for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. <sup>16</sup>I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. <sup>17</sup>Rise up, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.” <sup>18</sup>So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the LORD.

*Note:* Find Scripture Notes for this reading on the final page of the lesson.

### Bible Study

#### 3. Scripture Reading

Participant’s Book, p. 2

- To get the context of today’s Scripture passage, invite the group to read silently Genesis 11:30–13:7. Then read today’s passage round-robin style, with each participant reading one verse in turn.
- Optional: Form four small groups or pairs. Ask each group to read one of the following: Genesis 11:30–32; 12:1–9; 12:10–20; 13:1–7. Ask a volunteer from each group to very briefly summarize the action in their passage. Then ask one reader to read aloud Genesis 13:8–14 and another to read verses 14–18.

#### 4. A Bolt from the Blue

Participant’s Book, p. 3

- We read that looking at Genesis 13:8–18, a reader can interact with how Abram navigated conflict and cultivated a generous spirit. The author notes that Hebrew biblical scholar Levenson says that God’s grace comes to Abram like a “bolt from the blue.” Discuss:
  1. What distinguishes Abram from his peers?
  2. How does the passage distinguish between Abram’s response and that of Lot?

3. What does the author mean when he says the story of Abram is really the story of a community's response?
- The author notes that we experience what he calls threshold events.
  1. How would you define threshold events? How do you respond to the idea that interpersonal conflict can initiate these events? Would you agree or disagree?
  2. What threshold events in your life help you to empathize with the experiences of Abram or Sarai?
  3. How would you describe the experience of a family, community, or church that shares a commitment to the peaceful resolution of a dispute?

## 5. Grace Begins Anew

Participant's Book, p. 4

- Invite participants to quickly review the events recorded in Genesis 1–11, asking volunteers to briefly name, popcorn style, the events leading up to the beginning of the Abram narrative. Ask:
  1. Why does the author assert that, through Abram, God begins anew with humanity?
- We read that a bolt from the blue might be exactly the way Sarai experienced the news from Abram.
  1. What evidence do we have in Genesis that God's grace was with Sarai too?
- The author observes that we often desire to have a measure of stability.
  1. How do you respond to the assertion that the changes that take place in Sarai's life are not changes that support a feeling of stability? Can you name a time when you experienced being jolted from stability by a sense that God was calling you to embrace newness? If so, how did you respond?
- In speaking of Abram's possession of male and female slaves, the author observes that this study trusts that a biblical text, even when it depicts cultural practices that must be rejected, invites us into life-giving conversations. Discuss:
  1. In what ways might you engage in such conversations? If God's grace was extended, not just to Abram, but to the entire community with which he traveled, how do you imagine the divine grace was extended to those who were enslaved?
- The story describes Abram building altars as markers of his spiritual growth in relationship to God. Invite participants to ponder in silence the following question:
  1. How might you mark the waypoints of your spiritual maturity, using markers of time and space as essential reminders of God-filled moments?

## 6. Stepping into the World

Participant's Book, p. 5

- The author calls our attention to the timing of when this lesson is scheduled: Labor Day weekend in the United States. Point out that, while in recent decades the holiday has been more about celebrating the last summer weekend before fall schedules kick in, it was initially to recognize the American labor movement. It lifted up organized efforts of labor groups to improve working conditions and wages for those who suffered under unsustainable employment practices. Discuss:
  1. In what ways, if at all, would you affirm that the actions of labor organizers then and now are a response to God's yearning for shalom for all, calling them to go from generations of dehumanizing practices of harsh labor to a new way of being?
- Invite participants to reflect on one of the following and respond in their journals:
  1. As a laborer (employer, gig worker, retired person ) how am I experiencing/did I experience God's grace in my workplace? If an employer, how am I/was I open to receiving God's grace and enacting policies of shalom for employees? Where do I/did I embody God's grace for those with whom I worked? Where am I falling/did I fall short?
  2. What memorials remind me of the importance of a commitment to peaceful resolution? As I consider a dispute, where do I see a commitment to peaceful resolution? How might that commitment be memorialized as a threshold for resolution?
- Choose between the following optional activities for exploring the Scripture:
  1. Review the information about the functions of altars in the ancient world in Scripture Note 3. Invite participants to consider the meaning of altars in your church's faith tradition. When has the altar held importance in your memory of a particular event (baptism, marriage, conversion, and so forth)?
  2. Revisit the open-ended prompt from the beginning of the lesson. Also ask participants to revisit this question posed earlier in the lesson: How might you mark the waypoints of your spiritual maturity, using markers of time and space as essential reminders of God-filled moments? Encourage them to identify a significant God moment they have experienced and choose a way to construct an altar of remembrance and gratitude to God. This might be a small drawing or a symbol, or a word or phrase that would call it to memory.

## Closing Worship

### 7. Morning Prayer 2

Worship Leaflet, lesson 1

- Invite the participants to turn to the Worship Leaflet, and enlist volunteers to lead the remaining portions of Morning Prayer.
- Begin with Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession, pray the Lord's Prayer, and end with the Dismissal.
- Bless participants as they leave, saying, "*(Name)*, go forth to be a blessing."
- Extinguish the candle.

## SCRIPTURE NOTES

*The following notes from the Church Uniform Series provide additional information about today's Scripture.*

1. Pastoral nomadism was common in the ancient Near East. The provision for the health of Abram's and Lot's herds determined their prospects for survival. Given the scarcity of grazing land and water sources, tempers were short. There were limits as to the size of herds that the land could support.
2. In deferring to Lot, Abram is on the verge of giving away the Promised Land. But Lot "chose" to go "east." Abram remained in the land, securing God's promise. Lot became the father of the Ammonites and the Moabites (19:37–38), who proved to be obstacles to Israel's faithfulness (Deut. 23:3–6; Ezra 9:1).
3. The Hebrew word for *altar* is *mizbeah* ("to slaughter"); Greek *thusiasterion* ("a place of sacrifice"). Altars are places of exchange, communication, and influence. In the patriarchal period, altars were markers of place, commemorating an encounter with God (Gen. 12:7) or physical signs of habitation. The altar built by Abram near Hebron was located close to those mentioned in 12:6–8, in what would later be the central regions of Israel and Judah.
4. Mamre refers to an Amorite who resided near Hebron (Gen. 14:13, 24). He owned the place known as "the oaks of Mamre the Amorite" (14:13).

## ENGAGE YOUR LEARNERS DURING THE WEEK

Send an email or a text:

1. Encouraging participants to ponder any conflict they are experiencing. How might they commit to a peaceful resolution?
2. Suggesting that they might create a more enduring altar of remembrance by making a small, simple, stacked stone creation.