

# Study Guide for ABRAHAM: FATHER OF FAITH & WORKS

By Stephen K. Ray

Based on the Ignatius Bible, RSV, 2<sup>nd</sup> Catholic edition and  
the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition

[Pages are formatted at 8" x 5" with a type font size of 9 points]

## **STUDY GUIDE SPONSORS**

Ralph and Carey D'Agostino and Family

Terry and Susan Duffey

Edward and Betsy Fredericks

Mary Lou Hartman

Alberto and Lillie Heredia

Eric and Rita Michaelson

Mike and Barbara Stoltz

## **CHAPTER 1: IN THE BEGINNING**

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. He made Man in his image, male and female, and placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Through disobedience our first parents brought sin and death into the world. Wickedness multiplied until God caused a great flood through which only righteous Noah with his family and the animals were saved. Beyond the Euphrates River, in the modern country of Iraq, Abram was born into a pagan family that served foreign gods. When called by God, and because of his great faith and obedience, Abram left the bones of his ancestors and their false gods to follow the God of Glory. He departed Ur in Mesopotamia, traveling hundreds of miles to Haran and later to Canaan. God made covenantal promises to Abram including a son in his old age, innumerable descendants and the possession of Canaan.

### **Questions for further discussion and study:**

1. Who created the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1; CCC 290)? Through what creative cooperation were all things created (Gen 1:2; Col 1:15-17; CCC 291-92)? Why did God create man and woman (CCC 1, 221, 231, 257)? Were humans programmed to obey God or were they free to choose (Sir 15:14; CCC 1730)? Why would God create Man with the ability to disobey (CCC 311)?
2. How did Adam and Eve misuse their freedom (Gen 3:1-23; CCC 397, 415-16)? What was the result of their disobedience and how did it affect all their descendants (Gen 3:22-24; Wis 2:23-24; Sir 25:24; Rom 5:12, 19; CCC 402-404, 1008)? What is Original Sin (see "Original Sin" in CCC Glossary; CCC 388-89)? Due to the wickedness of Mankind, what action did God take (Gen 6:11-14, 17)? Who was saved from the flood and by what means (Gen 7:1; Sir 44:17-18)? How do the flood and the ark prefigure the Sacrament of Baptism and salvation (1 Pet 3:20-21; CCC 845, 1094, 1219)? What is typology and what are some other examples (Rom 5:14; Heb 11:19; CCC 128-130, 1094)?
3. What happened again after Noah's descendants began to multiply (Gen 11:1-9; CCC 57)? What did the people build and why?

*There is little doubt that the account [of Babel] recalls the ziggurat temples of Babylonia (Freedman, David Noel, Gary A. Herion, David F. Graf, John David Pleins, and Astrid B. Beck, eds. The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary. New York: Doubleday, 1992, Vol. 6, pg. 624). The largest and most con-*

*spicuous of them was the temple complex of Nana and Ningal at Ur, with its still-surviving ziggurat or monumental stepped tower. (Anchor, Vol. 4, pg. 729).*

4. Where did Abram live before God called him (Jud 5:6-7; Gen 11:28, 31; Acts 7:2-3)? In what modern country is ancient Ur located today? Where is Mesopotamia and what does the word mean? Locate the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers on a map. What did Abraham's family and ancestors worship (Josh 24:2)? What god did the people of Ur worship?

*After Babylon, [Ur] is without a doubt the best known Mesopotamian site in the Bible because it is mentioned in connection with Abraham...The best known monument is the ziggurat which was constructed by Ur-nammu, the founder of the Third Dynasty. He particularly distinguished himself as a builder of ziggurats in Mesopotamia; he began with his own city, dedicated to the god Nanna (Anchor, Vol. 6, pg. 766). The best preserved ziggurat is that of the moon god Nanna at Ur (Anchor, Vol 1, pg. 422).*

*However, the archaeological fame of Ur rests above all on the discovery of several royal tombs. ... In the corridors and in the wells, funerary chariots are found with their teams of equids, their drivers and a whole group of servants and musicians that must have accompanied the king in death. Sometimes more than 80 bodies have been found, certainly sacrificed before the funeral (Anchor, Vol. 6, Pg. 767).*

Knowing that human sacrifice existed in Ur, how would this affect a society and its perception of human beings? What kind of human sacrifice existed in Canaan (Lev 18:21; 20:2-5; Deut 12:31; 2 Kings 16:3; 21.6)? Is there any form of "human sacrifice" practiced in our own country today?

4. God found a special man on which to build a covenant and begin the plan of salvation—what was his name at the time of the call (Gen 11:26; Neh 9:7)? Abram means "father". To what was his name later changed and what did his new name Abraham mean (Gen 17:5)? Name the members of Abram's family tree from Noah's son Shem to Abram (Gen 11:10-26).

Abram acquired the title "Hebrew" from his relative Eber in Gen 11:15; cf. Gen 10:21. What were the names of his immediate family (Gen 11:27-30)? What was Abraham called in Scripture that was unique to him (2 Chron 20:7; Is 41:8; Jas 2:23)?

5. How is Abram introduced in Scripture (Gen 11:10-32)? Why did God choose Abram (Gen 18:19, 26:5; Neh 9:7-8)? How did God call Abram (Gen 12:1-3)? How did Abram respond (Gen 12:4-5; Heb 11:8; CCC, 144-146, 2570)? What response did Abram receive from his fellow countrymen

(Jud 5:8)? How old was Abram when God called him to leave his homeland (Gen 12:4)?

6. Where did God tell Abram to go? (Gen 12:1; Acts 7:2-4)? List the things Abram left behind. What kind of life was he to look forward to (Acts 7:5, Heb 11:9, 13)? Would you have been willing to leave everything behind and go to a place you did not know for promises you would never personally receive? Along with his wife Sarai, who and what did Abram take with him (Gen 12:5)? How was wealth measured in ancient times (Gen 24:35, 2 Sam 12:2)? How long would it take you to walk seven hundred miles with your family, servants and their families, possessions and thousands of animals in your herds and flocks? How much land did Abraham inherit when he arrived in Canaan (Acts 7:5)?

## **CHAPTER 2: ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD**

Abram was a man of faith and integrity with whom God could establish a covenant. Leaving Haran Abram traveled 700 miles southwest to the land of Canaan, later named Israel. It was occupied by wicked Canaanites. God promised the whole land to Abram and his descendants forever. Abram was 75 years old and Sarah 65 but they believed God would give them a son to inherit the covenant and the land. Arriving in Canaan Abram built altars and called upon the Lord. God renewed his promises and Abram believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. Abraham did not have “faith alone” but faith, obedience and good works. Abram was given a new name—Abraham, father of nations—and circumcision was the sign of God’s covenant. The Lord visited Abraham in the form of three travelers—often understood in trinitarian terms. God came down to confirm the wickedness of Sodom with its aggressive homosexuality and inhospitality. Sodom was condemned and destroyed.

### **Questions for further discussion and study:**

1. Haran was a much traveled junction on the trade routes of the Fertile Crescent and gets its name from an ancient word meaning “crossroads.” It is situated in modern day Turkey near Urfa only ten miles from the Syrian border. It was excellent grazing land on the lucrative commercial route not far from the Euphrates River. Abram lived in Haran until what event (Gen 11:32, Acts 7:4)? How old was Abram when his father Terah died (Gen 12:4)? What did God say to Abram (Gen 12:1-4; Acts 7:3)? By what virtue did Abram have the courage to leave his homeland, family and friends to journey to an unknown land (Heb 11:8-9; CCC 145)?

2. What was Abraham looking forward to—and what do you think Scripture means by this explanation (Heb 11:10)? What is the first thing Abram did when he arrived in Canaan (Gen 12:7-8)? Having abandoned the gods

of Mesopotamia, upon whom did Abram call (Gen 12:8)? What is the status of anyone who calls on the name of the Lord (Rom 10:12)?

*In the ancient world, any surface on which offerings were made or placed for a deity could be considered an altar. ...Altars were constructed at places which were considered to have a sacred character, points where contact between the human and the divine could occur. ...The most common activities associated with altars in the Hebrew Bible are the burning of sacrifices upon the altar (Anchor, Vol. 1, pg. 162, 164).*

3. How do tent pegs and altars represent the pilgrimage of life and the permanence of God? What happens to a shepherd's tent (Is 38:12; cf. Is 33:20)? What is *faith* and why is Abraham the father of all who believe—who have faith (Heb 1:1-2; Rom 4:16; CCC 146-47)? What is the attitude of heart that Abraham had towards God and how was it demonstrated (CCC 2570)?

4. Remembering Question No. 2 of Chapter 1 above, what is typology and why is it helpful to understand the New Testament and the Church (CCC 128-130, 1094)? When Abram passed by the Valley of Shaveh—the King's Valley (adjacent to Jerusalem)—who came out to meet him and what did he present to Abram (Gen 14:18)? What were the dual offices of Melchizedek (Gen 14:18)?

5. How does the book of Hebrews explain Jesus as a priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb 7:1-28)? What did Abram give Melchizedek in return (Gen 14:20)? In Christian tradition, who does Melchizedek represent (CCC 58, 1544)? What do the bread and wine represent (CCC 1333)? Since our Catholic priests share in the priesthood of Christ and serve *in persona Christi* (“in the person of Christ”), they serve in the order of Melchizedek. How ancient is the order of our priests?

6. Abraham is often called the Father of the Faith—an example of genuine faith in God. Genesis 15:6 is quoted five times in the New Testament. What does it say and how are we to understand this verse (Rom 4:16-25; Gal 3:6-9; Jas 2:20-24; CCC 146, 162)?

7. Protestants tend to say that salvation or justification is by “faith alone.” Does the Bible ever use the words “faith alone”? What essentials does the Bible say are essentials for salvation—check these passages: 1) believing in Christ (Jn 3:16; Acts 16:31), obedience (Jn 3:36; Rom 6:16), repentance (Acts 2:38; 2 Pet 3:9), baptism (Jn 3:5; 1 Pet 3:21; Tit 3:5), confessing Christ with our mouths (Lk 12:8; Rom 10:9), coming to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4; Heb 10:26), good works (Rom 2:6-7; Jas 2:24), perseverance (Mt 10:22; Col 1:22-23), and even taking up our own cross (Mt 10:38; Lk 9:23)? What kind of faith is important (Gal 5:6)?

8. In a culture where large families were prized and essential for farming, survival and to inherit the land—and where a woman without a husband or son was often propertyless and destitute—consider why Sarai so desperately desired a son (e.g., 1 Sam 1:1-18). Barren woman who were widows lived alone without sustenance, but what was the hope of a barren woman (Psa 113:9)?

9. What insight can we gain from Sarah's barrenness by observing Jesus' care for his mother Mary at the foot of his cross (Jn 19:26-27)? Mary had lost her husband and was now losing her only Son.

*Joseph being deceased, and Jesus now dying, there were no heirs, and probably no goods or estate, for the support and maintenance of his mother Mary. This, Christ at his last breath takes particular care of; and probably had made provision before; for it is hardly conceivable that this was the first overture he had with St. John in this affair; but that he had obtained a promise from him, in his mother's behalf, some time before this. And hence perhaps that peculiar love he bore to him beyond all the rest. So that those words, Woman, behold thy son! and on the other side to him, Behold thy mother! seem no other than as if he had said, "This man, from the time that thou art now deprived of thy son, shall be in the stead of a son to thee, and shall cherish and provide for thee:" and so, vice versa, to his disciple John (Lightfoot, John. A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica, Matthew-1 Corinthians: , Luke-John. Vol. 3. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010).*

10. What did Sarah do to gain a son (Gen 16:1-4)? How did infertile women often obtain a son (Gen 30:3)?

*In ancient societies a barren woman could have her husband impregnate her servant; the baby "born on her knees" would be her own child. Immediately upon birth the baby is placed on the lap of the barren woman indicating the baby is now legally hers.*

11. Read Genesis 16: the birth of Abraham's son through Sarai's maid Hagar. What troubles did her impatience cause? How old was Abram when Ishmael was born (Gen 16:16)?

12. How old was Abram when God appeared to him again (Gen 17:1)? How many years of silence had intervened since the birth of Ishmael? What does God renew with Abram and what is changed (Gen 17:1-5)? Who else had a name change accompanied by a promise (Gen 17:16-17)? What does the new name "Abraham" mean (Gen 17:5)? Who else will be recipients and beneficiaries of the covenant (Gen 17:7-8)? What is the sign of the covenant, when and to whom is it applied (Gen 17:10-14, 23-27; Acts 7:8)? How old was Jesus when he was circumcised into the Abrahamic covenant

(Lk 2:21; CCC 527)? What would have happened if Abraham had refused to be circumcised?

13. God appears to Abraham again but how is this appearance different than earlier appearances through visions (Gen 18:1-2; cf. 15:1)? Who appeared to Abraham and how many were there? How does Abraham address the three men (Gen 18:3)? How might the writer of Hebrews allude to this story (Heb 13:2)? What does Abraham's hospitality foreshadow (CCC 2571)?

*Abraham, who was glad to receive strangers, faithful to God and tireless in his service and prompt in fulfilling his duty, saw the Trinity typified. He added religious devotion to hospitality, for although he beheld three, he adored one, and, while keeping a distinction of the persons, yet he called one Lord, thus giving honor to the three but signifying one power. For not knowledge but grace spoke in him. ... he saw three but worshiped their unity. He brought out three measures of meal but slaughtered one calf, believing one sacrifice was sufficient, but a threefold offering; one victim, but a threefold gift. (St. Ambrose, On His Brother, Satyrus 2.96).*

*But since three men appeared, and no one of them is said to be greater than the rest either in form, or age, or power, why should we not here understand, as visibly intimated by the visible creature, the equality of the Trinity, and one and the same substance in three persons? (St. Augustine, The Trinity, 2:11).*

*Abraham saw the day of the Lord when he hospitably received three angels as a prefiguration of the most holy Trinity. After he had received them, he spoke to the three as to one, since although there are three persons in the Trinity, the nature of the divinity is one (Pope St. Gregory the Great, Forty Gospel Homilies, 16).*

14. How did Abraham respond to the Lord's visit? Count the verbs related to speedy action on Abraham's part—what characterized Abraham's reception of the heavenly guests (Gen 18:2-8)? The Jewish leaders in Jesus' day claimed to be the sons of Abraham—how did Jesus respond to their claim (Jn 8:39-40)? Compare the way Abraham responded to the Lord's visit in Mamre and the way the Jews responded to Jesus in Jerusalem when he came to visit them. What does Jesus say about Abraham's reception (Jn 8:56)?

15. What did the Lord announce and how did Sarah respond (Gen 18:9-12)? How did the Lord respond to Sarah's laugh (Gen 18:13-15)? How did Sarah and other holy women prepare the way for Mary (CCC 489)?

16. How did God consult with Abraham and why (Gen 18:16-21)? What did God mean when he said that in Abraham “all the nations of the earth will be blessed” (Acts 3:25; Gal 3:8; CCC 706)?

17. Where were the men going and why (Gen 18:16, 20-21)? How did the three heavenly guests split up (Gen 18:22)? Knowing that Sodom was wicked and impending judgment was at hand, what did Abraham do (Gen 18:23-33; CCC 2571, 2635)? What is intercession (CCC 2634)?

18. Read Genesis 19. What happened when the two angels visited Sodom? How did Abraham’s nephew Lot care for them? What did the men of Sodom attempt to do and was their destruction justified? What were the sins of Sodom (Gen 19:4-5; Ezek 16:49-50; CCC 1867)? What do Scripture and the Church teach about homosexuality (Lev 18:22; Rom 1:26-27; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Jude 7; CCC 2357)? Where does our modern word “sodomy” come from and what does it mean? What did God do to Sodom in response to their depravity?

19. What happened to Lot and his family (Gen 19:29-38)? What is the origin of the biblical nations of Moab and Ammon?

### **CHAPTER 3: THE LORD WILL PROVIDE**

According to God’s promise Sarah gave birth to a son—she was ninety years old. Abraham circumcised him on the eighth day naming the baby Isaac. He was the son God had promised when he had called Abraham. Sarah did not want Ishmael, the son of her servant Hagar, to infringe on the inheritance of her son Isaac so Hagar and Ishmael were sent away. God blessed Ishmael who became the father of the Arabs. Probably ten or fifteen years later God told Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering. It was to prefigure the future offering of God’s only begotten Son whom he loved. At the instant when Abraham was slaying his son, God stopped him and provided a ram as a substitute sacrifice for Isaac. Because of Abraham’s obedience of faith and good works he was justified before God.

#### **Questions for further discussion and study:**

1. How did God keep his promise to Sarah (Gen 21:1-2)? Sarah was ten years younger than Abraham, so how old was Sarah when the baby was finally born (Gen 21:5)? What two things did Abraham do (Gen 21:3-4)? How did Sarah react to the miraculous birth (Gen 21:6-7)? Babies were usually weaned after three years (e.g., 2 Mac 7:27). What happened after Isaac had passed the precarious early years of infancy (Gen 21:8)?

2. Sarah had acted hastily with Hagar and now her son Isaac’s position was threatened by Ishmael, the first born son of Abraham. What did Sarah insist Abraham do with Hagar and Ishmael (Gen 21:9-10)? Read the story of

Ishmael's expulsion in Genesis 21:11-21. How did God bless Ishmael? Notice how St. Paul used the story of Hagar, Sarah and their sons to allegorically contrast earthly and heavenly Jerusalem, flesh and the spirit, law and promise (Gal 4:21-31). Notice the records of Ishmael's descendants; where did they settle (Gen 25:12-18).

*Most Arabs claim Ishmael as their father. "As Jews circumcise on the eighth day to follow Isaac's example, so Arabs follow Ishmael in circumcising in the thirteenth year" (Anchor, Vol. 1, pg. 1028). "Ishmael was the father of the Ishmaelites, a nomadic nation which lived in northern Arabia. Modern-day Arabs claim descent from Ishmael (Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary. "Ishmael." Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1995).*

3. God's final and most excruciating test came when Abraham was about 115 years old. How did Abraham respond when God called him (Gen 22:1, 11; cf. Gen 46:2; Ex 3:4; Acts 9:10)? What did God ask Abraham to do (Gen 22:2)? By what virtue was Abraham willing and able to obey God (Gen 22:16-18; Heb 11:17; CCC 145)?

*According to good sources the structure of the sentence suggests that God did not command Abraham to offer his son. It was more like a request. If so, Abraham's response is all the more profound. He could have said "No" without disobeying God. His actions said, "God, I will do not only what you command of me, but also what you wish of me."*

*"The Hebrew adds the participle na' to the imperative, which usually softens the command to an entreaty ... Abraham has absolute freedom of choice. Should he refuse, he would not incur any guilt (Sarna, Nahum M. Genesis. The JPS Torah Commentary. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989).*

4. Are there any indications that Abraham knew he would not have to actually sacrifice his son even if he obeyed God (Gen 22:5, 7-8)? Even if Abraham *did* kill his son, how strong was his faith in God's promise that Isaac would live to inherit the promises (Heb 11:17-19; CCC 2572)? What virtue enabled him to become the father of many nations (CCC 1819)?

5. Having become familiar with ancient Mesopotamia and Canaan, was human sacrifice unusual or unthinkable? Discuss why God might have requested this of Abraham? Did God condone human sacrifice? Did he really expect to have Abraham follow through with the holocaust—or was it only a test to determine Abraham's allegiances (Gen 22:1, 12)? Might God have been giving us a human example of what he himself would do for us with his own Son? Might he be seeing if a man was willing to do for him

what he was willing to do for men? What does Jesus require of us (Mk 10:28-31; Lk 14:26; CCC 1618)?

6. Where was Abraham to take his son for the holocaust (Gen 22:2)? To understand the importance of Moriah, what would be built there a thousand years later (2 Chron 3:1)?

*Today the site of Mt. Moriah, the temple platform, is located in the SE corner of the Old City of Jerusalem and is occupied by the Muslim shrines known as the El-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock (Anchor, Vol. 4, pg. 905).*

7. God referred to Abraham's son as "your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love." Do these words bring to mind similar words from the Gospels (Jn 3:16)? Do you think it is coincidental that God would offer his only Son whom he loved on the same mountain?

*This is the first time the word "love" is used in the Bible—used of a father's love for his only son. How might it be significant that the word was first used here?*

8. How does Moses later give detailed instructions for a burnt offering (Lev 1:2-17)? What happened when Abraham's knife was in the air ready to kill Isaac (Gen 22:10-12)? What was provided—as Abraham seemed to have anticipated in advance (Gen 22:8, 13)? What did Abraham name the place after the sacrifice (Gen 22:14)? What would eventually be provided on the same mountain (Lk 23:33)?

9. After the test how did the Lord respond to Abraham's willingness to offer his son (Gen 22:15-18)? What effect did the sacrifice have on Abraham (CCC 1819)? What does God promise and how will all the nations be blessed through Abraham (Gen 22:17-18; Gal 3:8; CCC 706)? Isn't it interesting the blessing promised by God will also take place at this same mountain two thousand years later?

10. The typological parallels are rich between these two historical accounts. What did Isaac carry on his back to the sacrifice (Gen 22:6)? What did Jesus carry on his back to the sacrifice (Jn 19:17)? In what was the substitute ram's head stuck (Gen 22:13)? What was Jesus' head stuck in (Jn 19:2)? What was the sign of the curse imposed on the earth due to Adam's sin (Gen 3:17-18)? How might the crown of thorns suggest that Jesus also carried the curse of the earth to the cross as well as the sin of mankind? Does Isaac appear to be a willing victim? Was Jesus a willing victim (Is 53:7; CCC 608)?

11. What was the reward for Abraham's faith, obedience and good deeds (Gen 22:17-18, 1 Mac 2:51-52; Jam 2:23; CCC 1819)? Was Abraham justified by faith alone (Jas 2:21-24)? Who else had his good works "reckoned to him as righteous" (Psa 106:30-31; Jas 2:25-26)? Can we be saved by works alone (Gal 3:6, Eph 2:8-9)? What are we saved *for* (Eph 2:10)? What is the relationship between faith and works (Gal 5:6; CCC 162, 1814)? What must we continue doing (Col 1:22-23)? What is the criteria of the final judgment (Jn 5:28-29; CCC 679, 1038)? How is our salvation practically realized (Phil 2:12)?

*The Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone contradicts Scripture. St. Paul never says we are justified by faith alone, and St. James explicitly says we are not justified by faith alone (Kreeft, Peter. Catholic Christianity: A Complete Catechism of Catholic Beliefs Based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001, pg. 26).*

*Paul's letters to the Romans and Galatians speak frequently of justification by faith and not by "works of the law". "Works of the law" were laws imposed on the Jews that made them distinct from the Gentiles (e.g., circumcision, Sabbath laws, dietary restrictions, etc.). St. Paul argues that it is not these "works of the law" that justify a person before God; it is faith and obedience to Christ. Many improperly twist Paul's writings into a Protestant-Catholic polemic, whereas St. Paul had no such thing in mind. Paul's context is Jewish-Gentile—must a Gentile first become a Jew and do their "works of the Law" before they can become a Christian (Acts 15:1-31)?*

#### **CHAPTER 4: GOD OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB**

Abraham is central but Sarah was ever at his side. She is mentioned more than any other woman in the Bible. Scripture repeatedly attests to her great faith and example. At 127 years old she died. Abraham bought the cave of Machpelah in Hebron in which to bury his wife. To pass the covenant to future generations Isaac needed a wife and children. The wife must not be a Canaanite but from Abraham's kin, the family back in Haran. Abraham's servant finds Rebekah who agrees to marry Isaac. They have twin boys named Esau and Jacob. Jacob is a conniver and supplanter who cheats his brother of his paternal blessing and his status as first born. Jacob escapes to Haran to avoid his brother's wrath. He sees the vision of the ladder up to heaven and God renews his covenant with Jacob who marries Leah and Rachel. He is a shepherd in Haran for twenty years and returns a rich man to the land of promise. Isaac was buried with his father and mother in the Cave of Machpelah. Jacob and his twelve sons go to Egypt during a famine and become slaves there for four hundred years.

### Questions for further discussion and study:

1. How does Scripture attest to Sarah's faith and example (Heb 11:11; 1 Pet 3:5-6; CCC 64, 145, 489)? Where was Sarah buried (Gen 23:19-20)?
2. What is necessary for God's covenant to be fulfilled after Abraham dies (Gen 24:7)? What was imperative and suitable for the patriarchs and kings when choosing a wife—and why (Gen 24:3-4; Ex 34:11-16; Deut 7:3-4; 1 Kings 11:1-8, 11; Tob 4:12; Ezra 9:1-4)? Abraham forbids his son to marry a Canaanite and to leave the land of promise—so what did Abraham decide to do (Gen 24:1-9)?
3. What was Abraham's servant's name or is he only known by his description—how is he described (Gen 24:2, 5)? What did Abraham command of his servant (Gen 24:1-14)? What did the servant pray and whom did he find? Imagine the generosity and character of this young maiden knowing that one camel can drink in excess of 25 gallons of water in 10 minutes! Read the delightful story of the beautiful Rebekah, her father Laban and the marital agreement (Gen 24:15-61). What did Rebekah decide to do (Gen 24:58)? The romantic story of Isaac and Rebekah's meeting and marriage can be read in Genesis 24:62-67.
3. There is rich typology embedded in Isaac and Rebekah's marital union which prefigures that of Jesus Christ and the Church. How does the relationship of a husband and wife reveal a great mystery about Christ and his Church (Eph 5:25-33; CCC 772, 1659)? How did Isaac's reprieve on Mount Moriah provide a type or prefiguration of the resurrection (Heb 11:18-19)? What did Abraham do with Isaac after the sacrifice (Gen 22:19)? What did God the Father do with his Son after the sacrifice (Lk 24:50-51; Dan 7:13-14; Eph 1:19-20; CCC 659)? After the two fathers took their sons home, who was sent to secure what for the sons (Gen 24:2-4; Acts 2:1-6; CCC 767, 795)? Are we given the name of Abraham's servant in this story? What is the name of God's Spirit sent to find a bride for Jesus? "Holy Spirit" is not a name but a description. Both are unnamed servants sent to find brides for beloved sons. What did both "unnamed servants" give to the brides (Gen 24:10, 22, 53; 1 Cor 1:7, 12:4, 11; CCC 1692, 1785)? What was the end result for both (Gen 24:67; Rev 19:7-9; 21:2, 9; CCC 757, 808, 1602)?
4. How old was Abraham when he died (Gen 25:7-8)? Where was he buried and by whom (Gen 25:9-11)? How does Scripture summarize the life and faith of Abraham (Sir 44:19-23; Heb 11:8-19)?
5. How old was Isaac when he married Rebekah and what was her problem (Gen 25:19-21)? What was her second problem (Gen 25:22)? What did God reveal to her about her pregnancy (Gen 25:23)? How are God's words used later by St. Paul to demonstrate God's sovereign choices (Rom

9:10-14)? How were the boys very different (Gen 25:24-28)? In what order were the boys born and how did Jacob receive his name from his actions at birth (Gen 25:25)? What does the name Jacob mean?

6. How did Esau despise his birthright as the firstborn—for what did he trade it (Gen 25:29-34; Heb 12:16-17)? How did Jacob receive the coveted “firstborn’s blessing” from his father and who coached him (Gen 27:1-40)? What was the blessing Jacob received (Gen 27:27-29)? Even though deceived by Rebekah and Jacob, how did Isaac act in faith (Heb 11:20)? What did Esau resolve to do (Gen 27:41)? What did Rebekah and Isaac tell Jacob to do (Gen 27:42—28:5)? What was Jacob forbidden from doing (Gen 28:1-2)? What was Isaac’s prayer for Jacob as he sent him off (Gen 28:3-4)?

*In Israel, the firstborn son inherited special rights and privileges. His Birthright was a double portion of the estate and leadership of the family. As head of the home after his father’s death, the oldest son customarily cared for his mother until her death, and provided for his unmarried sisters until their marriage. He was the family’s spiritual head (Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary, “Firstborn”).*

7. On his journey north what vision did Jacob see while he slept (Gen 28:10-17)? What did he do with his rock pillow and what did he name the place (Gen 28:18-19)? Who had worshiped there twice before (Gen 12:8; 13:2-4)? What did God say to Jacob and where did we hear similar words before (Gen 28:13-15; cf. Gen 13:15, 17; 26:3)? Who and what did Jacob now personally appropriate for himself (Gen 28:20-22)? What did he name the place, even though his grandfather had already named it thus (Gen 28:18-19)?

8. Where do we see the ladder to heaven alluded to in the New Testament (Jn 1:51)? How does Jesus draw from the story of Jacob and the ladder (Jn 1:47-51)? What (or who) is the true ladder between heaven and earth? How might this episode illuminate the meaning of John 14:6? God and man— heaven and earth— meet in Christ. How will Jesus be lifted up to bridge the gap between heaven and earth (Jn 12:32–34; Acts 1:9; 1 Tim 2:5-6; CCC 661-662, 2795)?

*Jacob was sleeping and saw the Lord leaning on the top of the ladder. What does it mean to lean on the ladder, except to hang on the cross? ... [W]hy did this happen on the road, before Jacob obtained a wife? Because our Lord, the true Jacob, first leaned on the ladder, that is, the cross, and afterwards formed a Church for Himself. ... both Jacob asleep and the Lord leaning on the ladder prefigured Christ” (Saint Caesarius of Arles: Sermons (1–238). Edited by Hermigild Dressler and Bernard M. Peebles.*

*Translated by Mary Magdeleine Mueller. Vol. 31, 47, 66. The Fathers of the Church. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press; Consortium Books, 1956–1973. Sermon 87: On Jacob’s Ladder.*

9. When Jacob arrived in Haran, the home of Abraham’s family, what happened to him (Gen 29:1-20)? “Jacob” means supplanter or cheater, well-known for his crafty deceit. How did Jacob meet his match with his Uncle Laban (Gen 29:21-30)? For the whole story of Jacob’s 20 years as a shepherd serving Laban, building his family and his flocks, and how he and his uncle repeatedly deceived each other, read Genesis 29:31–31:55. Read the account of Jacob and his family crossing the Euphrates River (Gen 31:21) with their flocks and herds heading back to his aged father Isaac (Gen 32:1-23; 33:1-17).

10. After sending his family across the Jabbok River ahead of him, what kept Jacob occupied all night (Gen 32:24)? When the “man” who wrestled with Jacob saw he had not prevailed against Jacob, what did he do (Gen 32:25)? The power to inflict such physical harm with only a touch implies what about the wrestler (Gen 32:30)? Jacob received a new name that night—what was it and what did it mean (Gen 32:26-28)? What does this episode teach us about prayer (CCC 2573)? Where were the new name and covenant renewed again (Gen 35:9-15)?

*Referring again to John 1:47-51, notice that Jesus refers to Nathaniel as an Israelite in whom there is no guile (“Israelite” is a word used only one other time in the New Testament—Romans 11:1). God changed Jacob’s name to “Israel.” Not only did Jacob mean “supplanter” but he also lived up to his name as a deceiver full of guile. Using a play on words, one could translate Jesus’ pun as “Behold, an Israelite in whom there is no Jacob—no guile and cunning.”*

11. How does God refer to himself (Ex 3:15)? How can God refer to himself as the God of Jacob—a deceitful supplanter? Does it encourage you that he might also then refer to himself as the God of you and me?

12. What were the names of Jacob’s twelve sons (Gen 35:22-26)? What happened to Isaac after Jacob returned to the **Promised Land** (Gen 35:27-29)? Jacob and his family eventually went to Egypt during a famine (Acts 7:11-12, 14-15). The whole account—including Jacob’s son Joseph, sold into slavery to prepare the way for his family—is a marvelous and providential story (Gen 34:1–48:22; Acts 7:13-18). After blessing all of his sons (Gen 49:1-28), Jacob dictated where he was to be buried—and then he died (Gen 49:29–50:3). What did Jacob do by faith (Heb 11:21)? Where

was Jacob buried (Gen 50:4-14; Acts 7:16)? What happened to Abraham's descendants for 400 years (Gen 15:12-16; Acts 7:6-7; Ex 1:1-22)?

13. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lived four thousand years ago, so what do their lives and faith have to do with us today (Rom 4:9-13; CCC 59-60)? How are the patriarchs used as examples for us (Judith 8:24-27; 1 Mac 2:50-51)? Who are the ancestors of Jesus Christ (Mt 1:1-2, 16-17; Lk 3:23-38)?

*If you are still wondering how important the patriarchs are for us, consider that Abraham is mentioned at least 67 times in the New Testament, Isaac 20 times and Jacob 24 times. Many more times they are referred to collectively as "the fathers."*

14. What is the current and future status of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Matt 8:11; 22:32; Lk 13:28; 16:23; Jn 8:56)? Are the Old Testament patriarchs considered saints by the Catholic Church (CCC 61)?

### **The Catholic Challenge**

We have viewed *Abraham, Father of Faith & Works*. Now having gone through the study guide, you should be better equipped to understand Abraham and his impressive role in salvation history from a Catholic, biblical, and historical perspective. You should also better understand the ancient world, the beginning of the people of Israel, God's plan of salvation as it began to unfold, how we are justified and saved, and how we as Christians must be prepared to persevere in our obedience and good works before God. Now, let's answer some questions about Abraham: who he was, what he did, the covenant as it was renewed through his descendants and how he taught us to believe and obey God in *The Catholic Challenge*.

1. Why did God create the world, what happened to it and why did God decide to intervene to bring salvation to the world?
2. How was Abraham's homeland like and unlike ours today?
3. What are the modern ziggurats and the false gods people worship today?
4. What would be the difficulties of leaving home for a place unknown and what did Abraham leave behind?
5. What qualities did Abraham possess that allowed God to break through to him and maybe not to others?
6. What are the "altars" and "tent stakes" in your life—the permanent and temporary, the earthly and the heavenly? What are you attached to?
7. Why is typology important and give a few examples.

8. Does salvation come from “faith alone”? What other actions or deeds are necessary?
9. Do we ever fail to wait on God and take things into our own hands like Sarah did with Hagar?
10. Who or what is the seed of Abraham? What did God mean that “through you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed”?
11. How would you respond if Jesus surprisingly showed up at your home? How do we respond to others that come to us?
12. What is the purpose of sexuality and the human person? What do the Bible and the Church teach about homosexuality and other disordered sexual activity? How should we respond to the moral decadence of our society today?
13. Why did God tell Abraham to offer his son as a burnt offering? Do you think God intended him to really kill his son? Do you think Abraham thought he would actually have to kill Isaac? What was Abraham thinking as he walked along with Isaac?
14. What can we learn from the obedience of Abraham regarding the sacrifice?
15. What do we learn from the typology presented on Mount Moriah?
16. When was Abraham “saved” and how was he saved?
17. If someone asks, “Are you saved?”—how do you respond?
18. Discuss the relationship between Abraham and Sarah and her role in salvation history.
19. How do we pass the faith on to future generations?
20. Why is Abraham the father of all who believe?
21. Discuss the genealogy of Jesus Christ and the importance of the patriarchs.
22. How do we view the patriarchs and prophets today, especially their significance in the liturgical life of the Church?

### **For Further Reading**

Akin, James. *The Drama of Salvation*. San Diego, Calif.: Catholic Answers, 2015.

Sarna, Nahum M. *Genesis*. The JPS Torah Commentary. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989.

Ray, Stephen K. *Genesis*. Catholic Scripture Study. Charlotte, NC: Catholic Scripture Study International, 2008.

Catholic Church. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. 2nd Ed. Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000.

Zettler, Richard, and Lee Horne, eds. *Treasures from the Royal Tombs of Ur*. University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology; First Edition, 1998.

Mitch, Curtis and Hahn, Scott. *Genesis*. Ignatius Catholic Study Bible. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010.

Louth, Andrew, and Marco Conti. *Genesis 1–11*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture OT 1. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

Sheridan, Mark. *Genesis 12–50*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture OT 2. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002.

Gavigan, James, Brian McCarthy, and Thomas McGovern, eds. *The Pentateuch*. The Navarre Bible. Dublin; New York: Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishers, 1999.

Most of the research and study was done using Verbum Catholic and Bible software. See this program at [www.Verbum.com/SteveRay](http://www.Verbum.com/SteveRay).