

# Understanding The Bible *from* A *to* Z

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## **UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE FROM A-Z**

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## Abraham

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1. God's Call ♦ 2. God's Covenant ♦  
3. Abraham's Test of Faith
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**1. God's Call.** Christians consider Abraham an important ancestor of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:1) and the father of the faithful (Romans 4:16). Abraham, whose name means “father of a multitude,” lived around 2000 B.C. He originated from the city of Ur, in Mesopotamia, on the River Euphrates. He was apparently a very wealthy and powerful man.

God called Abraham to leave Ur and go to a new land—the land of Canaan (literally, “belonging to the land of the red purple”), which God was giving to Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 12:1). Abraham left with his wife, Sarah, and his nephew, Lot. Upon arriving in Canaan, his first act was to construct an altar to worship God. This was typical of Abraham; God was of first importance to him.

Abraham's sojourn to Canaan was, in itself, an act of great faith. After all, Canaan was already occupied by the fearsome Canaanites. But Abraham never doubted God's promise. The land would someday belong to Abraham and his descendants. It was just a matter of time.

**2. God's Covenant.** God made a covenant with Abraham in which He promised him that his descendants would be as numerous as the dust of the earth (Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-17). The promise may have seemed unbelievable to Abraham since his wife was childless (11:30). Yet Abraham did not doubt God; he knew God would faithfully give what He had promised. God even reaffirmed the covenant in Genesis 15, perhaps to emphasize to Abraham that even in his advanced age, the promise would come to pass. God also promised Abraham that he would be personally blessed, that his name would become

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great, that those who bless him would be blessed and those who curse him would be cursed, and that all the families of the earth would be blessed through his posterity.

At one point, an impatient Sarah suggested that their heir might be procured through their Egyptian handmaiden, Hagar. Ishmael was thus born to Abraham, through Hagar, when he was 86 years old. But Ishmael *was not* the child of promise. In God's perfect timing, the child of promise was finally born when Abraham and Sarah were very old (Abraham was 100), far beyond normal childbearing age. Their son was named Isaac (Genesis 21), and, as promised, an entire nation eventually developed from his line. "Isaac" means "laughter" and is fitting because it points to the joy derived from this child of promise.

**3. Abraham's Test of Faith.** In a famous episode in the Bible, Abraham's faith was stretched when he was commanded by God to sacrifice his beloved son of promise, Isaac. Abraham obeyed God's command without hesitation. In his heart, Abraham believed God would provide a substitute lamb for the burnt offering (Genesis 22:8). God, of course, intervened before Isaac was actually sacrificed, but the episode served to demonstrate the tremendous faith Abraham had in God. Many theologians have noted that Abraham pre-figures the heavenly Father, "who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all" (Romans 8:32).

Abraham lived 175 years, and then "breathed his last and died at a good old age" (Genesis 25:7-8).

**Abrahamic Covenant—See *Covenants*.**

## Acts

The book of Acts may be considered "Part Two" of Luke's Gospel, for Luke is the author of both. He wrote Acts in A.D. 61, shortly after he wrote his Gospel.

While Luke's Gospel contains an orderly account of the accomplishments of Jesus during His earthly life, the book of Acts contains an orderly account of the accomplishments of Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, in the 30 years or so of the early church following His resurrection and ascension. The book covers events beginning with the ascension of Jesus into heaven and ending with the apostle Paul's imprisonment in Rome. It serves as a link between the four Gospels and the Epistles.

Though the book of Acts focuses primarily on the "acts of the apostles" (such as Paul and Peter), in reality the book predominantly focuses on the "acts of the Holy Spirit" through different people. It focuses on how Paul and Peter and others empowered by the Holy Spirit were used to spread Christianity among both Jews and Gentiles around the northern Mediterranean, including Samaria (Acts 8:5-25), Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch (9:32-12:25), Phrygia and Galatia (13:1-15:35), Macedonia (15:36-21:16), and Rome (21:17-22:29). Despite persecution by Roman authorities, Jewish authorities, and others (2:13; 4:1-22; 5:17-42; 6:9-8:4), Christianity spread like wildfire.

## Adam and Eve

Adam and Eve were our first parents, the first human beings created by the hand of God (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7,22-23). The Hebrew word for "Adam" literally means "humanity" and is an appropriate term for the first man since he represents the human race. The Hebrew word for "Eve" means "giver of life" and is appropriate since it was through her body that the rest of humanity was given birth.

The words translated "man" and "woman" in Genesis 2:21-22 are based on a play on words in the Hebrew. "Man" in Hebrew is *ish*, while "woman" is *ishshah*. The name indicates that woman has the same nature as man (*ish*), but also is different in some way (*shah*). The woman is a perfect companion of the opposite gender for man.

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It is highly revealing that man was formed from the very soil that God entrusted him to cultivate (Genesis 2:15; 3:17). Woman, on the other hand, was created from a rib taken from man's side, and she was called to be his helper. It would thus seem that their different modes of creation are closely related to their respective tasks in life.

It is also interesting that when God was giving instructions about moral responsibility, He gave these instructions to Adam alone. After the Fall, God first summoned Adam, not Eve, even though *she* was the one who had led him into sin (Genesis 3:9). Adam, the head of the family, was held responsible for what had happened. Indeed, Romans 5:12 ascribes the guilt to Adam.

**Adultery**—See *Sex and Sexuality*.

**Agriculture and Farming**—See *Farming*.

## Almsgiving and Charity

The New Testament is replete with admonitions to give freely to others. Hebrews 13:16 instructs us to do good and share with others. We are admonished to give to the poor (Matthew 19:21; Luke 11:41; 12:33; 1 John 3:17) and to those who ask (Matthew 5:42). We are called to share food with the hungry (Isaiah 58:7,10), to share money generously (Romans 12:8), and to use money for good (1 Timothy 6:17-18). The early church certainly showed charity as an evidence of Christian love (Acts 9:36; 10:2,4; Romans 12:13; Ephesians 4:28). Jesus advises us to give to others secretly, instead of openly in order to win the praise of men (Matthew 6:1-2).

The New Testament often describes such generous activities as almsgiving. The word “alms” derives from the Greek word *eleos*, which means “mercy.” “Almsgiving” thus means