



Lesson 6 Volume 2

The Great Family

God's promise through Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 12, 15, 17-18, 21, 24)

How to use this lesson

- Core Presentation – presented every year
- Sacred Story – the stories of how God and people meet
- It is part of a comprehensive approach to Christian formation that consists of eight volumes. Together the lessons form a spiral curriculum that enables children to move into adolescence with an inner working knowledge of the classical Christian language system to sustain them all their lives.

The Material

- Location: Sacred Story shelves
- Pieces: Desert Box, Basket with four People of God (Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Rebekah), basket of stones, blocks of wood to represent the cities (Ur and Haran), 2 long pieces of blue yarn for the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers.
- Underlay: Use the Desert Box

Background

In this story, we continue seeking the elusive presence of God. God was present at creation, blessing all that was made. Noah walked with God and was led by God's presence to build the ark that preserved life. And then?

The people living in Ur around Abraham and Sarah believed that there were many gods embedded in nature. [This is a belief known as animism and is a characteristic of many different religions.](#) This meant that gods had to be “here” or “there.” Abraham and his family believed that God was everywhere, but was that really true? What if they were to go into an unknown place or experience, would God be there? They were not sure, but they hoped God would be there and God was.

Notes on the Material

This lesson uses the Desert Box (or a Desert Bag), an important setting for several sacred stories. The desert box usually has a lid and can have wheels, to make it easy to move. Place the box in the middle of the circle to tell today's story.



The pieces of the story should all be placed on a simple tray (wood or wicker). On the tray will be a small basket with stones to make altars, two wooden blocks and two long pieces of heavy blue yarn. One length of yarn will represent the Euphrates River that arcs toward Haran to guide and nourish that part of the journey. The second length of yarn will represent the Tigris River that arcs in a north-eastward direction.

As you face the sacred story shelves, locate this material to the right of the material for the Flood and the Ark on the top shelf.

Special Notes

Many young children spend time in early education settings that feature a sand box. Help children understand that the desert box is *not* a sand box by consistently calling it the *Desert* box. You can also use a Dert Bag to tell this story; however, the bag is harder for the children to handle independently.

Children will almost certainly scoot up to the box to touch the irresistible sand. That's fine, but help them scoot themselves back too. You might say, "It's time to get ready now. You need to scoot back, so everyone can see. This is the lesson."

The desert box needs an introduction whenever it is used, but be sure to spend plenty of time when introducing it to the children for the first time.

Take time to learn the correct placement of Ur, Haran, and the two rivers in the desert box. Your care in placing figures correctly means that children won't have to unlearn an incorrect placement of these landmarks when they learn later how to use maps of the Middle East.

Extending the lesson: The extension lessons for this core lesson can be found in Volume 6 of *The Complete Guide to Godly Play* (The Story of Abraham, the Story of Sarah, The Story of Jacob, and the Story of Joseph). After children have worked with this core lesson approximately three times, they will be ready to work with these extension lessons. Ideally the extension lessons get placed directly under the core lesson they are meant to extend so that they are visually connected. It is important that in a room designed for experienced "Godly Players" both the core and extension lessons are present.



MOVEMENTS

Go and get the desert box and bring it to the circle. Leave the cover on the desert box until you are ready to begin the lesson.

Return to get the tray with the “rivers”, the stones, the markers for Ur and Haran, and the figures for Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Rebekah. Get settled and begin when all are ready.

Trace the outline of the desert box with your finger.

Remove the lid.

WORDS

Watch carefully where I go so you will always know where to get the Desert Box...

...and this lesson.

This is the Desert Box. So many wonderful and important things happened in the desert. We need to know what it is like.

We can't get the whole desert in our classroom, so here is just a little piece of the desert.

The desert can be a dangerous place. It is always moving, so it is hard to know where you are. There is little water, so you get thirsty and you can die if no water is found. Almost nothing grows there, so there is almost nothing to eat. In the daytime it is hot and the sun scorches your skin. In the night it is cold. When the wind blows, the sand stings your skin when it hits you. People wear many clothes to protect them from the sun and blowing sand. The desert can be a



dangerous place. People do not go into the desert unless they are ready.

As you talk, move your hand over the desert, smoothing the sand to show the mystery of the desert and what happens there.

When the Flood was over, the creatures went out in all the four directions of the earth to fill it up with life again. They often gathered along the rivers. The people lived in small villages and then cities. One of the most ancient and greatest of these cities was called Ur.

Place the yarn and the two blocks of wood in the sand. Ur (the larger block) is at the left farthest from you and Haran is close to you, in the center. From the point of view of the children, Haran is at the top of a semicircle, called the Fertile Crescent. The blue yarn (for the river Euphrates) marks the route to Haran and then turns north towards modern-day Turkey.

In the city of Ur, the people believed that there were many gods. There was a god for every tree, every rock, and every flower. There was a god of the sky, the clouds, the water and the land. The world was alive with gods.

Touch the block of wood for Ur at your far left in the desert box.

But there was one family that believed that all of God was in every place. They did not yet *know* that, but that is what they believed.

Abram and his wife Sarai were part of that family.

Stand Abram and Sarai in the sand by Ur.

When it came time to move to a new place, they were not sure that God would be there.



They also wondered what the new place would be like.

They walked toward Haran with their sheep, their donkeys, and their many helpers. Even the old people and all the children went, too. They slept in their tents at night, and during the day they walked along the great river called the Euphrates. It showed them the way and gave them and all their animals water to drink.

When you are moving the figures take your time. Notice how they leave footprints in the sand. This shows their journey. Take care to step the figures as opposed to dragging them through the sand. Listen to the crunching sound they make as they move across the desert. Be sure to pick them up by their arms or body, not their heads.

It took a long, long time. Finally, they met people coming out from Haran. They knew the journey was almost over. Then they were there.

Move the figures along the Euphrates river, marked by the blue yarn, to the city of Haran. From the children's point of view, you move the figures toward the top of an arc.

Sometimes Abram would go out to the edge of the desert and look out across the sand and into the sky. Then God came so close to Abram, and Abram came so close to God, that he knew what God wanted him to do. God wanted Abram and Sarai to move on again to another new place. And God said, "I will make of you a great family. I will bless you and you will be a blessing."

Move Abram out away from Haran (toward the children) as you tell about Abram's encounter with the presence of the mystery of God. Move one of your hands close to



Abram when God comes close.

Abram and Sarai did what God said. They went into the desert to the west of Haran and walked toward Canaan. They went with all their sheep, their tents and many helpers. This time there was no river to show the way or to give them water to drink.

Move Abram and Sarai on to your right into Canaan. As the path starts down, you will stop at two places and build altars (place rocks). Then you will go down to the bottom (the farthest away from you) of the box to Hebron the final home of Abram and Sarai.

They finally came to a place called Shechem. Abram climbed up a hill and prayed to God, and God was there, so Abram built an altar to mark the place. Then they went on.

Place a rock at Shechem to symbolize an altar.

Next they came to a place near Bethel. Abram prayed again and God was there, also. Abram built an altar to mark this place, too. God was not just here or there. All of God was everywhere.

Place another rock near Bethel to symbolize another altar.

Then they went on to Hebron to make their home, near the oaks of Mamre.

Leave Abram and Sarai together at your far right.

Move Abram a short distance away from Hebron.

One night God brought Abram outside. He looked up into the sky. God came so close to Abram, and Abram came so close to God, that Abram knew what God was saying. “You will become the father of a great family, and Sarai will be the mother. The members of the great family will be as many



as there are stars in the sky and grains of sand in the desert.”

Abram laughed. He and Sarai were very old. God’s promise sounded impossible, but God said to change their names anyway. Abram was to be Abraham, the father of many, and Sarai was to be called Sarah.

Move Abraham back to stand beside Sarah.

One day three strangers came out of the desert.

You don’t need to put any figures down for the strangers. Leave them mysterious by just making a gentle motion towards Abraham and Sarah with your hand.

Abraham was sitting by his tent. He invited them in and Sarah mixed three measures of flour, which is a lot. She gave them bread and meat to eat, and milk and water to drink, as was the custom. They told Abraham that he and Sarah would have a son. Sarah was standing by the tent and heard them, and she laughed. They were too old.

The three strangers went on their way. Do you know what happened? Abraham and Sarah had a son.

Place a figure for Isaac between Sarah and Abraham when you speak of his birth.

They laughed again, so they named the baby “Laughter.” In their language the word for “laughter” is “Isaac.”

When the boy was grown, old Sarah, who was now full of many years and very tired, died. She was buried in the cave near the oaks of Mamre.

Pick up Sarah and reverently hold her in your open hand. Turn your hand over and



hide her as you touch the sand with your where she was buried, not far from Hebron. Do not literally bury her in the sand. Just keep her concealed as the story continues. You can tuck her under the desert box close to you or in your lap – whatever is most convenient.

Move your finger in the air, just above the sand, back toward Haran as you retrace the original journey. You will not use a person to represent the helper.

Place the Rebekah figure in the sand a little to your right of Haran. We won't name the place but it is Nahor in Mesopotamia (Genesis 24:10).

Move the Rebekah figure back to where Abraham and Isaac are waiting. Move the Isaac figure to meet her; then move the two figures to where Abraham is waiting. Don't hurry; this is a powerful moment.

Abraham was lonely. He missed Sarah very much, but he had one more thing he had to do.

He sent his most trusted helper back to the land of his people to find a wife for Isaac.

Abraham's helper stopped by a well in the evening. A young woman named Rebekah offered him water to drink, and helped him give water to his animals.

She was as full of courage as she was kindness. Rebekah then invited him to meet her family. He told her family about Abraham and Sarah and the Great Family. Rebekah decided she would like to be part of that Great Family, so they went across the desert and then past Shechem and Bethel toward Hebron.

Isaac saw them coming and came out to meet them. Then Isaac and Rebekah were married.



Old Abraham was now very old and full of years. He died and was buried with Sarah in a cave by the trees.

Pick up Abraham and conceal him in your hand as you point to the place where cave is. Do literally bury him in the sand, but instead keep him concealed in the same way you did Sarah.

Then Isaac and Rebekah had children, and their children had children, and those children had children.

And this kept on happening until I was born, and then you were born, and we are all part of this great family, which has become as many as the stars in the sky and the grains of sand in the desert.

When you say "you," look up at the children. Take your time and look at each child in the circle.

Look up as you mention the stars and then scoop a handful of sand and let it slowly trickle out.

Sit for a moment reflecting on the story and then begin the wondering questions.

Now, I wonder what part of this story you like best?

I wonder what part is the most important?

I wonder where you are in the story or what part of the story is about you?

I wonder if there is any part of the story we can leave out and still have all the story we need?



When the wondering is concluded, put everything away, and invite the children to get out their work.

Now it is time to get out our work. What work would you like to get out today? You may work with the story of the Great Family, or you may make something about it. Maybe you have something that you are already working on. There may be another material you would like to work with. There is so much. While I am going around the circle, think about what you are going to work with.