

# Abraham and pilgrimage

## LESSON 3: GENESIS 12:1-7 (R5); 13:1-4, 14-18 (R6); 22:1-4 (R8)

### Menu

#### Opening: Speaking and listening

- Discussion
- Painting

#### Bible access 1

- Questions to discuss

#### Bible access 2

- Small group activity

#### Explore

- Personal response

#### Plenary

### You will need:

- *Into the Bible* books
- Image of *The departure of Abraham* by Jacopo Bassano
- Set of building bricks

OT

**Literary genre:** Old Testament

### Key words and concepts:

Pilgrimage, Trust, Faith, Encounter with God, Abram, Isaac, Lot, Sarai, Bethel, Canaan, Altar, Ram

### Objectives:

Children should learn (to):

- Explore the meaning of pilgrimage by looking at Abraham's journey.
- Journeys are not always physical, but also spiritual and inward.
- Reflect on the special journeys made by members of a faith community and on their own personal journeys.

### Outcomes:

Children should:

- Describe the meaning of 'pilgrimage' in the light of Abraham's special moments of meeting or encounter with God and the actions he took.
- Discuss any special moments of encounter or experience in their own life journeys, which have influenced or inspired them.

### Assessment opportunities:

- Use religious vocabulary to explain what the narrative says about pilgrimage and encounter with God. (AT1)
- Able to describe an experience in their own life journey. (AT2)



## Background explanation

- In the Genesis narratives, God called Abram (as he was first known) to leave his home in the city of Haran (in present day Iraq), and go to Canaan, land west of the river Jordan. So Abraham embarked on a new life as a 'wanderer'. (See map *Into the Bible page XX*).
- At significant times on his journey or 'pilgrimage,' Abraham built altars, piles of rough stones and earth. Altars, used in many religions, were places of sacrifice, but for God's people, like Abraham, they also symbolised communion with God, to help remember special encounters with him. They remained as a reminder of God's promises and protection.
- In Latin the word pilgrim or 'perager' means 'through field, country, or land.' A pilgrimage or journey might not be just physical, but also spiritual and inward. It might be a return as an act of religious devotion to places of historical significance such as going to Mecca in the Hajj (for Muslims) or to Lourdes (for Roman Catholics). Pilgrimages can also be a moving forward on a journey to an unknown destination, such as Christian experienced in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* or in the way that all people are on a pilgrimage of life, when as pilgrims they cannot be exactly sure what the future holds. Abraham went back to places of significance and built altars that were of significance for future generations. He also moved forward on a pilgrimage, a journey with an uncertain destination but his encounters with and experience of God changed him inwardly and affected his actions outwardly.
- Abraham is presented, with all his imperfections, as a man of great faith, one of the founding figures of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. His ultimate test of faith (which he passed with flying colours) came when, after years of waiting for the birth of Isaac, the son promised by God, God then asked him to sacrifice Isaac as an offering. Would Abraham trust God even in this? At the last moment, God provided a ram as an alternate sacrificial victim.
- God changed Abram's name to Abraham, 'father of many nations' before the promised son was even conceived. Sarai's name was changed to Sarah. In Islam Abraham is known as Ibrahim who sacrificed his older son Ishmael, whose mother was Hagar.

## The Bible teaches that Abraham...

- was the founder of the Jewish nation
- had one son and heir called Isaac, by his wife, Sarah and another son, Ishmael, whose mother Hagar was Sarah's servant.
- lived in Haran, present day Iraq, where he lived in a permanent home as a rich man.
- once he left Haran, lived in a tent, as a nomad.
- had a nephew called Lot, who travelled with him, until they had a fall-out!



## OPENING UP THE SUBJECT

This lesson the children are going to find out about someone in the Bible who set off on a special journey or pilgrimage. He and his family did not know where they would end up, but they knew they should go where God asked them to go. As a result of his journey Abraham changed as a person. Pilgrimage doesn't have to be a physical journey. It can be an inward spiritual journey too that can change people!

### **Either:**

Think about a special journey the children have been on which ended in a visit to a special place. What made it special? Did their journey change them in any way?

### **Or:**

Talk about the definition of a pilgrimage with reference to Lourdes, Mecca and other local places known to be places of pilgrimage (going back to special places) or Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress* moving forwards towards the 'Celestial City.' How far does the song and football anthem, 'You'll never walk alone' suggest that life is a journey? Can children think of other songs or phrases that also do this?

### **Or:**

Show the painting of *The Departure of Abraham* by Jacopo Bassano (see below). Ask the children what they think the painting is about? Then explain that the man in the picture is Abraham and discuss what the children know about him. Use the information on the Background explanation on page 2 to tell the pupils about Abraham.

### **Further questions from the painting could include:**

- What was Abraham taking with him?
- Can you see some items ready to pack?
- What makes you think he was a rich man?
- Abraham had to leave a lot of things behind when he left home. What do you think he would have missed about his old life?
- Who is in the triangle of golden lights? Why is he there? (*God is calling them into an unknown future*)

Have the children ever had to face big changes in their lives when they are not sure about what the future holds? What sort of changes? How does it feel? What change did Abraham and his family face?

**Jacopo Bassano** was a late 16th century Italian painter who was born and died in Bassano del Grappa near Venice, from where he took his name. Bassano is in North Italy on the River Brenta with Monte Grappa in the background. Many of his paintings have a countryside feel. He created religious paintings by taking local features like animals, farmhouses and landscapes and local people to create biblical landscapes and biblical characters. He worked in Venice and other Italian towns with his four sons. Several members of his family may have worked on this painting in their studio.

## BIBLE ACCESS 1

### Genesis 12:1-7 (R5)

Read this extract, with children taking the parts of narrator and God or show the extract on an interactive whiteboard. If this is a whole class activity, when the answers are given to the questions, the relevant phrases can be highlighted.

- What did God call Abraham to do? *(This could be highlighted.)*
- How do you think Abraham's family felt when they were told to move? *(This could be a small group discussion. Abraham had an unknown future. He left his home, taking his family with him and believing that God also went with him.)*
- What did God promise Abraham and his family? *(This could be highlighted)*
- Abraham had a special encounter with God, when God spoke to him. How do you think Abraham and Sarah felt when God spoke to them? *(This could be a small group discussion.)*
- What did Abraham do to remember this special encounter or meeting? *(This could be highlighted.)*

## BIBLE ACCESS 2

### Genesis 13:1-4,14-18 or 22:1-14 (R6, R8)

In groups (no more than 6) look up one of these Bible extracts in *Into the Bible* making use of the map in *Into the Bible*. Read about an incident on Abraham's pilgrimage and then using a large sheet of sugar paper, answer these questions.

- 1 What happened to Abraham in your narrative? Plot his journey on your paper.
- 2 Describe or draw where Abraham was when he encountered God. What did God say?
- 3 How did Abraham respond? Do you think he put his faith in God? If so, how? Did he build an altar? Why? What did it look like?

## PLENARY/EXPLORING THE THEME

Feedback from work done in groups. Show the drawings made in answer to the first two questions and invite verbal response to questions 3.

- When Abraham was on his journey or 'pilgrimage' he could look back and remember God's faithfulness to him. Ask the children to look back on their 'life journey' or pilgrimage and think of any special encounters or experiences they have had in their life that have influenced, inspired or even changed them. For example, meeting a new friend, spending time with an elderly relative, meeting someone they admire, having a really special experience.
- Do they have a way of remembering that encounter or experience? Maybe they have a picture, a letter, a friendship bracelet or special keepsake to remind them.
- Using a set of children's building bricks ask the children if any would be willing to share about that special encounter or experience and then lay a brick down to as a reminder, as Abraham laid down a reminder. Or, they could lay down a brick and say something they remember about Abraham's journey or 'pilgrimage.'

### Extension work

- Invite a visitor who is a Christian to talk about an encounter they had with God and how they remembered it. How far do they see their life as a Christian as a pilgrimage?
- Find out about why some places and occasions are special to Christian believers. What local Christian sites are there? Could you arrange a local visit to tie in with this lesson? Why might they be considered sacred? Find out about either the Jewish tradition of pilgrimage to Jerusalem, or the significance for Muslims of making the hajj to Mecca.
- Read part of a children's version of *Pilgrim's Progress*.
- Read Genesis 16:1-16 (R7) to find out what happened to Hagar, Sarah's servant, who also had a child by Abraham, called Ishmael.