

Let us pray: God of sacred story,  
your word has many powers;  
power to create, power to break down, power to heal.  
Help us hear your word for us today.  
Amen.

*The Lord said to Abram, "Leave your own country, your family, and your father's home for a land that I will show you. I'll make you a great nation and bless you. I'll make you famous; you'll be a blessing. I'll bless those who bless you; those who curse you I'll curse. All the families of the Earth will be blessed through you."*

*Gen 12:1-3 The Message*

What did God promise Us? What did we promise God?  
What makes this relationship with God work?

Still, the promises are everlasting, and God is with us, always, calling us to be God's people.

When we hear about the tragic conflicts between the descendants of Abraham that are still happening today, we know we have a long way to go to get to God's plan. Still, the story of Abraham and Sarah can inspire hope in every family, in every faith community.

The blessing is out there, as long as the promise is renewed the promise is alive, as real as the millions of stars in the sky. I wonder what opportunities (beneath the brokenness), could God use to multiply blessings for the whole of his family? Could we be involved somehow?

Abraham and Sarah were told to be "blameless", completely loyal to God.

The Prophet Micah said,

*"What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice,  
and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."*

The instructions for Abraham and Sarah sound simple enough:

*“Walk before me, and be blame-less.”*

What does it mean to “walk with God”, “walk before God?”

Are we included in this covenant, in spite of our own expectations and desires?

Is God making a promise like this, to us, too? How would we know?

This wasn't the first time God made a covenant with Abram, saying,

“I will bless those who bless you. I will make your descendants as many as there are stars in the sky.”

The things God was saying to Abram really must have tested Abram's imagination.

A “multitude” of descend-ants! How many exactly, is a “multitude”?

“...And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!’” *(Luke 2:13,14)*

It was one thing to be told to pull up stakes (literally) and leave Haran; to set out for a new home, a new future. But it was another thing to have the promise of a Baby, at their age. Sarah laughed at the news. “She was barren, she had no child.” This is the first mention of a barren woman in the scripture, and it starts to cause doubt about the promise, and purpose, of God.

God tells Abraham to go to a new land, and God will bless him with many descendants. These verses are the major turning point of the entire bible; tracing Abraham's family tree for many generations, down to the House of David, and generations later; to Jesus. Though there has always been many theories, and depending on the author of which gospel, concerning Joseph's, and Mary' lineage by marriage or by blood since Mary was his human mother.

Sarah waits for about seventy-seven years before finally having a son. Anyone's faith would be tested. But God has called these two through whom God promises to bless the whole Earth. A baby worth waiting for! They have only one role in God's plan; to be “a blessing for all the families of the ground”

...all human beings are created from the ‘dust of the ground...’ *Gen 2: 7a*

The rest of chapter 17 tells us that the gift of the land is an important part of the promise.... ‘for perpetual holding,’

Michael Williams says God attempted to ‘start over’ with Abraham and Sarah. Before we hear their story, we read the world is a mess. People have separated from each other, scattered all over trying to build their own cultures without God. Their isolation, confusion, and different languages are culminated in the ‘Tower of Babel.’ (*Gen. 11*)

So, God calls Abram, (son of Terah,) and Sarai, to be the new beginning.

Think for a minute about Sarah. Her name Saria/Sarah is mentioned a lot in the Genesis chapters 12 -18:15. As is usually the case, we read about her actions, what she does, but not about how she feels. We read that she ‘dutifully’ followed her husband, as women did. But what was she thinking?

There are many questions. Did she want to go? Was she leaving Her family and friends behind? Did she ever ask, “Where in the world are we going?” And did she take the lead once in a while, to let Abraham rest?...probably not. The scripture describes her as a faithful (and loving) wife, but was she really? One important question to ask is, did she have friends? Other women to talk to, share things with, to talk about what God was asking them to do, to pray with (other than her maids?) Or was she alone?...waiting and praying for seventy seven years for a baby...What does that say about her faith?

But maybe that’s a bit unfair. Maybe she was quite happy. It seemed like she loved her husband (hard to tell love from duty), she wanted to be faithful to him and to God. They had plenty of servants, so her days weren’t too tiring. The picture of her life just isn’t clear enough for me.

Unlike the covenant God made with Noah, there would be no widespread destruction, and God promising there would be an offering of the earth, and its inhabitants a future once again. This covenant will be more focused; it applies to the nations that will descend from these two seniors.

Rev. Kathryn Huey points out that it’s important to remember who, and why, this story was written. Biblical historians believe it was written by several writers, during time of exile in Babylon...which has a meaning of its own. The biblical story has gone from the vastness of creation, light from darkness, land from water, the beginning of human beings...to this story of Abraham and Sarah. Scholars often say the first eleven chapters of Genesis are the prequel to the story of the people of Israel, whose story begins with Abraham and Sarah.

Eliezer Segal says, “A longstanding Jewish tradition sees the story of Abraham as a series of trials, starting with his call to leave his homeland for an unidentified destination, and ending in the command to sacrifice his son.”

Maybe we’re seeing today’s reading as a different kind of trial; if Sarah hadn’t reacted to God’s promise with irrepressible laughter, then they would have failed the test! They would have been declared unworthy bearers of God’s covenant.

The covenant and blessing aren’t just for Israel, though, because God’s plan is, through Israel, all humanity will be restored. But, it has to start somewhere; one man, and one woman, who leave their home and all that is familiar, to answer a call from God.

God calls Abram to “love God completely devoted in unqualified loyalty.” God then changes Abram’s name to ‘Abraham,’ (father of many) and gives him a new life, and a “Wondrous, End-less Future of power and well-being.” Sarai’s name, he changes to ‘Sarah’...meaning Princess.

....about those stars? .....too many to count.  
Anyway, the promise is the thing.

Let us pray,     Almighty God, we listened to these words;  
                          may we take them with us;  
                          reflecting, wondering, praying.  
                          May we take our new name with us.  
                          Amen