

# The Great Family

## Background

Focus: God with the people of God (Genesis 12-15, 24)

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 around Abraham and Sarah believed that there were many gods embedded in nature. 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 of this, but they put their faith in God's promises and found them to be true.

## Material

The basket for The Great Family is on one of the Old Testament shelves.

It contains:

4 wooden figures:

- Abraham
- Sarah
- Isaac
- Rebekah

a small box containing six small stones

2 wooden blocks

2 pieces of blue yarn

You'll also need the desert box.

## 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.*

*Get the story basket from the shelf. Get settled and begin when all are ready.*

## Words

Watch carefully where I go so you will always know where to get the desert box...

... and this lesson.

*Trace the outline of the desert box with your finger.*

This is the desert box. So many wonderful and important things happen in the desert; we need to know what it is like.

*Remove the lid.*

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

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

The desert is 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 when it hits you. People wear many clothes to protect them from the sun and blowing sand. The desert is a dangerous place. People do not go into the desert unless they have to.

*Place the yarn and the two blocks of wood in the sand. Ur 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 semicircle.*

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 ancient and greatest of these cities was called Ur.

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

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

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 thought.

*Stand Abraham and Sarah in the sand by Ur.*

Abram and Sarai were part of that family.

*When you are moving the figures, take your time. Notice how they leave footprints in the sand. This shows their journey.*

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

*Move the figures along the river, marked by the blue yarn, moving from your left to right, to the city of Haran. From the children's point of view, you*

They walked toward Haran with their sheep and their donkeys. 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

*move the figures toward the top of an arc.*

*Move Abraham out away from Haran (toward the children) as you tell about Abram's encounter with the presence of the mystery of God.*

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

*Use three stones to build an altar.*

*Use three stones to build another altar.*

*Leave Abraham and Sarah together at your far right.*

water to drink.

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.

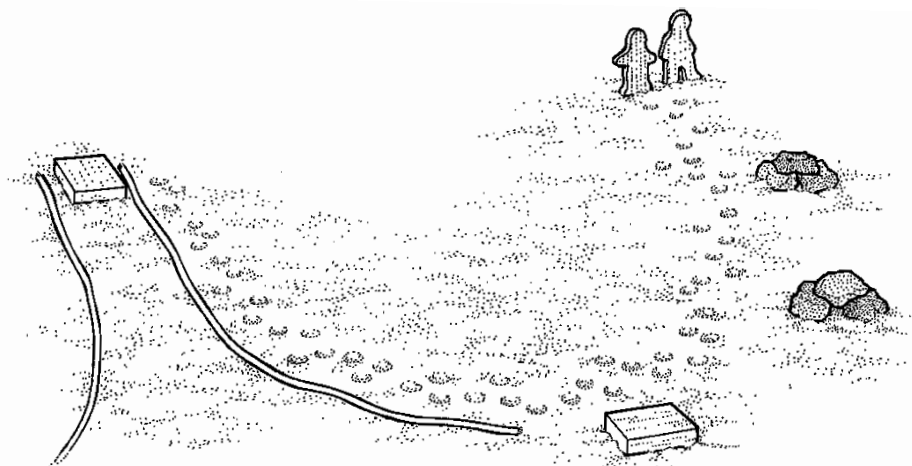
Sometimes Abram would go out to the edge of the desert and look out across the sand and into the sky. Then God came so close to Abram, and Abram came so close to God, that he knew what God wanted him to do. God wanted Abram and Sarai to move on again to another new place.

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. Abram's brother's son Lot also went with them. This time there was no river to show the way or give them water to drink.

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.

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.

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



**ABRAM AND SARAI IN HEBRON (STORYTELLER'S PERSPECTIVE)**

*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 and Sarai was to be called Sarah.

*You don't need to put any figures down for the strangers. Leave them mysterious.*

One day three strangers came out of the desert.

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, and Abraham laughed. Sarah was standing by the tent and heard them. She laughed, too. They were too old.

The three strangers went on their way. Do you know what happened? Abraham and Sarah had a son. They laughed again, so they named the baby "Laughter." In their language the word for "laughter" is "Isaac."

*Pick up Sarah and reverently hold her in your open hand. Turn your hand over and hide her as you touch the place where she was buried, not far from Hebron. Keep her concealed as the story continues.*

When the boy was grown, old Sarah died. She was buried in the cave near the oaks of Mamre.

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

*Move your finger in the air just above the sand back toward Haran as you retrace the original journey.*

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

*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.*

Abraham's helper stopped by a well in the evening. Rebekah offered to give him some water to drink. She then helped him give water to his animals. She was as full of courage as she was kind. Rebekah then invited him home. 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.

*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.*

*"Bury" Abraham near Sarah by holding him in your open hand and turning it over to hide him as you touch the place where he is buried.*

*Scoop up a handful of sand and let it slowly trickle out.*

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

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

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.

Then Isaac and Rebekah had children, and their children had children, and those children had children. This went on for many thousands of thousands of years until your grandmothers and grandfathers had children. Then your mothers and fathers had children.

Now you are part of that great family which has become as many as the stars in the sky and the grains of sand in the desert.

- 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 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?