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Break Through!

The Bible for Young Catholics



Old Testament Leader Guide



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The **Bible** for **Young Catholics**

Old Testament Leader Guide

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The publishing team included Gloria Shahin, editorial director; and Joanna Dailey, editor. Prepress and manufacturing coordinated by the production departments of Saint Mary's Press.

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Printed in the United States of America

4352

ISBN 978-1-59982-220-4, paper
ISBN 978-1-59982-215-0, e-book

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Introduction

Thank you for picking up this exciting Bible and its *Old Testament Leader Guide*! All five resources—the Bible, the leader guides (*Old Testament Leader Guide* and *New Testament Leader Guide*), and their accompanying student activity booklets—work together to help familiarize younger adolescents with the people of salvation history in both the Old and the New Testament and to help younger adolescents see themselves as a vital part of the Church’s history.

The Bible, the leader guides, and the activity booklets do not depend on one another; they are interdependent, and the use of each strengthens the positive characteristics of the others. (The leader guides and the activity booklets do require the use of a Bible, however, even if it is not *Breakthrough!*)

The Revised *Breakthrough!* Ancillaries

The recently revised *Breakthrough!* is a Bible with four revised companions: two for the teacher’s use (*Old Testament Leader Guide* and *New Testament Leader Guide*) and two for the student’s use (*Old Testament Activity Booklet* and *New Testament Activity Booklet*). The leader guides and activity booklets of this revision are clearly separated into the two main divisions of the Bible: the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The Bible

Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics will be your strongest resource for introducing young adolescents to Scripture. Every element of this Bible was carefully chosen or created to appeal to young people who are ten to thirteen years old. This starts with the choice of using the Catholic Edition of the *Good News Translation* for the Bible text. The *Good News Translation* was created with a vocabulary and reading level appropriate to the younger student. If you have been using translations with a more advanced reading level, you will notice an immediate difference in your student’s ability to read and understand the Bible text.

Additionally, *Breakthrough!* provides many other tools to help young people feel more comfortable and familiar with the Bible. Forty illustrated color inserts feature “interviews” with the biblical characters. These character interviews quickly identify the important events in the biblical character’s story and the role this person played in salvation history. A four-page salvation history time line at the beginning of the Bible shows how these biblical characters fit into God’s big picture of salvation history.

Another key feature is the inclusion of Pray It!, Study It!, Live It!, and Catholic Connection articles. These articles appear alongside the biblical text in forty biblical books. The forty books were chosen to provide the best overview of salvation history and a representative sampling of the different types of books found in the Bible. For these forty books, the articles provide a commentary to help young readers better understand and apply the biblical message to their life. Pray It! articles give the young reader ideas about applying the spirituality of the Bible. Study It! articles give them background so that they better understand the context of the passages they are reading. Live It! articles challenge the young people to live biblical values and teachings. Catholic Connection articles show where important Catholic teachings are found in the Bible.

These are some of the other features you will find in *Breakthrough!*:

- lists to help find important Bible stories, prayers, and teachings
- a glossary with definitions of more than 180 important Bible words
- nine color maps
- a list of important Catholic prayers
- a list of important Catholic beliefs

Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics: Old Testament Leader Guide

Although the Bible and activity booklets are for the young people, this leader guide is for you! Six professionals from around the United States coauthored this manual to help Catholic middle school teachers, parish catechists, and youth ministers explore the Bible with young people.

This leader guide gives suggestions about ways you can introduce and explore key figures in salvation history. Studying the Bible by learning the stories of its main Old Testament figures interests young adolescents because they are very curious about people—themselves, their friends, their families, people they meet. People are endlessly fascinating. This holds true for Bible people as well.

Depending on their level of biblical literacy, your students will be continuing or beginning a life journey with figures from the Old Testament who will inspire, challenge, and puzzle them, yet ultimately be very important in their own spiritual lives. Given the significance of these Old Testament people for all Catholics, it is important to talk about them with young adolescents. As they grow older, they will encounter the familiar stories anew, bringing to the stories the issues and questions that are foremost on their minds and hearts at that time. Although few of the biblical characters that the students will encounter are their own age, the stories provide many opportunities for the young people to make connections to their own life experiences.

Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics: Old Testament Activity Booklet

You will notice that the activity booklet also includes an introduction to the New Testament, with activity pages familiarizing the students with the broad scope of salvation history and the links between God's Revelation in the Old Testament and his completion of Revelation, through Jesus Christ, in the New Testament. For ease of use, the leader guides and activity booklets are separated into Old and New Testament sections, but it is important for the students to know that the Old and New Testaments are intimately connected. God's Revelation in the Old Testament prepares us for his Revelation in the New Testament.

For students of this age, it seemed especially appropriate to provide some puzzles and worksheets to assist their reading and reflecting on the Bible. After presenting several pages of introductory exercises in biblical literacy, the activity booklet goes on to provide a puzzle, some background, suggested readings, suggested articles, and reflection questions for the same biblical people who are covered in the leader guide. The activity booklet provides independent study opportunities for the student that can complement the work that the teacher or catechist does in the classroom. It will also be helpful for parents who are homeschooling to use in conjunction with the Bible. We envision that some parents may want their child to have a copy of this activity booklet and will see its potential to provide some guidance to the young reader.

The puzzle about each character requires a familiarity with the character's story. Most young people will need to read or reread the passages about the figure. Up to six Scripture passages are provided per character. The article references can also help the young person get to know the character. The background in the workbook shows the reader where each Old Testament character "fits" in salvation history. Finally, the reflection questions invite the young person to consider how this biblical person's story sheds light on her or his own spiritual journey and life experience. After completing the activities presented for each biblical person, you might like to use the puzzle as a diagnostic, or check of understanding.

Even if you do not choose to purchase activity booklets for all your students, you may find the booklet appropriate for students who have a weaker background in Scripture or who need to spend more time with the Old Testament to understand the stories.

About the Term *Young Adolescent*

You will notice that the *Breakthrough!* materials use the term *young adolescent* throughout. This term describes young people of the ages that would normally put them in grades five through eight. We intentionally use a term that describes their age rather than their status in school, which is what happens when we use “junior high” or “middle school.” We all know that, depending on what part of the country, state, or county you find yourself, even these terms are fluid!

We also use the terms *young people* and *students* to refer to this same group. Even though some activities may lend themselves more readily to the classroom of a Catholic grade school, all the authors wrote with both school and parish needs in mind.

Looking More Closely at This Leader Guide

This leader guide has many features that will help you in your ministry with young adolescents. Neither the Bible nor the leader guide provides a comprehensive curriculum for study of the Old Testament, but you will find that this guide will supplement the curriculum you are currently using.

After this introduction, the text of this guide consists of thirty-five chapters covering biblical characters from the Old Testament as well as four appendixes. You can use these chapters in order or pick and choose as you need. In addition to inviting the students to learn the stories of the people in the Old Testament, the material in the chapter enables you to make connections between your young people and the biblical characters. The greatest hope of this guide is that these young men and women will get to know Sarah, Samson, Isaiah, and Amos as people—people who were chosen to play a special role in the development of our faith tradition, people through whom God spoke, people whom God called, and people who sometimes responded more completely than at other times to their own vocations. If our young people can come to see the connections between their own lives today and the lives of these Old Testament figures, they have a much greater chance of being able to recognize and meet God in ways that these characters do.

The next sections will explain the rationale behind the different parts of these chapters.

Preparing to Teach

Each chapter begins with a section called “Preparing to Teach.” There is quite a bit of “raw material” in the first half of the chapter, such as Scripture citations, lists of articles found in *Breakthrough! The Bible for*

Young Catholics, connections between biblical figures and young people, and Bible quotations about God's presence. These tools are present to make it easier for you to reflect about your own students and their needs and questions and then to move quickly into a session plan that will bring the Bible and its people alive for your young people.

Instead of going through chapters sequentially, we hope that you will make the decisions about what and how to teach based on a combination of factors, such as what materials you have and what you think your own students need. The following parts of each chapter should help you to tailor your teaching to the needs of your students.

A Note on “Dark” Passages of the Bible

As you and your students become more familiar with the Bible, you will no doubt notice that some biblical accounts include what Pope Benedict XVI calls the “dark” passages of the Bible—the stories of cheating and trickery, sin, violence, murder, and war, which are so much a part of human history. In his apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini (The Word of the Lord)*, Pope Benedict reminds us that God's teaching of morality and justice is progressive. Eventually, through the prophets, both justice and mercy are proclaimed as ideal human goals, and, in Jesus Christ, morality is elevated to love of God, neighbor, and even enemies. These biblical stories of human sin remind us that God knows us at our worst, loves us, and wishes to save us. Even if these kinds of stories are not included in an assignment, middle-school students may well read them and ask questions about them. In that case, an explanation of God's progressive Revelation, and even God's ability to bring about good despite human weakness and sin, is appropriate. In any case, it is important to read all unfamiliar passages of the Bible carefully before assigning them to the students.

Overview

The overview consists of several paragraphs that introduce the biblical character and highlight ways that this biblical character *uniquely* connects with young adolescents. Though several of the judges are skilled in battle, for example, the story of Gideon shows how God helps the people of Israel resist the bullying nature of their enemies. The prophets share similar messages, but it is Ezekiel who may appeal to more young people because his messages are so image-heavy and fantastic, more like the media the young people know.

This Chapter at a Glance

This short section gives you the names of the activities that are in the second half of the chapter. You will see here that each chapter provides at least one activity that helps the young people to learn the story of the

biblical character and one that helps them to probe more deeply into the character's personality.

Scripture Passages Related to the Biblical Character

This section lists no more than twelve key passages about the character under study. Asterisks identify those passages that are most important to read. This section should make it easier for you to find relevant stories and to assign reading to your group.



Articles from *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics* Related to the Biblical Character

This section lists up to twelve articles from *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics* that are relevant to your study. The first article is almost always a reference to the interview with the character that can be found in the Bible. The Bible also features Pray It!, Study It!, and Live It! articles so that the students can learn more about aspects of the Bible, develop their prayer life, and hear challenges to live differently. These three types of articles as well as the Catholic Connections can be springboards for conversation with your students. When you see the *Breakthrough!* icon in the margin, you will know that you will be directed to an aspect of *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics*.

The Biblical Character and Young Adolescents Today

This section suggests several connections between the biblical character and the young people with whom you are working. There may be more connections in a chapter than you can cover with your students. This section invites you to discern how you think God may want to speak through this biblical character to your specific group of young people today. Perhaps one or two of the connections will intuitively or obviously seem more suitable for your group now. But next year, with another group, another one or two may emerge as important.

Highlighting God's Presence

In this section, the authors have picked Bible quotations that describe God's action in the stories being studied about a specific person. It is our hope that students will begin to listen for and look for God in the same ways that God reveals himself in the Old Testament. Though a biblical character's story is interesting in and of itself, ultimately Scripture brings us to God. The hope is that the passages in the guide will provide you with an additional resource to bring your students to a new awareness of God.

Activities

The second half of each chapter is devoted to class or session activities. The activities section provides a choice of activities to present as you explore an Old Testament character with the young people. You will notice that the authors of this guide believe that it is possible to learn about Scripture and find God in Scripture while having an enjoyable, meaningful, and creative time as well!

The Appendixes: Making It Easier for You

This leader guide has four appendixes.

Appendix 1: Additional Resources

This appendix lists other resources that could provide background for you or that could lead you to other materials for sharing Scripture with the students. This appendix also provides you with music and video ideas.

Appendix 2: Tools for Teaching

This appendix contains some of the best and most creative activities that our authors wrote for this manual. These activities can be used with different biblical people. Look in this appendix if the recommended activity does not seem appropriate for your group or if you have had success with one of the approaches before!

Appendix 3: Answer Key for *Breakthrough! The Bible for Young Catholics: Old Testament Activity Booklet* Puzzles

This appendix contains the answers for the puzzles that appear in the revised *Old Testament Activity Booklet*. This appendix does not directly connect with any materials in this leader guide. You may choose to use the activity booklet to give the students additional opportunities to learn about Old Testament biblical figures and their stories. This booklet is available from Saint Mary's Press, at www.smp.org.

Appendix 4: Index of Activities by Topic

Because this guide focuses on bringing Scripture and the lives of students together, many topics covered relate to the students' everyday lives, such as families, friendships, self-esteem, and so on. The activities are gathered and sorted under headings. In addition, activities that relate to various Sacraments, feast days, or themes are also listed accordingly.

Journeying with the Young People

The authors of this guide wrote the activities in this leader guide with the faces of young people in mind whom they have known and loved over the years. Some aspects of the activities in this leader guide will work for your group, while others may not. This guide is an invitation to trust your own ability to discern the needs of your group of young people. The activities in the guide are strong and workable because the authors used these very activities in the classroom and during parish gatherings.

May God give you the grace to see the everyday opportunities to teach young people about Scripture and the people of the Old Testament, who, in response to God's gracious love, lived the salvation history that we hope to continue in our own time and place.

Adam and Eve

Preparing to Teach

Overview

Reading the story of Adam and Eve is a wonderful way for the students to examine how sin affects our relationships with God and other people. Young adolescents are very conscious of their connections to others and painfully aware when relationships are broken. When we follow God's will, we become closer to him and to one another, but when we sin, we separate ourselves from God and those we love. God continues his relationship with Adam and Eve after their sin, which is reassuring when students feel that they have done something wrong.

The Adam and Eve story also offers young people an opportunity to examine the place of rules in their lives and to emphasize the importance of listening to God. On the verge of greater independence, students struggle with temptation, which often clothes itself as the suggestion to resist limits set by parents or school. Adam and Eve's story teaches us that limits exist for our well-being.

A good way to prepare for the study of Adam and Eve is by reading the article "Uncovering the Truth" (Genesis 2:5–25) in *Breakthrough!* The Catholic understanding of Scripture sometimes conflicts with the literal interpretations of some other Christian denominations, especially in regard to the Creation stories. Catholics see them as symbolic stories that convey spiritual and moral truths. Knowing that this story falls into this literary genre still allows us to see the figures of Adam and Eve as our predecessors who enjoyed a loving relationship with God before sin entered the world.

This Chapter at a Glance

Activities

- Who Is Guilty?
 - Hiding Who We Are
 - Who Hates Rules?
-
-

Scripture Passages Related to Adam and Eve

- Genesis 2:4–17 (God creates a man and a place for him to live)*
- Genesis 2:18–20 (God creates the animals)*
- Genesis 2:21–25 (God creates a woman)*
- Genesis 3:1–6 (Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit)*
- Genesis 3:7–13 (Adam and Eve hide from God)*
- Genesis 3:14–24 (God punishes and banishes Adam and Eve)*
- Genesis 4:1–2 (Adam and Eve have two sons, Cain and Abel)
- Genesis 4:25 (Adam and Eve have another son, Seth)
- Genesis 5:1–32 (Adam’s other descendants)

Asterisk (*) signifies key passages to cover.



Articles from *Breakthrough!* Related to Adam and Eve

- *Breakthrough!* Interview with Adam and Eve
- Uncovering the Truth (Genesis 2:5–25)
- Original Sin (Genesis 3:1–24)

Adam and Eve and Young Adolescents Today

- Companionship is extremely important to young adolescents. God desires the companionship of human beings because he created them to walk and talk with him.
- God banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. For adolescents, companionship is so important that being left out is a difficult and feared experience.
- Young adolescents often struggle with the restrictions placed on them, as did Adam and Eve. As young adolescents struggle toward independence and responsibility, they still need rules and guidelines to assist them.
- The serpent is the master of temptation. Adam and Eve’s relationship with the serpent is a wonderful model for the perils of peer pressure.
- Like Adam and Eve who try to hide from God, young adolescents often attempt to cover up their wrongdoings instead of accepting responsibility. Like Adam, they often look for someone else to whom they can point and say, “She, or he, made me do it!”
- Women’s equality is still an issue in our society, and young adolescents are aware of this. In the past, this story has been used to justify the inferior status of women, so it becomes especially

important to counter this misguided notion. Many biblical scholars suggest that Eve's creation from Adam's rib (i.e., his side) is symbolic of Eve's equality with Adam. A man and a woman are destined to walk side-by-side as equal partners.

Highlighting God's Presence

Then the LORD God took some soil from the ground and formed a man out of it; he breathed life-giving breath into his nostrils and the man began to live. (Genesis 2:7)

That evening they heard the LORD God walking in the garden. (Genesis 3:8)

Activities

Who Is Guilty?

In this activity, the students hold a trial in which the prosecutor accuses the characters in the Genesis story of bringing about the fall of humanity.

Preparation

❑ Each student needs a Bible, paper, and a pen.

1. Read Genesis, chapters 2 and 3, aloud. Explain that the objective of this activity will be to come to a verdict, trial-style, regarding who is to blame for the fall of humanity.
2. Make sure that everyone is familiar with the roles that different people play in the court. Pick one student to be the prosecutor, and divide the rest of the class into four groups named "The Serpent," "Adam," "Eve," and "The Jury."
3. Tell the students to read carefully Genesis, chapters 2 and 3. Tell the first three groups to come up with a defense for their character. (Each defendant should also try to suggest to the jury that another character is the guilty party.) The jury and prosecutor review the "evidence" in Genesis, chapters 2 and 3.
4. Take a moment to direct the students to avoid offensive sexist remarks. Because this passage has been used to oppress women, it is important that they not misrepresent this message of the story. Emphasize the need to respect all of God's creation.

5. Instruct each group to choose one person to represent the group and to act as its character. The prosecutor will call the representatives and give them an opportunity to tell their side of the story. The prosecutor will then have a brief opportunity to cross-examine them. Repeat the process with the next two witnesses. The fourth group, the jury, will listen to each testimony and decide on a verdict.
6. Allow the jury a few minutes to deliberate and announce its verdict.
7. Discuss the process with the students. In this story, each character has the freedom to obey or disobey God's Law. No one is completely innocent. Below are some suggested discussion starters.
 - Do any of the characters ever lie to each other?
 - What are the motives for each character?
 - What are the immediate consequences for eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and bad?
 - How does each character have a responsibility to the others? How do they ignore their responsibilities?
 - Where do we see freedom misused in our everyday lives?

Hiding Who We Are


The students will examine how they hide their true selves in an attempt to be someone that they feel others will accept.

Preparation

- ☐ Have a copy of the handout "The Fig Leaves of My Life" (Document #: TX002876) for each student.
- ☐ Make sure each student has scissors and pens, pencils, or markers.
- ☐ Provide magazines for cutting out pictures (optional).

This activity is appropriate if you have already established a safe environment in which students are comfortable sharing difficult emotions and experiences, and if they have a clear understanding of how to respond appropriately (and how not to respond). If not, a more depersonalized and safe version could be done by focusing on what young adolescents in general do to hide themselves.

1. Read Genesis 3:1–10 aloud with the class. Make the following points, using these or similar words:
 - ▶ In this story, God makes humans who are completely happy. But the downfall comes when humans want to become something that they are not.

- ▶ Many of us are very much like Adam and Eve. Too often we are not happy with being who God made us to be. We think, “I’m too short,” or “I’m too fat,” or “I’m not a good basketball player,” and so on.
 - ▶ Like Adam and Eve, we are ashamed to be seen without protection, and we try to hide our true selves. We might try to hang out with the cool crowd, or perhaps we try to participate in activities that we don’t really like. Sometimes we avoid things that we really love in order to fit in. Like Adam and Eve’s fig leaves, we try to cover up.
2. Distribute the handout “The Fig Leaves of My Life” (Document #: TX002876). Have the students cut out their fig leaves and then draw or write the ways they hide who they really are. (If you brought magazines, the students could also go through them and cut out and paste images that express their “fig leaves.”) 
 3. Ask for volunteers to explain parts of their fig leaf. Below are some discussion starters.
 - Why do people choose “fig leaves” over letting others see who they really are?
 - Can you tell the difference when people are really being themselves versus covering up?
 - What gives people the strength to be themselves?
 - Are the temptations that Adam and Eve encounter similar to or different from the temptations we have today?

Who Hates Rules?

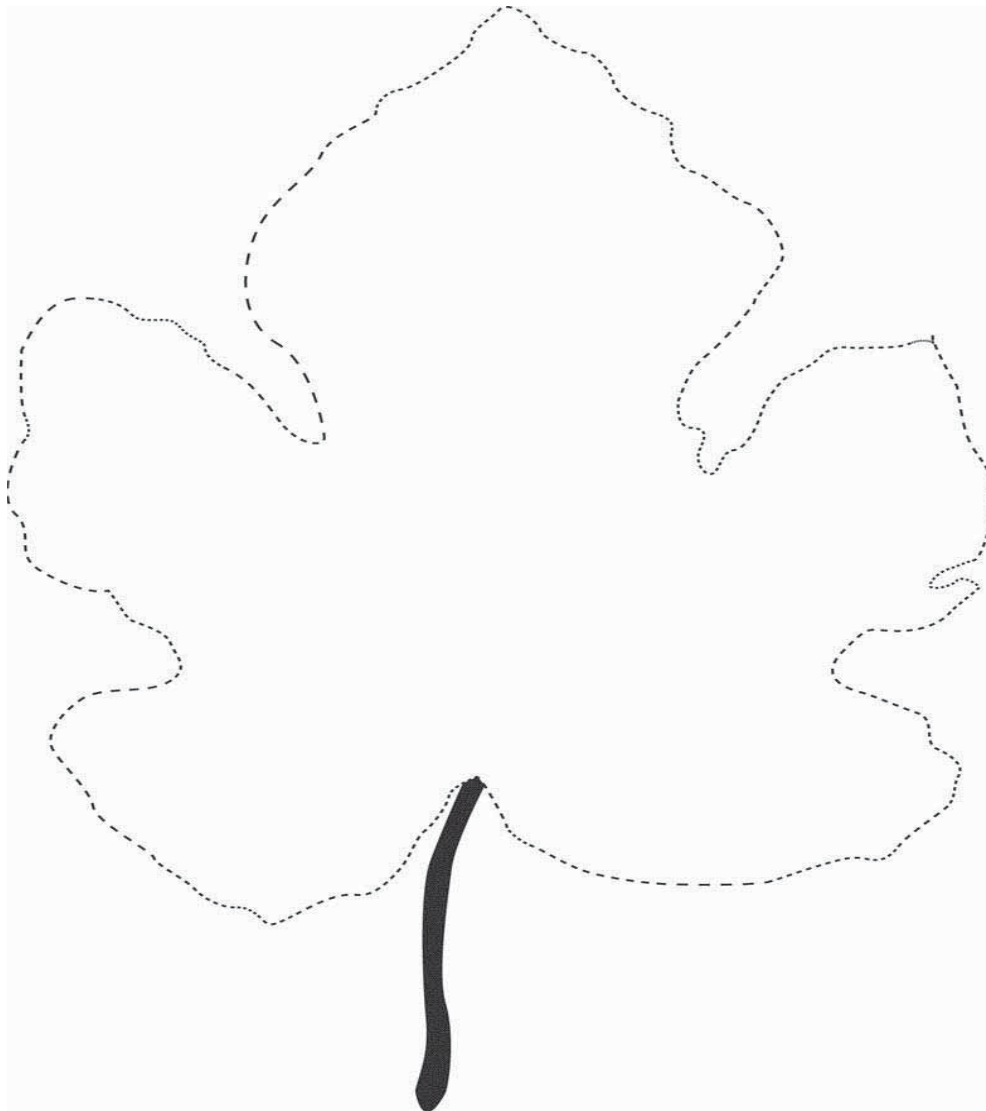
The students will engage in an activity without rules to learn their importance.

1. Have the students play a game of basketball, soccer, or some other team sport, except tell them that there are no rules. (Be sure to maintain a safe environment.) Another option would be to get a few volunteers to play checkers with you while the class looks on, but again, there are no rules!
2. After a short period of time, the students will surely start to become a little frustrated, angry, or bored. When this becomes obvious, call the game to an end.
3. Process the experience with the class. Use the following questions as discussion starters:
 - How did you feel when you first heard that the game would have no rules? (Probably, excited.) So what happened?

- Did you become frustrated or angry or bored? Why?
 - When you play a game, what do rules provide?
4. Read Genesis 2:15–17 aloud to the group. Present these thoughts, using these or similar words:
 - ▶ God gives human beings this rule because he cares for Adam, much as a parent gives a child the rule, “Look both ways before you cross the street.” This direction given or limitation imposed is done out of love and concern.
 5. Read Genesis 3:1–6. Ask:
 - ▶ What reason does the serpent give for God not allowing them to eat from that tree? (The serpent says that God doesn’t want them to be powerful like he is.)Continue with the following questions:
 - ▶ Why did Adam and Eve believe the serpent?
 - ▶ How can young people be like Adam and Eve in their decision making?
 6. Direct each student to write a list of rules they have been taught to follow and how the rules benefit people when they are followed. This could also be done in groups.

The Fig Leaves of My Life

Cut out this fig leaf and then draw or write the ways that you hide who you really are.



Noah

Preparing to Teach

Overview

The story of Noah and the Ark is a story rich in symbolism. In this story, we find the following themes: the struggle between good and evil; the ultimate triumph of goodness over evil; the promise of God to be faithful to his people, a promise symbolized by the rainbow (this promise is called the Noahic Covenant); and the goodness of all creation, a creation worth saving.

All of these themes are of concern to young adolescents. How will they face their choices between good and evil? Can they count on God to help them? What hopes, or rainbows, do they see in their lives that encourage them to keep to the right path, no matter how difficult? What is their attitude toward God's creation, including his creation of each one of them as unique and valued?

In addition to its relation to life issues, the story of Noah has been seen by the early Church Fathers and theologians as a symbol of Baptism. The Ark itself is seen as a symbol of the Church. Young adolescents can grasp these ideas if these symbols are explained:

- The story of Noah as a symbol of Baptism: Just as Noah and his family, faithful to God, were saved in the midst of the waters of the Flood, so we, followers of Jesus, the Son of God, are saved in the midst of the waters of Baptism (Peter 3:20–22).
- The symbolism of the rainbow: The rainbow as a sign of God's covenant, and of his ultimate goodness and love, is a beautiful symbol that can be readily understood.
- The dove: The dove in the story of Noah, carrying an olive branch as a sign that the waters had receded, is seen as a symbol of peace. It is also a sign of the Holy Spirit. Just as the Spirit of God hovered over the waters of the first creation (Genesis 1:2), so the Spirit of God is present at this "new creation."
- Noah's Ark: The Ark itself is a symbol of the Church, the vessel in which God gathers us so that we might weather life's storms together in Christ and be brought to safe harbor in him.

This Chapter at a Glance

Noah

Activities

- Building an Ark
- The Church Is Our Ark

Scripture Passages Related to Noah

- Genesis 6:5–8 (The Lord is pleased with Noah)
- Genesis 6:9–22 (God’s request and Noah’s obedience)*
- Genesis 7:1–5 (God’s request regarding animals)
- Genesis 7:6–16 (Noah’s family and the animals enter the Ark)*
- Genesis 7:17–24 (The Flood)
- Genesis 8:1–12 (The end of the Flood)
- Genesis 8:13–19 (Noah’s family and the animals leave the Ark)*
- Genesis 8:20–22 (Noah’s sacrifice to God)
- Genesis 9:1–17 (God’s Covenant with Noah)*
- Matthew 24:37 (Jesus compares his coming at the end of time to the days of Noah)
- 1 Peter 3:20–22 (The story of Noah is a prefiguring of Baptism)

Asterisk (*) signifies key passages to cover.

Articles from *Breakthrough!* Related to Noah

- God’s Bright Spot (Genesis 6:1–12)
- Got Gratitude? (Genesis 8:20–22)
- A Promising Sign (Genesis 9:8–17)



Noah and Young Adolescents Today

- Young adolescents are concerned about fairness to others and about being treated fairly themselves. The story of Noah assures us that God is ultimately fair. The wicked will bear the consequences of their behavior, and those who are trying to follow the right path will be saved. We do not always see this played out in this world, but we can be certain that God has prepared wonderful things for those who love him. (See 1 Corinthians 2:9.)

- Young adolescents today are concerned for the environment, including the preservation of wild natural spaces and endangered animal species. The story of Noah provides an encouragement and confirmation that God cares about the world he created. Caring for God's world is not only a service to ourselves and to future generations but also an act of love for God.
- Young people today need support in living their faith. The story of Noah helps them to understand that they can go through the storms of life if they have this support not only among family and friends but also from others in the Church.

Highlighting God's Presence

God said to Noah and his sons: "I am now making my covenant with you and with your descendants, and with all living beings—all birds and all animals—everything that came out of the boat with you. With these words I make my covenant with you: I promise that never again will all living beings be destroyed by a flood; never again will a flood destroy the earth. As a sign of this everlasting covenant which I am making with you and with all living beings, I am putting my bow in the clouds. It will be the sign of my covenant with the world. Whenever I cover the sky with clouds and the rainbow appears, I will remember my promise to you and to all the animals that a flood will never again destroy all living beings. When the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between me and all living beings on earth. That is the sign of the promise which I am making to all living beings." (Genesis 9:8–17)

Activities

Building an Ark

In this activity, the students make a replica of Noah's Ark, including the animals.

Preparation

1. Provide each student with a pair of scissors. You may need a knife or box cutter to cut cardboard at the students' request. Gather materials such as cardboard boxes (shoeboxes as well as larger boxes) and clear packing tape. Have clay or another malleable material ready to use to form the animals. You may also want to supply various colors of poster paint, if the students will be painting their Arks and animals.

2. Arrange the students in groups of three or four. (If you prefer to have the students work individually, have them make their Arks with shoeboxes and their animals correspondingly smaller.) Explain to the students that they will make a replica of Noah's Ark. Assure them that they need not concern themselves with the measurements in the Bible. They may make the Ark of a size comfortable for them and large enough to accommodate the animals they will be making. You may want to download a few pictures of Noah's Ark from the Internet so that the students can see other portrayals of Noah's Ark.
3. Distribute the art supplies and have the students begin working.
4. Allow time at the end of the session for the students to "tour" the work of their classmates. You may want to arrange for the Arks to be displayed in the parish center or another appropriate place.

The Church Is Our Ark

In this activity, the students experience the difficulty of being "the lone Christian" and the grace and gift of gathering in the Church as our Ark.

Preparation

1. Divide the class into groups of five or six. Appoint one student in each group as "the lone Christian." Appoint the others in the group as "Commandment breakers." Explain that we are just "pretending" for this exercise, and that we are all, of course, followers of Christ and none of us wants to be a Commandment breaker!
2. Explain that, for about 10 minutes, the Commandment breakers are to try to convince the lone Christian that going against the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, and Jesus' command to love God and others is the best way to live. In return, the lone Christian will refute those claims and defend the Christian way of life as a life of love and true happiness.
3. After about 10 minutes, call the entire group together and say:
 - Let us all gather together in the Ark. The Ark is a symbol of the Church, and we are called to gather together in the Church to support one another.

(You may want to designate a specific area of the room as "The Ark" and set it off with a sign or an arrangement of chairs.) When the entire group is gathered, call the lone Christians to the front as a group. Invite these students to share how they felt about being the only one in their group to defend the Christian way of life. Open up this discussion to the entire class, asking for instances of feeling "alone" in living the Catholic faith.

4. Explain again that the Church is our Ark. We are never alone in living our faith because we are one in the Body of Christ. We go through the storms of life together! Gathering on Sunday for the Eucharist is one way to be strengthened in our faith. But, as we have seen, living our faith is harder to do when others do not share our beliefs and values. At these times, we must be strong, remember our Catholic religious education, share our faith with others, and make sure that we choose friends who support us in our faith.

Abraham

Preparing to Teach

Overview

Young adolescents can learn much about God’s love for them and the power of faith through the study of Abraham. Like most young people, Abraham is an ordinary person whom God calls to extraordinary faith. First, God calls Abraham to move his family. This is the kind of transition that young people know from moving into middle school or junior high, or from family moves and transitions.

Then God calls Abraham into a covenant relationship that requires something of both God and Abraham. Young people are very interested in relationships and the give-and-take required for those relationships. From the stories of Abraham, they can see that a good relationship requires that each party keep its commitments. They also see that even if their friends or family let them down, their God never will.

Finally, God calls Abraham to wait. Young people wait for rides, for the end of the school day, for vacation, for a friend to call. The stories about Abraham teach us that there is waiting and then there is “waiting in faith.” But luckily for all of us, God gives us many chances to be faithful. The students can also see that God rewards Abraham’s faith—and our own.

This Chapter at a Glance

Activities

- Getting to the Promised Land
- Moving On in Faith
- Covenants and Promises: Keeping Our Word

Scripture Passages Related to Abraham

- Genesis 11:27–32 (Abram’s family of origin)
- Genesis 12:1–9 (God calls Abram to leave Ur)*
- Genesis 14:17–24 (Melchizedek meets Abram)
- Genesis 15:1–21 (God makes a Covenant with Abram)*

Abraham

- Genesis 16:1–16 (Hagar gives birth to Ishmael)
- Genesis 17:1–8, 15–16 (God changes Abram’s and Sarai’s names)*
- Genesis 17:9–13 (God asks for circumcision as a sign of the Covenant)*
- Genesis 18:1–15 (God promises to send Sarah and Abraham a son)
- Genesis 21:1–8 (The birth of Isaac)*
- Genesis 21:9–21 (Abraham sends Hagar out to the desert)
- Genesis 22:1–19 (God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac)*
- Genesis 23: 1–19 (The burial of Sarah)
- Genesis 25:7–11 (The burial of Abraham)

Asterisk (*) signifies key passages to cover.



Articles from *Breakthrough!* Related to Abraham

- *Breakthrough!* Interview with Abraham
- From Story to History (Genesis 11:10–32)
- An Act of Faith (Genesis 12:1–9)
- Priest of the Most High God (Genesis 14:17–20)
- Fear and Faith (Genesis 15:1–15)
- What’s in a Name? (Genesis 17:1–22)
- Surprises from God (Genesis 18:1–15)
- Don’t Look Back (Genesis 19:1–29)
- The Ultimate Sacrifice (Genesis 22:1–19)

Abraham and Young Adolescents Today

- God calls Abram and Sarai to move away from their familiar lives to a new territory so as to grow in their relationship with him; the young adolescent is in the midst of a transition from childhood to adolescence and can identify with the excitement and nervousness Abram and Sarai probably experienced in their move to Canaan.
- Several elements mark the faith Abram has in God: it involves personal trust, risk, an ongoing process, and times of darkness or doubt. Young people can be shown how to compare their own faith experience of God with these elements of Abram and Sarai’s faith.
- Abram shows hospitality to strangers as a normal part of his family life; the young adolescent can recognize the importance of hospitality in the family home.

Highlighting God's Presence

The LORD said to Abram: "Leave your country, your relatives, and your father's home, and go to a land that I am going to show you. I will give you many descendants, and they will become a great nation." (Genesis 12:1–2)

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am the Almighty God. Obey me and always do what is right. I will make my covenant with you and give you many descendants. . . .

"I will keep my promise to you and to your descendants in future generations as an everlasting covenant. I will be your God and the God of your descendants. I will give to you and to your descendants this land in which you are now a foreigner." (Genesis 17:1–2,7–8)

The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time, "I make a vow by my own name—the LORD is speaking—that I will richly bless you. Because you did this and did not keep back your only son from me, I promise that I will give you as many descendants as there are stars in the sky or grains of sand along the seashore. Your descendants will conquer their enemies. All the nations will ask me to bless them as I have your descendants—all because you obeyed my command." (Genesis 22:15–18)

Activities

Getting to the Promised Land

In this activity, the students review the stories about Abraham while playing a short game that helps them to review the geography of the region.

Preparation

- ☐ Make enough copies of the handout "Traveling with Abraham" (Document #: TX002877) so that you can give one to each small group of four.
- ☐ Have a penny, a nickel, a dime, and a quarter, ideally, and markers available for each game group.
- ☐ Provide each group with twenty-four index cards, four pens, and a copy of the readings from "Scripture Passages Related to Abraham."
- ☐ Provide a Bible for each young person.
- ☐ Assemble prizes if desired. Suggestions are listed after step 4.

Abraham



1. Divide the class into groups of four. Have each young person take turns reading aloud the Bible passages that pertain to Abram or Abraham.
2. Give each group a set of twenty-four index cards and four pens. Instruct the students to each take six cards and a pen and then to write a question about Abraham's story and its answer on the front of each card. (An example might be the following: *Question:* From what city do Abram and Sarai leave? *Answer:* Ur)
3. When all of the students have made their six cards, collect each group's set of cards. Distribute the handout "Traveling with Abraham" (Document #: TX002877), four coins, and markers to each group. Also give each group a set of index card questions that another group created.
4. Provide the students with these instructions:
 - ▶ Have the oldest person at the table start. The person to his or her left takes an index card and reads the question. (Play then proceeds to the left with the next player reading the next question.) If a player answers the question correctly, he or she flips the coin. "Heads" means that the student moves one space, and "tails" means that he or she moves two spaces. A missed answer leaves the student on the same space. Arriving on the Haran spot gives the player a two-space bonus move.

For prizes, consider offering some biblical food: grapes, figs, pita bread, olives, or honey as well as some contemporary refreshments.

Moving On in Faith

In this activity, the students explore through skits Abram and Sarai's decision to move away from home.

Preparation

- ❑ Each student needs a Bible, paper, and a pen.
1. Introduce this activity by suggesting that moving, whether to a new house, school, or soccer team, can be intense. The letting go of the known for the unknown can be exciting as well as unsettling. Discuss with the students their experiences of moving. Ask these questions:
 - ▶ What was exciting about moving and why?
 - ▶ What was difficult about moving and why?
 - ▶ How did you change as a person as a result of this move?

2. Ask a student to read Genesis 12:1–9 aloud to the group. Then read the article “An Act of Faith” (Genesis 12:1–9) from *Breakthrough!* Invite the students to respond to the following questions:



Abraham

- ▶ Abram and Sarai, being well-established in Ur with friends and family, must have found it difficult to leave for Canaan. So, why did they go? (Because God promised them many descendants and a homeland.)
- ▶ What did having many descendants mean to them? (In the ancient world, people believed that they lived on through their descendants' memory of them. Thus, when God promises Abram and Sarai many descendants, the promise implies a certain immortality for them.)
- ▶ What does the promise of a homeland mean to Abram and Sarai? (The promise of a homeland means that this “new people” would be associated with a place in a distinct way.)

3. Divide the class into several small groups. Ask each group to create a skit that shows Abram and Sarai explaining to family and friends why they are moving. Suggest that they might want to include dialogue about what Abram's God is like, what promises he has made to them, and how he promises to be faithful.
4. After enjoying the skits, highlight the similarities and differences between them. Have the students privately reflect on whether they have ever had to make changes in their lives that were hard for other people to understand. Ask them to consider what they might learn from Abram and Sarai's move. Ask the students to reflect on ways they could invite God into the next move they make.

Covenants and Promises: Keeping Our Word

In this activity, the students explore the nature of covenants, using a beanbag toss as a symbolic tool.

Preparation

- ❑ Each student needs a Bible, paper, and a pen.
 - ❑ Bring beanbags to class, one for every two students.
1. Introduce this activity by explaining that God's concern for humanity reaches new heights through Abram and Sarai's lives. God makes a covenant with them and their descendants. Read Genesis 15:7–21 aloud to the class. Ask the students to share what they know of covenants and how they are made. Provide them with the following information:

- A covenant is an unconditional promise of faithfulness. Covenants are made through rituals that are public in some way. The ritual that Abram and God performed was used by the people of the Middle East to signify complete fidelity, even if it meant giving up one's own life if it was broken.

2. Move the discussion of covenant into the present day. Ask the students where they see covenant-type relationships being forged today. (Possibilities include marriage, vowed religious life, swearing on a Bible in court, the oath of office the president takes, and so on) Ask, What symbols or gestures accompany these covenant events?

Note that unfortunately our human experience of covenant relationships is mixed as we see many people unable to live completely faithful to their lifelong promises. But God can be completely faithful in a way that we cannot. (In addition, emphasize that with God's help, we can live covenant relationships with greater faithfulness.)

3. Help the students to distinguish between a covenant and a contract. (A covenant is unconditional in its terms; a contract has conditional terms.) Ask the students to interpret the message that the ritual between God and Abram conveys. ("If either of us breaks the covenant, may we end up like the animals beside us!")
4. Discuss with the students the importance of promises. Note that a mini-covenant experience is making a promise or "giving your word." Ask the young people these questions:
 - What does it mean to give your word? (or to follow through on a commitment?)
 - How important is it to keep our promises?
 - How do you feel when someone keeps their word to you? breaks their word to you?
5. Take the students outside or to an inside open space. Divide the class in half, putting one half in a line and then putting the other half facing the line, about three feet apart. Each student should have a partner. Give each pair a beanbag. Ask them to toss the beanbag back and forth. If they do not drop the bag, have them go back a step and again throw it back and forth. The young people should do this until they are so far away that they cannot reach their partner.
6. Have the students explain to you what makes for a successful beanbag partnership and what circumstances can get in the way. Using these or similar words, explain that throwing a beanbag back and forth can give us some insight into covenant relationships:
 - If you think of the beanbag as a symbol of a covenant, note that keeping the "covenant" afloat first requires two people. There are

no one-person covenants. In addition, both parties are responsible for keeping it “afloat” or going. If one person stops focusing on the “covenant,” they are more likely to drop it or throw it poorly to their partner. The farther apart the partners are also contributes to whether or not the beanbag covenant has a safe flight. Relationships that become distanced threaten any covenant that has been made.

- ▶ Both parties throwing the beanbag have hope that it will stay airborne. When one person “drops the ball,” the other can be frustrated or disappointed. A key element of covenant making is covenant remaking. How do we forgive others for dropping the ball? How do we pick up the ball and resume our relationship?
- ▶ While everyday promises may not always seem earth-shattering, they form the type of person we will be when we enter into covenant relationships and the way we are in relationship with God.
- ▶ God always invite us to resume the covenant, to pick up the ball, to move closer.

7. Conclude by praying the Lord’s Prayer slowly, emphasizing the importance of forgiveness we are called to share.

Traveling with Abraham



Sarah

Preparing to Teach

Overview

The power and paradoxical promises of God are revealed in the biblical story of Abraham and Sarah. The first thing we learn about Sarai (Sarah) in Genesis, chapter 11, is that she cannot have children (v. 30). This small biographical detail is significant to the unfolding story of Abram and Sarai in partnership with God. In a culture where women were honored for their reproductive abilities, there was shame in being a woman unable to bear children. Young people also have secret or public shortcomings that make them vulnerable to feeling inferior or being made to feel lesser by their peers.

Luckily, the God of Abraham and Sarah brings honor to those whom society shames. This God is also one of loving surprises who can bring blessing out of challenge and difficulty. It is important for young people to consider that God does not see them with the critical eye of other people their age. In fact, God can strengthen and bless them if they experience being an outsider.

God's invitation to our first biblical patriarch and matriarch can be described as an invitation to trust and believe in what is possible in partnership with God—and they do, for the most part. God fulfills his promises to Abraham and Sarah, who cooperate with him. Abraham's promised son will be born only to Sarah. Sarah is significant to the fulfillment of God's promises and plan for all humankind.

This Chapter at a Glance

Activities

- A Paradigm of Promise: Who Is Projecting the Picture?
 - The “Eye-Popper” Activity
 - Inside Out and Upside Down
-
-

Scripture Passages Related to Sarah

- Genesis 11:29–32 (Sarai enters the Scripture story)
- Genesis 12:1–9 (Call of Abram and Sarai)*
- Genesis 12:10–20; 20:1–18 (Sarai, Abram’s wife or sister?)
- Genesis 16:1–6 (Sarai tries to control the family plan)*
- Genesis 17:1–22 (God corrects the family plan)*
- Genesis 18:1–15 (God’s promise)*
- Genesis 21:1–8 (Birth of Isaac)*
- Genesis 23:1–20 (Death of Sarah)

Asterisk (*) signifies key passages to cover.



Articles from *Breakthrough!* Related to Sarah

- Breakthrough! Interview with Sarah
- An Act of Faith (Genesis 12:1–9)
- What’s in a Name? (Genesis 17:1–22)
- Surprises from God (Genesis 18:1–15)
- Jealousy (Genesis 21:9–21)

Sarah and Young Adolescents Today

- Sarai adapts to Abram’s plans to travel with their household. Many students must adapt to new schools and neighborhoods for varied reasons—parental employment, separation, divorce, or family lifestyle changes.
- Sarah is influenced by the culture’s social pressures for women to have children, which were not in keeping with God’s initial plan for Sarah. Peer pressure can negatively influence young people today to conform to social expectations not in keeping with God’s plan for them.
- Sarah’s lack of patience with God’s promise prompted her to make choices that brought pain to others and to herself. The natural impatience of young adolescents can cause problems for others and themselves. (See the article “Jealousy” [Genesis 21:9–21] in *Breakthrough!* to discuss this topic further with your students.)
- Sarah was pleasantly surprised to become pregnant at an advanced age. Young people experience both positive and negative surprises in their lives.



Highlighting God's Presence

God said to Abraham, "You must no longer call your wife, Sarai; from now on her name will be Sarah. I will bless her, and I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she will become the mother of nations, and there will be kings among her descendants." (Genesis 17:15–16)

Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Can I really have a child when I am so old?' Is anything too hard for the Lord? As I said, nine months from now I will return and Sarah will have a son." (Genesis 18:13–14)

The Lord blessed Sarah as he had promised, and she became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham when he was old. (Genesis 21:1–2)

Sarah

Activities

A Paradigm of Promise: Who Is Projecting the Picture?

Sarah is the first barren woman we encounter in the Bible whom God blesses with offspring (Genesis 11:30, 21:1–2). Old Testament figures Rebecca (Genesis 25:21), Rachel (Genesis 29:31, 30:22–24), and Hannah (1 Samuel 1:1–7, 19–20) are also initially barren. In the New Testament, we hear the story of childless Elizabeth, Mary's cousin, and the miraculous birth of her son, John (Luke 1:26–37, 57–58).

This activity heightens the students' awareness of the kind of conditioning that society can give us, influencing the way that we see the world and God. Sarah's offering of Hagar to Abraham in Genesis, chapter 16 enables the students to explore these questions: Are their actions rooted in trust in God's promises, or are their decisions based on the promises of peers, the media, and other influencing aspects of their lives? Who "conditions" the way they see their lives?

Preparation

- ❑ Make a copy of the three resource sheets: "The Old Woman" (Document #: TX002878); "The Young Woman" (Document #: TX002879); and "The Woman" (Document #: TX002880). The images can be either held up for the class to observe or projected onto a screen. (The first two resource sheets are pictures that "condition" the student to see a particular image in the third resource sheet.)
- 1. Ask the students to take turns reading aloud the stories about Sarah from "Scripture Passages Related to Sarah."

2. Ask the students to answer this question, using a scale of one to ten one means not at all and ten signifies completely: “How much is the way you view the world influenced by the culture: media, politics, customs?” Discuss the students’ answers and explain that you will return to them.



3. Divide the class in half. One half of the class will spend 30 seconds viewing the resource sheet “The Old Woman” (Document #: TX002878) while the other half of the class closes their eyes. (The students closing their eyes can hum the theme to *Jeopardy* or another song two times to help pass the time.)



4. The students who viewed “The Old Woman” are to close their eyes (and hum), while the ones who previously had their eyes closed are to view the resource sheet “The Young Woman” (Document #: TX002879) for 30 seconds.



5. Show the resource sheet “The Woman” (Document #: TX002880) to all of the students and discuss what the image looks like. Ask: “Is the woman in the picture old or young? What are some of her physical characteristics?”

(If the students have never done this exercise, they should describe the woman as old or young according to the image that they viewed previously for 30 seconds. Those who looked at the first resource sheet will likely describe an old woman, and those who observed the second resource sheet will likely describe a young woman.)

6. Tell the students that you just “conditioned” them to see the picture in a particular way. Then show the first resource sheet, “The Old Woman,” to the group that viewed the second resource sheet, “The Young Woman,” and vice versa. Discuss what image they initially saw when they viewed the third resource sheet, “The Woman.” Highlight that this conditioning took only 30 seconds! Ask the students to react to this experience, especially in light of their response in step 2.
7. Ask the students to think about some of the things that condition them to see the world in a particular way. Television, film, magazines, advertising, and friends all influence the way young people see themselves and the world around them. Note that they spend much more time than 30 seconds with these influences! Discuss these questions with the students:
 - ▶ Do people and things condition you to see the world in a certain way? Can you prevent this?
 - ▶ Do people and things condition you to see God in your lives?
 - ▶ What conditions you to have trust in God’s promises and plans for you?

8. Ask the students to consider the way that Sarai acts in Genesis 16:1–6. Ask these questions:
 - ▶ What kind of conditioning does Sarai seem to have received?
 - ▶ Did Sarai not trust God’s promise that she and Abram would have children, or was she conditioned by the culture around her when she offered her servant girl, Hagar, to Abram?
 - ▶ To what extent does social conditioning affect our own ability to listen to God?
9. Conclude with comments about the importance of giving God time to condition the way we see our relationships with God, self, others, and the world around us.

The “Eye Popper” Activity

In this activity, the students use the surprising nature of the party favor “eye poppers” as a way of talking about the surprising nature of God.

Preparation

- ❑ Purchase a bag of “eye poppers” party favors at a party supply store or from an online vendor. The theological idea in this activity can be communicated with just one eye popper, but the students enjoy the surprise of having a handful of poppers thrown into the air for them to catch! Tell the students to keep them as a reminder that God is full of surprises.
1. Introduce the students to the God of Abraham and Sarah, a God of surprises, by reading the stories listed under “Scripture Passages Related to Sarah,” highlighting Genesis 11:30 and Genesis 12:1–4. Explain that God’s promise to make Abram’s name great meant that God would bless him and his wife with children. Then ask the students why God would choose this particular couple in God’s mission to bless the world. With that introduction, throw a handful of eye poppers into the air for the students to catch, and let the students enjoy the chaos.
 2. Let the students play with these poppers for a couple minutes, turning them inside out and upside down on a flat surface and waiting for the surprise jump into the air. Settle the class and ask what theological lessons can be drawn from this exercise of inversion and surprise? Guide the conversation toward some of these themes:
 - ▶ God reverses our understanding of the way things should work, and this is sometimes called the “divine reversal.” (Several other biblical passages point to this reality: Hannah’s Prayer

[1 Samuel 2:1–10], the *Magnificat* [Luke 1:46–55], and the Beatitudes [Matthew 5:3–11].)

- ▶ “[I]n our weakness you perfect your power and on the feeble bestow strength to bear you witness, through Christ our Lord” (from “Preface I of Holy Martyrs,” *Roman Missal*). There are numerous biblical narratives and stories of the saints that support this paradoxical promise.
 - ▶ God’s love knows no bounds. The Spirit of God moves as the Spirit wills. We need to be ready and willing to encounter divine love, which is often revealed in unexpected and surprising ways.
3. Conclude by having a student read Genesis 22:17. Share the following insights, using these or similar words:
- ▶ Abraham is considered the father of faith for three world religions: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, so his spiritual descendants are today as numerous as the stars. God reveals in the story of Abraham and Sarah that nothing is impossible when you are willing to follow a God of surprises!

Inside Out and Upside Down

The students may be familiar with the song “Spinnin’ Around,” by Jump5 (on the album *The Very Best of Jump5*, by Jump5 [Sparrow/Emd, 2005]). This tune captures a sense of the paradoxes and surprises of God. Sarah and Abraham’s journey with God kept them “spinnin’ around,” and when they kept their eyes and heart on God, it was a joyful journey enriched by laughter!

You could either listen to the song in class and have the students make connections between the concepts of the biblical story and the lyrics of the music, or you could make the connections on your own and bring these ideas into discussion in class. You might suggest that the students interject God as a replacement for the “you” of the song.

The Old Woman

(Teacher Resource)



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The Young Woman

(Teacher Resource)



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The Woman

(Teacher Resource)



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Isaac

Preparing to Teach

Overview

Isaac's story connects with the lives of young adolescents in several areas. His life, with its ups and downs, can challenge the misconception that biblical characters' lives are so very different from ours. Just as God was present in the up-and-down moments of Isaac's life, God is also present in the ups and downs of our own lives.

Isaac is the promise that God made to his parents, Abraham and Sarah. In a culture today that often says you are important for what you do, what you wear, or how you look, Isaac's birth reminds us that each person is important because he or she is a promise of God. The word *promise* is used in different ways in our society so it is important to sort out what type of promise God's promise is.

Isaac was also tested. Young people experience various challenges, big and small. It is important that they realize that God is close in all the challenges they face.

This Chapter at a Glance

Activities

- Isaac's Ups and Downs
- Isaac Is a Promise
- Being Tested

Scripture Passages Related to Isaac

- Genesis 21:1–8 (Isaac's birth)*
- Genesis 21:9–13 (Isaac plays with Ishmael)
- Genesis 22:1–19 (Abraham leads Isaac to sacrifice)*
- Genesis 23:1–19 (Sarah dies)
- Genesis, chapter 24 (Isaac's servant brings Rebecca to Isaac)*
- Genesis 25:1–6 (Abraham remarries, has children, and leaves all to Isaac)

- Genesis 25:19–26 (Rebecca gives birth to their sons, Esau and Jacob)*
- Genesis 25:27–34 (Isaac’s family dynamics)*
- Genesis, chapter 26 (Isaac and Abimelech)
- Genesis 27:1–29 (Isaac gives Jacob, rather than Esau, a blessing)*

Asterisk (*) signifies key passages to cover.

Articles from *Breakthrough!* Related to Isaac



Isaac

- *Breakthrough!* Interview with Isaac
- What’s in a Name? (Genesis 17:1–22)
- Surprises from God (Genesis 18:1–15)
- Jealousy (Genesis 21:9–21)
- The Ultimate Sacrifice (Genesis 22:1–19)
- A Match Made in Heaven (Genesis 24:57–67)
- Thanks for Siblings (Genesis 25:19–34)

Isaac and Young Adolescents Today

- Isaac came from ancestors and from parents. He has a lineage as do the students.
- Isaac’s name has a special meaning. Young people have been given names for particular reasons, and this makes up part of their identity.
- Isaac’s birth is a promise to Abraham. Each person’s birth is a promise and a gift.
- Isaac has a half brother, Ishmael, and experiences the joy and tension of a blended family. Some students are part of blended families. (See the article “Jealousy” [Genesis 21:9–21] in *Breakthrough!* for a discussion of this dynamic in Isaac’s family.)
- God’s request to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac was a test for Isaac. Young people face tests of various types in their lives.
- Isaac loses his mother and his father remarries. Some young adolescents have already lost loved ones.
- Isaac’s own sons are rivals and experience favoritism from their parents. Some young people experience these family dynamics at home.



Highlighting God's Presence

"Don't hurt the boy or do anything to him," he said. "Now I know that you honor and obey God, because you have not kept back your only son from him." (Genesis 22:12; the angel of the Lord)

Laban and Bethuel answered, "Since this matter comes from the LORD, it is not for us to make a decision." (Genesis 24:50)

Because Rebecca had no children, Isaac prayed to the LORD for her. The LORD answered his prayer, and Rebecca became pregnant. (Genesis 25:21)

Activities

Isaac's Ups and Downs

In this activity, the students review or learn about the story of Isaac and focus on the high and low points of his story.

Preparation

- ☐ Create a time line for the Isaac story on newsprint or on the blackboard prior to meeting as a class. You can subdivide the time line with the headings "birth," "youth," "adulthood," and "old age." The space above the time line should indicate a "high point" in life, the line itself an "average point," and below the line is a "low point."
 - ☐ If you would like to give the students the poem "Footprints," make enough copies of the handout "Footprints" (Document #: TX002881) on nice paper to hand out.
 - ☐ Make sure that each group of students has a Bible.
1. Divide the class into six groups, and assign each group one of the biblical stories that has an asterisk in "Scripture Passages." For each biblical story, tell the students to do the following tasks:
 - Write down the chapter and verse in Genesis that corresponds to the story.
 - Summarize the plot of the story.
 - Decide whether or not this story describes a low, average, or high point in Isaac's life and why. (If the story has more than one type of experience, ask the students to identify them all in terms of highs and lows.)
 - Look for God's presence in the story. If God is directly mentioned, what does God do or say, either himself or through a messenger?

(Note that God can be working whether he is mentioned by name or not.)

2. Go through the Isaac stories in order, asking each group to share the summary of the story. After each group shares the summary, instruct a representative to go up to the board and pick a spot to put the story on the time line, explaining the group's choice. Invite comment or discussion.
3. Ask the students whether they think that Isaac had a pretty typical life, or one that was characterized by many highs and lows.
4. Return to the stories, in order, and ask each group to share whether they saw God acting in the stories. Have a volunteer map God's presence on the time line while the groups share. (The volunteer might use an adjective to describe God's presence in a given situation such as "testing" or "reassuring," for example.)
5. Conclude by discussing that God is present in our lives all the time. The poem "Footprints" is a helpful illustration of God's presence whether visible or invisible. Distribute the copies of the handout "Footprints" (Document #: TX002881) to the young people and invite them to reflect on what it means.

Isaac



Isaac Is a Promise

In this activity, the students contemplate the meaning of the word *promise* and then consider themselves as God's promise.

Preparation

- ❑ The students will each need a Bible, a paper, and a pen.
- ❑ Make copies of the handout "Promises" (Document #: TX002882), one for each student.
- ❑ Review Genesis, chapter 21.

1. Distribute the handout "Promises" (Document #: TX002882) to the young people and go over the directions with them. Give them 5 or more minutes to put several answers in each of the boxes on the handout.
2. Write the headings from the handout chart on the board. Then ask the students to share their answers while a student volunteer records them.



3. Ask these questions about the different categories on the board:
 - ▶ What happens when these different types of promises are kept?
 - ▶ What happens when they are broken? (Play devil's advocate, if necessary, to encourage the students to explore the concept of promise more deeply.)
4. Ask a volunteer to read Genesis, chapter 21, aloud. Ask:
 - ▶ What type of promises does God make? What are God's promises like?
5. Conclude by asking the young people to consider this question:
 - ▶ What does it mean for you to be a promise of God or the fulfillment of God's promise, as was Isaac?

Being Tested

In this activity, the students look to see that God is present when life tests them, just as he was there when Isaac was tested.

1. Arrange the students into groups of three and have them read Genesis 22:1–19, with each person taking a role: Abraham, Isaac, or the angel of the Lord. Afterward, ask each group to prepare a short role-play of this reading. Encourage the students to reflect on the feelings that they imagine each of the figures had and to communicate those feelings not just in the tone of voice they use during the role-play but also in the gestures, speed of walking, and facial expressions that they use. You may want the students to write up a script first.

Another possibility would be to use the already-made skit for "Abraham and Isaac," from *Ready-to-Go Scripture Skits . . . That Teach Serious Stuff*, by Michael Theisen (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2004).

2. Invite several groups to present their role-plays. Afterward, ask:
 - ▶ What is similar in these role-plays? What is different?

Ask each group to explain their own depiction. Note on the board the types of emotions that emerge in this story.
3. Give the students a few moments of silence, and ask them to think privately about times when they have felt the kinds of emotions noted on the board. Ask:
 - ▶ When have you been tested? What did you do?

Invite the students to share as they feel comfortable.

4. Conclude the discussion of Isaac's test with these thoughts, using these or similar words:
- All of us go through times that feel very much like the journey that Abraham and Isaac took. Even people who are following the will of God sometimes feel alone and scared. It is important to remember that God is with us and that God wants us to come through our test with feelings of hope and joy like Isaac and Abraham did.

Isaac

Variation

Have the students read the *Breakthrough!* article “The Ultimate Sacrifice” (Genesis 22:1–19) to discuss the parallels between Abraham, Isaac, and Jesus.



Footprints

One night a man had a dream about walking along the beach with the Lord. The sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene, he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand: his and the Lord's.

After the last scene flashed before him, he looked at the footprints, noticing that at the most difficult times in his life there was only one set of footprints.

"Lord, you said you'd walk with me all the way if I followed you. But during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. Why did you leave me when I needed you most?"

The Lord replied, "I love you and would never leave you. In your times of trial and suffering when you only see one set of footprints, that was when I carried you."

Author Unknown

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Author Unknown



Promises

Describe the kind of promises that are made in the following areas, giving several examples for each one.

Friends	Family
School	Government

What are the characteristics of God's promises? Circle the promises above that most resemble God's promises.



Jacob

Preparing to Teach about Jacob

Overview

Jacob is a complex figure. His initial deceit in cooperation with Rebecca to obtain Isaac's blessing is a tough story for many young people. They ask, "How did he become such an important person in the Bible if he did that?" Clearly, God still blesses people even when they fail in living moral lives. This subtlety can help young people to see that not just "the really good kids" can be people through whom God works; everyone can!

Esau's forgiveness of Jacob is also a powerful witness to the way that people can overcome damage that has been done to them and grow because of it. Esau's example challenges the students to expect more from themselves (with God's help) and to be able to hope that reconciliation can occur in some of their own troubled relationships.

Jacob's love for Rachel is beautiful. Despite the way that Laban treats him, he is willing to stay on with him because of her. Young people search for models of what "true love" is. In addition, they can easily imagine the jealousy between the two young wives who both want to bear children and be seen as special in Jacob's eyes.

Do family patterns repeat themselves? Although this part of Jacob's story is usually covered in the study of Joseph, it is interesting that after suffering from parental favoritism, Jacob himself has a favorite son. This choice causes him much pain, but again God works through it all. If the young people could come away from Jacob's story saying, "God can work through it all," they would have learned an important and relevant lesson.

This Chapter at a Glance

Activities

- Comic Book Life of Jacob
 - Jacob's Extended Family and Our Own
 - Jacob and Reconciliation
-
-

Scripture Passages Related to Jacob

- Genesis 25:19–26 (The birth of Esau and Jacob to Isaac and Rebecca)
- Genesis 25:27–34 (Esau sells rights as firstborn son)*
- Genesis 27:1–45 (Rebecca and Jacob deceive Isaac, and Jacob receives blessing)*
- Genesis 28:10–22 (Jacob’s dream at Bethel)*
- Genesis 29:1–14 (Jacob arrives at Laban’s house)
- Genesis 29:15–30 (Jacob marries Leah and Rachel)*
- Genesis 29:31—30:24 (Birth of Jacob’s children)
- Genesis 31:1–55 (Jacob flees from Laban)
- Genesis 32:22–30 (Jacob receives the name Israel)*
- Genesis 33:1–20 (Jacob meets Esau)*
- Genesis 35:16–21 (Rachel’s death)
- Genesis 35:22–25 (A list of the sons of Jacob)*

Asterisk (*) signifies key passages to cover.

Jacob

Articles from *Breakthrough!* Related to Jacob

- *Breakthrough!* Interview with Jacob
- Thanks for Siblings (Genesis 25:19–34)
- Esau’s Dilemma (Genesis 27:1–29)
- An Imperfect Believer (Genesis 30:25–43)
- Jacob’s Wrestling Match (Genesis 32:22–32)
- A Moment of Great Power (Genesis 33:1–11)
- The Tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:8–12)
- To Be Continued (Genesis, chapter 50)



Jacob and Young Adolescents Today

- The story of Jacob revolves around troubling family dynamics: each parent favors a different child over the other and the two children are rivals. Some young adolescents also experience difficult dynamics in their families.
- The story of Isaac’s blessing of Jacob demonstrates the power of the spoken word in ancient cultures. Young people also can see how the words they use build up or hurt people.

- The story of Jacob is about reconciliation, especially in families. Young people need and have experienced reconciliation within their families.
- The story of Jacob is about positive transformations that can happen in our lives through memorable events, even hard ones. Young people also carry the memories of significant experiences in their lives.
- The story of Jacob emphasizes the importance of our extended families. Many young people also have experiences of extended families.

Highlighting God's Presence

And there was the LORD standing beside him [Jacob]. "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham and Isaac," he said. "I will give to you and to your descendants this land on which you are lying. They will be as numerous as the specks of dust on the earth." (Genesis 28:13–14)

"Your name will no longer be Jacob. You have struggled with God and with men, and you have won; so your name will be Israel." (Genesis 32:28; the man wrestling with Jacob)

God said to Jacob, "Go to Bethel at once, and live there. Build an altar there to me, the God who appeared to you when you were running away from your brother Esau." (Genesis 35:1)

Activities

Comic Book Life of Jacob

In this activity, the students use comic strips to familiarize themselves with the story of Jacob and to share the story with one another. For the first part of this activity, follow the four steps that can be found in appendix 2, "Tools for Teaching," under the heading "The Comic Book Approach," on page 243. Use the readings for Jacob in the "Scripture Passages Related to Jacob" section.

1. After the students have created and shared their comics with each other, ask them to think about the whole Jacob story and then to reflect on one or more of these questions:
 - ▶ What is the moral of this story?
 - ▶ If this comic was made into a movie, what would its title be?
 - ▶ What does Jacob learn from his life?

These are other questions you may want to pose to your students:

- ▶ How is God's promise to Abraham and Isaac continued in the life of Jacob?
- ▶ What does the saying "What goes around, comes around" mean?
- ▶ How is this saying true in the life of Jacob, and what about Jacob's story challenges its truth?

Note to Teacher. To help you prepare for the following activities, it is strongly recommended that you read a book titled *Son of Laughter*, by Frederick Buechner (New York: HarperCollins, 1993). This book is a fictionalized account of the biblical character Jacob, the son of Isaac, whose name means "laughter." These pages in particular bring the biblical story to life for the students.

- pages 73–75 (Rebecca discusses her plan with Jacob)
- pages 80–86 (Isaac blesses Jacob)
- pages 164–166 (Jacob and Esau meet again)

Jacob

Jacob's Extended Family and Our Own

Preparation

- ❑ Each student needs a Bible, paper, and a pen.
 - ❑ Make copies of the handout "The Patriarch Family Tree" (Document #: TX002883), one for each student.
 - ❑ Have a visible map of the United States on a bulletin board, a globe, and thumbtacks.
 - ❑ If you are not familiar with family trees, look on the Internet; there are quite a few sites with information about them.
1. Invite young people to read aloud Genesis, chapters 29 through 31, the parts of Jacob's story that relate to his Uncle Laban's family.
 2. In pairs or individually, have the students fill in the handout "The Patriarch Family Tree" (Document #: TX002883).
 3. After reviewing the trees as a class, examine the part of the tree that includes Jacob, Leah and Rachel, and Laban. Discuss these questions with the students:
 - ▶ How well do Jacob and Laban relate?
 - ▶ How well does Jacob relate with Rachel and Leah?
 - ▶ What does Jacob learn about himself after twenty years with his extended family?

