

Gathering Supplies

Based on your choices, you will need:

- ✓ *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- ✓ Resource Page 1
- ✓ Copies of Resource Page 2
- ✓ Colored construction paper
- ✓ Adhesive name tags
- ✓ *Crocodile's Crossing: A Search for Home* by Yoeri Slegers (Flyaway Books, 2020)
- ✓ Internet-connected device

Preparing to Lead

One important thing to keep in mind when you're reading this passage from Genesis is that it is an origin story. Communities who lived long after the time of the story of Abram and Sarai used it to understand themselves and their God, just as we use the story today to understand who God wants us to be. These stories are about the beginnings of God's relationship with God's people, so everything had to be said for the first time. Understanding that God keeps promises may be something we know as true, but God's relationship with our ancestors in the faith, such as Abram and Sarai, was new and had to be fleshed out in stories like this. That's why these are great Bible passages to teach to children. They are figuring these things out for the first time too!

Note that if you have children read from the Bible, there are some tricky concepts in the Genesis 17 passage. While the covenantal requirement of circumcision is theologically important in that God's covenant with God's people included even their bodies, talking about circumcision with children may not be appropriate.

Some themes to watch for as you read Genesis 12:1–4a; 17:1–16:

- ✓ *Immigration*: Abram and Sarai leave the comfort of their home to follow God's call. This takes them to a new, foreign place, but God meets them there.
- ✓ *Promises and Covenant*: God makes promises to Abram and Sarai (about being their God, about making their descendants into a great nation, and about giving them a home), but what makes these promises a covenant is the relational way God invites them into those promises.

- ✓ *Names*: God gives Abram and Sarai new names to mark the establishment of the covenant. These names are intentional. Abram means “exulted ancestor” but Abraham means “ancestor of a multitude.” Sarai is said to mean, “my Sarah,” but Sarah is to become a mother of all nations.

Because this is a story of leaving the comfort of home and immigrating to a new place, demonstrate that by moving the children around the room a bit before getting them settled to engage with the story. Set up two distinct gathering spaces in the room in opposing corners, perhaps using a rug to sit on in one corner and chairs in a circle in another corner.



Enter into sacred space together.

Have the children sit down in one of the two gathering spaces in the room and invite them to pray by repeating after you:

God here, /
God there, /
God everywhere: /
help us hear /
your Word /
and have fun with you. /
Amen. /

Begin to introduce the story but then say something like, “Oops, my mistake—we actually need to be over there.” Have the children move to the other gathering place, get resettled, and pray the prayer again. Talk with the children about how God is everywhere, even when they must move around and even if they have to move a long way away.

If you have predominantly younger children, line the children up and have them follow the leader on a twisty path from one area to the other. You can even have them follow silly ways of walking or motions to make it more fun.

Leading



Read a story of God's people.

Ask the children if they have ever had to move to a new place. Wonder together what might be exciting and scary about moving. Read the first two paragraphs of “Abram and Sarai Find a New Home” in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 26).

Then ask the children to listen for what God promises Abram and Sarai as you read the rest of the story. Make a list of the promises they heard on a sheet of newsprint.

Draw simple pictures to help younger children remember these promises, such as stars or little stick figure people for the promise of a family, trees for the promise of a land, and the names Abraham and Sarah for their new names.



Pause to let God's Word enter into hearts and minds.

Invite the children to take a few moments to quietly imagine that they are Abram or Sarai. Would they be happy or sad, and would they find the move to a new place frightening or exciting?



Engage curiosity and imagination with God's story.

Show the map on Resource Page 1. Ask the children to share their feelings as they imagined they were Abram, Sarai, or their family members traveling from Ur to Haran to the promised land.

- How do you think Abram, Sarai, or one of their family members felt about leaving their home and traveling to a new land?
- What do you think they brought with them that was special? What do you think they had to leave behind?
- How do you think the people they were leaving may have felt?

Choose one or both options:

- Immigrants**
 - Introduce the word *immigrant* to the children. Explain that immigrants are people who have moved from their country to live in another country. Ask:

- How do you think Abram, Sarai, and their family were welcomed, or not welcomed, in their new home?
- How do you think the people who were living in the land felt about Abram, Sarai, and their family coming to live in their land?

- Promises**

- Read the list of promises God made to Abram and Sarai. Wonder together how Abram and Sarai felt knowing that they had these promises from God. Ask the children what they would do if God made these kinds of promises to them.



Wrestle with our place in God's story.

Invite the children to consider their response to the story of Abram and Sarai's journey as they think about what a promise means and what God's promises are.

Choose one or both options:

- Promises We Make**

- Invite the children to talk about promises in their lives using the following prompts. Write their responses under the headings “Home,” “School,” and “Keeping Promises.”
 - What promises do you make with your family at home?
 - What promises do you make with your friends at school?
 - How does it feel when someone doesn't keep their promise? Is it hard or easy to make promises with that person again? Why?
- Ask if there are any promises that you need to make to each other as a group seeking to learn about God. Create a list of shared group promises to use when you're together. You might suggest things like: “We promise to listen while others are talking” or “We promise to make room at the table for everyone.” Display this list someplace visible in the space.

- God's Promises**

- Tell the children that when two people make promises to each other, it's called a covenant. The same is true when God makes a promise to us and when we make a promise in return. For Abraham, God promised to be Abraham's God and Abraham promised to be faithful to God. Both parts are needed to keep the covenant.

Leading

God's promises and our promises fit together like puzzle pieces.

- ✦ Hand out copies of Resource Page 2. Suggest that these puzzle pieces show what a covenant with God is like: on one side is "God keeps promises" and on the other side is "I am faithful to God." Wonder together what some of God's promises to us are.
- ✦ Invite younger children to decorate the two puzzle pieces and older children to write or draw pictures of God's promises on God's part of the covenant and promises they make to God on their part of the covenant. Have the children cut out the puzzle pieces and glue them to a piece of colored construction paper, fitting together the puzzle pieces. Assist with cutting as needed.
- ✦ Have the younger children write, "My part" at the top of the puzzle piece that represents their part of the covenant ("I am faithful to God.") and "God's part" on top of the puzzle piece that represents God's part of the covenant ("God keeps promises."). Assist with writing as needed. Suggest that the older children should add promises that they want to make to God to the "faithful" puzzle piece.
- ✦ Encourage the children to use the puzzle pieces to remember the covenant of love between them and God during the week. Encourage the children to say a prayer thanking God for God's covenant, or promises, and asking for help to keep their promises to God when they see the puzzle pieces.



Bless one another with God's grace.

Remind the children that God gave Abram and Sarai a new name to show their new relationship with God and their covenant together. Abram's name meant "special ancestor" but his new name, Abraham, meant "father of many." Sarai's name was sort of a nickname meaning "my Sarah," but she would become known as Sarah, who would become a mother to all nations.

Give each child a new "name" to bless them as they go. If you know the children well, think about them ahead of time and how God's promise lives on in them, and then give them a name like "The One Who _____." If you don't know the children well, you can make up more general "names" to bless them, such as for the child who always cleans up

their mess: The One Who Helps; for the child who always figures out a unique way to do an activity: The One Who Finds a New Way; or more generally: The One Who Brings Joy or The One Who Laughs. Write the new "names" on the adhesive name tags for the children to wear as they leave.

Close with this echo prayer, inviting the children to repeat after you as you pray:

Gracious God /
who names us /
and knows us, /
may we keep /
your covenant of love /
every day. /
Amen. /

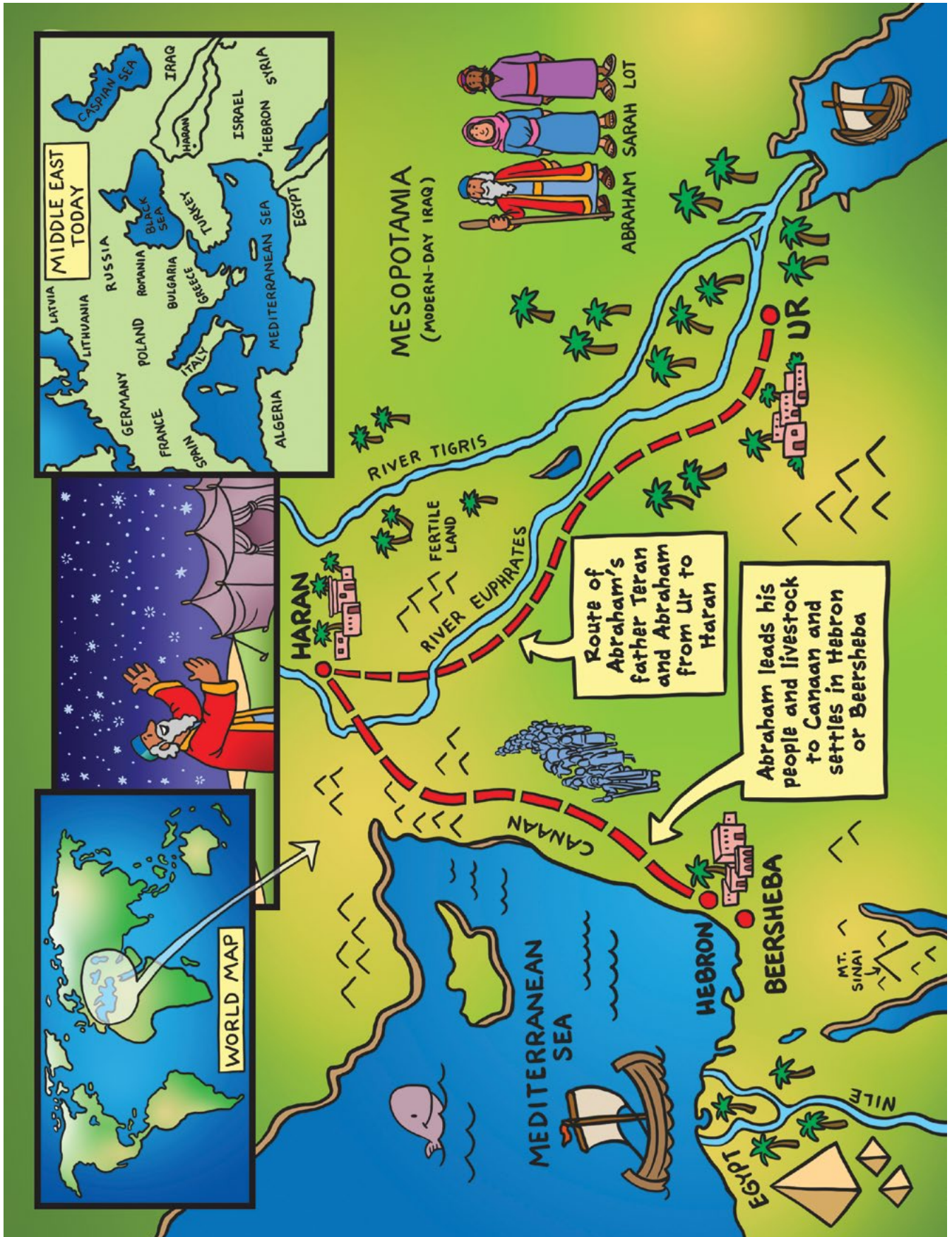


Grow with more.

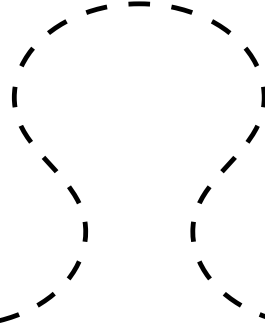
○ A New Home

- ✦ Read *Crocodile's Crossing: A Search for Home* by Yoei Slegers. Wonder together how it would feel to be Crocodile. Engage the children in conversation:
 - What experiences have you had with people from other countries who have come to live in your neighborhood?
 - What gifts have they brought to your community, or how have they enriched your life?
 - What can you do to make their experience in their new country and home better?
- ✦ Invite the children to draw a picture of something they have learned from someone from another country who has come to live in their community or of some way that they can help others feel at home in a new place.

If you have predominantly older children, watch the YouTube video "To Be Happy / An Immigrant Student's Tale" (bit.ly/ImmigrantStudentsTale, 3:38). Invite conversation about how these children feel as immigrants in a new land. Ask the children what some of the hurdles are that these children face. Wonder together how you might be a welcoming presence to someone who is new and from a different country, making them feel more comfortable in your church, school, or community.



**God keeps
promises.**



I am faithful to God.