

LESSON 4

THE GREAT FAMILY

LESSON NOTES

FOCUS: GOD WITH THE PEOPLE OF GOD (GENESIS 12–15, 24)

- SACRED STORY
- CORE PRESENTATION

THE MATERIAL

- LOCATION: SACRED STORY SHELVES
- PIECES: DESERT BOX, PEOPLE OF GOD FIGURES, BASKET OF STONES, BLOCKS, BLUE YARN
- UNDERLAY: NONE

BACKGROUND

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.

NOTES ON THE MATERIAL

This lesson uses the desert box, an important setting for several sacred stories. The desert box usually has a lid and can have wheels, to make it easy to move. If there are no wheels, place the box on a rug to drag the box from its storage location to the storytelling circle. Place the box in the middle of the circle to tell today's story.

You also need a basket with four of the People of God figures representing Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah. Another basket holds stones to make altars. Use two wooden blocks, one about 2" x 2", labeled *Ur*, and one about 1" x 1", labeled *Haran*.

In addition, you need two pieces of blue yarn. One length will represent the Euphrates river that arcs toward Haran to guide and nourish that part of the journey. The second length of yarn will represent the Tigris River that arcs in an eastward direction.

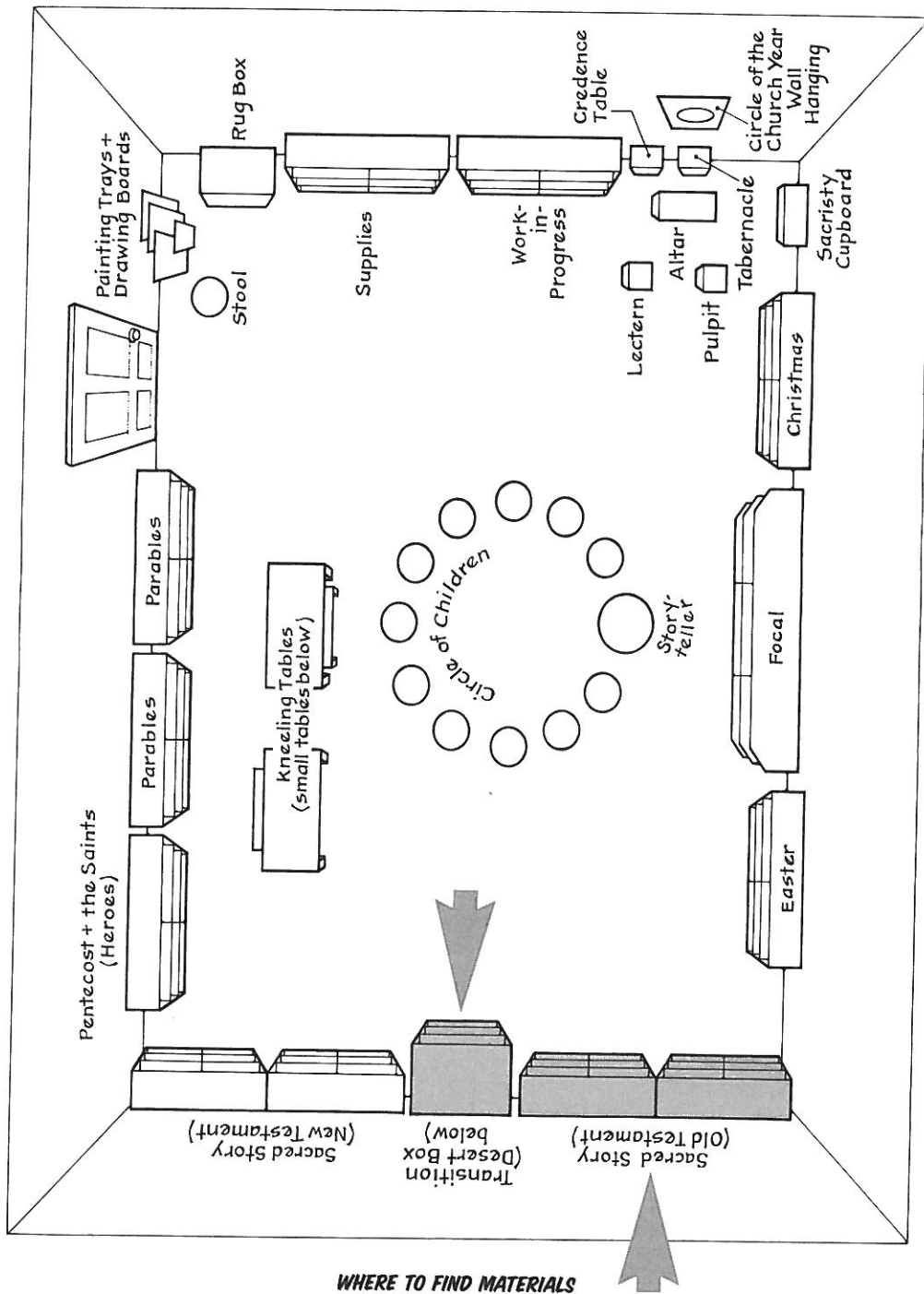
As you face the sacred story shelves, locate this material in a tray to the right of the material for the Flood and the Ark.

SPECIAL NOTES

Classroom management: Many young children spend time in early education settings that feature a sand box. Help children understand that the desert box is *not* a sand box by consistently calling it the *desert box*. Children will almost certainly scoot up to the box to touch the irresistible sand. That's fine, but help them scoot themselves back, too. "It's time to get ready now. You need to scoot back, so everyone can see. This is the lesson."

The desert box needs an introduction whenever it is used, but be sure to spend plenty of time today introducing it to the children. Spend extra interpretive time, too, whenever you use the desert box for the first time with a new group or during a new church school year.

Take time to learn the correct placement of Ur, Haran and the two rivers in the desert box. As you move the figures correctly in the story, most of the children will see the movement as it is shown on a map. They will see the family moving from east to west, just as our biblical maps show. Your care in placing figures correctly means that children won't have to unlearn an incorrect placement of these landmarks when they learn later how to use maps of the Middle East.



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.

Return to get the tray with the people, the "rivers," the stones and the markers for Ur and Haran. Get settled and begin when all are ready.

Trace the outline of the desert box with your finger.

Remove the lid.

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

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.

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

WORDS

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

...and this lesson.

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

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

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.

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 most ancient and greatest of these cities was called Ur.

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.

MOVEMENTS

Stand Abram and Sarai in the sand by Ur.

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

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 move the figures toward the top of an arc.

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

Move Abram and Sarai 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 Abram and Sarai.

Use several small stones to build an altar.

Use several small stones to build another altar.

Leave Abram and Sarai together at your far right.

WORDS

■ Abram and Sarai were part of that family.

■ 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.

■ 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 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 to give them water to drink.

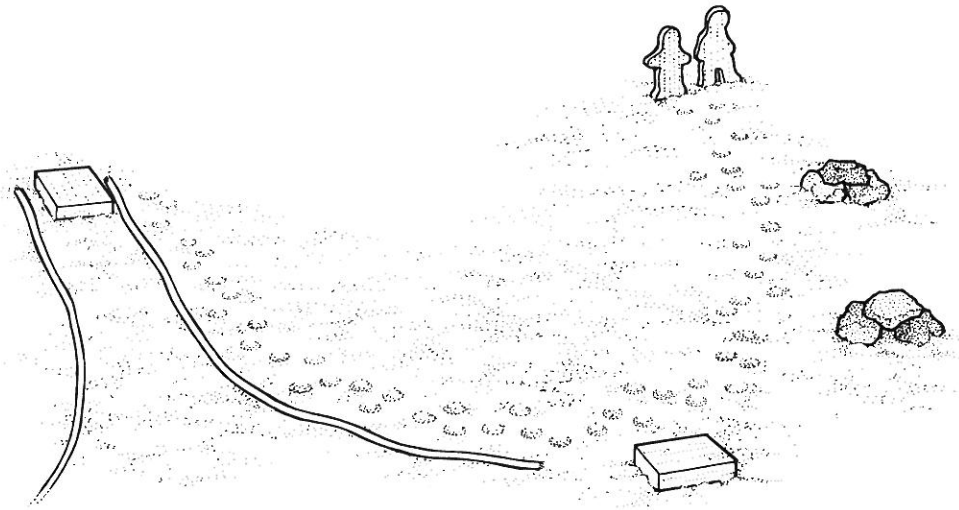
■ They finally came to a place called Shechem. Abram climbed up a hill and prayed to God, and God was there, so Abram built an altar to mark the place. Then they went on.

■ 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.

MOVEMENTS

WORDS



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."

MOVEMENTS

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.

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

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 (Genesis 24:10).

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.

WORDS

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.

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

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.

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 thousands and 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.

MOVEMENTS

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.

WORDS

■ Now, 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 of the story 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?

■ Now, I wonder what work you would like to get out today?