

# ***Abraham***

## **and the promises of God**



ABRAHAM

ABRAHAM AND THE PROMISES OF GOD  
studies (c) Phil Campbell  mpc 2004



# **Bless This Mess**

## **Genesis 12:1-7**

By the time we get to Genesis chapter 12, the world is a mess. God's good creation (Gen 1) has gone badly wrong. Amazingly, through Abraham, God is going to start again - and bless the mess. His significance in the Bible's unfolding story is shown by the fact that he's mentioned 291 times in the Bible... including 78 times in the New Testament. No matter where you are in the Bible, he's always remembered! Over the next few weeks, we'll find out why.

### **Background - Genesis 1-12** *Work through these fast!*

a) What was God's intention for mankind in Genesis 1:27-28?

b) What "status" does mankind have before God in Genesis 1:28?

c) What is the "threat" presented by Genesis 2:16-17?

d) What is the essence of the "temptation" in Genesis 3:1-6?

e) What is the outcome in Genesis 3:8 and 3:17f?

f) What glimmer of future hope is there in Genesis 3:15?

Things seem to go from bad to worse. Cain and Abel are born - and tragically, the older son kills his brother. Murder, revenge, deception and despair are the keynotes of human existence. But the hope of a future offspring who will "crush the Serpent" remains.

g) Who carries the line of promise in Gen 4:25-26?

h) Who does Seth's family line lead to? (Gen 5:28)

i) How is the state of the world described in Genesis 6:5?

h) Finally, God washes the world clean, and starts again with Noah. What are you reminded of by the words of Genesis 9:1?

i) Even after the world is washed, there's a "heart problem." Ham, the father of the Canaanites, mocks his drunken, naked, father. What's the result in Gen 9:24-27?

In a very real sense, these chapters were designed to explain to the ancient Israelites their own place among the tribes and nations that surrounded them. All their familiar adversaries can be traced back to Shem, Ham and Japheth. Particularly, the bad feeling between Israel and the Canaanites goes back to the beginning - the line of Ham. Shem is the carrier of the line of God's blessing. Then we come to Babel - the site of later Babylon, where Israel is finally exiled.

### **Babylon The Confused**

j) What is mankind trying to do in Genesis 11:3-4?

k) Compare God's comment in 11:6 with 3:22-23. (Perhaps we've under-estimated our own ability to do evil! God takes it seriously!) What is God's solution in 11:9?

Shem's family line leads to Terah (Gen 11:10-26) and finally, Abram. (Abram's name is later changed to the more familiar "Abraham". In these studies, we'll use the names interchangeably.)

### **Meet the family...**

Read the introductory family details in Genesis 11:27-32. Key cast members are Abram and Sarai; Lot, Abram's nephew; and Nahor, Abram's brother, who we'll meet again much later.

l) What problem is foreshadowed in Gen 11:30?

m) According to Gen 11:31-32, where does Terah intend to take his family, and where do they end up instead?



**Read Genesis 12:1-9.** This passage has been called "the topic sentence of the whole Old Testament." It sets the scene for everything that follows!

Let's take a closer look at God's promises to Abram...

## Promises, Promises

God says to Abram... leave everything, and go to the land I will show you...

<sup>2</sup> "I will make you into a great nation  
and I will bless you;  
I will make your name great,  
and you will be a blessing.  
<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you,  
and whoever curses you I will curse;  
and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you."

Circle or underline every word or idea that appears more than once

n) What are the key repeated words and ideas?

o) In the light of the earlier chapters of Genesis, how would you summarise what God is promising to do?

Can you spot a reversal of Gen 11:4?

Can you spot a continued trend with 1:28 and 9:1?

p) Who *ultimately* is to benefit from God's promise?

q) Abram does as he's told, and takes his family to the land of Canaan. What extra promise does God make in 12:7?

God is starting again! Though man is intent on "making a name for himself" and "playing God", God says he will make a "great name" for Abram - though childless, Abram will become the father of a great nation. God will give his descendants a land of their own. And whoever aligns themselves with Abram and his offspring will share God's blessing. The original blessing of humankind will be restored through Abram and his family line. To Abram, it sounds unlikely - but he does what he's told anyway.

Ultimately, the New Testament tells us how this blessing is fulfilled.

**Read Romans 4:16-25.** The Israelites (Abraham's direct descendants) became protective of their special status. But who does Paul say has a guarantee of God's promised blessing?

How does Paul define and describe Abraham's "faith" in v18-21?

How can his example help you when your faith in Jesus wavers?

# A Friend of a Friend

## Study 2 - Chapter 14

They say “it’s not what you know, it’s who you know.” And if you knew Abraham, that was especially true. God had said, “Those who bless you I will bless, and those who curse you I will curse.” While the promises of descendants and a homeland still seem far off, there are sure signs that Abraham is enjoying God’s favour.

a) Read about Abraham's land deal with Lot. (Genesis 13:5-17)

How does Abraham’s action put God’s land-promise under threat?

Lot has first choice... but everything works out okay for Abraham. Why?

What hint of future danger is there Lot’s decision (Gen 13:10-13)?

### Read Genesis 14.

b) How has Lot’s earlier decision brought him into danger? (14:12)

c) How does this connect with the context of 12:1-3, 13:14-17? (Where is blessing to be found?)

d) How does Abraham step in on Lot's behalf?

e) Look ahead quickly at 18:23-32, 19:29. How does Abraham save Lot's skin the second time around?

f) The picture of Abraham that emerges here is crystallized by a statement in 20:7. Make a note of it:

Why is this not surprising in the light of Genesis 12:1-3?

Clearly, God's blessing of humankind is tied to Abraham and his “offspring.” Lot and any others who walk away from Abraham are walking away from blessing. Abraham is like a prophet, and also like a priest he “mediates” for people before God. But there's another fascinating figure who seems to fill a similar role...

## Mysterious Melchizedek (Read 14:17-24)

Describe Abraham's meeting with the King of Sodom.

Describe Abraham's meeting with the King of Salem.

How would Abraham's commitment to God's promises account for his different responses?

The funny thing about Melchizedek, King of *Salem* (later more famous as “Jerusalem”) is that right back here, at the very start of the bible's story, he fills the role of both Priest and King before Israel's priesthood is even invented.

Much later, as King David writes Psalm 110, he looks forward to a future “priest-King” who is similar but much more glorious.

Who does David say he is talking about in Ps 110v1?

What “king” language is used in v 2?

What has God sworn about this Lord and King in v4?

In the New Testament, the mysterious figure of Melchizedek makes an appearance in Hebrews. His precedent is useful in a number of quite complicated ways!

### Read Hebrews 7

What are we told about Melchizedek in Heb 7:1-3?

Why does the writer to Hebrews go to such trouble to show that there is a priesthood other than the Levitical priesthood in v11-19?

What confidence can we take in the fact that Jesus is a priest in the order of Melchizedek in verses 26-28? How does this help us?

Melchizedek was more impressive than Abraham, and more impressive than the Jewish “Levitical” priesthood, because they all paid tribute to him. But Jesus is more impressive than all of them! He's the perfect “Priest King” foreshadowed by David in Psalm 110 the ideal “middle man” between us and God, and our rightful ruler. And if enjoying God's blessing meant sticking with Abraham back in Genesis, how much more does enjoying God's blessing mean sticking with Jesus now!





# **Bible Teaching Weekend**

## **THINKING ABOUT GUIDANCE**

How do Christians expect God to guide them? List as many methods of guidance you can, whether found in the Bible or not, and whether you disagree with them or not. Think of all the different ways God guides or is said to guide his people.

For what issues do Christians need guidance?

For what issues does society need guidance?

What major life decisions do you expect to confront over the next 5 - 10 years?

What decisions have you made today? What priorities have you set today?

**We're going to think about HOW we should go about making decisions or forming a Christian view on issues.** Briefly, as a group, **without using the Bible**, try answering the following questions. (Maybe pick just two or three issues that interest your group.)

1 Should Christians with homosexual inclinations be encouraged to express them?

2 Should Christians work at the casino?

3 Are we obligated to look after our parents when they get old?

**Remember, this study is not about these issues.** It's about how we arrive at answers. How does God guide us in these things? Reflecting on your answers to the questions above, how did you arrive at your decisions?

What difference do you expect using the Bible would make to your decisions?

What kind of guidance do you expect the Bible to give you?

### **A matter of Authority**

What was Jesus' view of the Old Testament? **(Pick any 3 of these references)**

Matthew 4:4,10

5:17-22

11:10

12:3

19:1-6

19:18,19

21:42-44

22:29-32

22:37-40

23:2,3

Mark 7:1-13

12:36

Luke 4:21

16:29-31

24:25-27

24:44-47

John 5:39-47

10:35



What was Jesus' view of his own teaching? **(Pick 3 of these references)**

John 5:24

6:63

7:15-17

8:26-28

8:43-47

12:48-50

14:10

15:3,7,26

17:6-8

18:37



What was Jesus' view of the apostles' authority? **(Pick 3 of these references)**

Matthew 10:17-20

10:40-42

16:13-20 (cf. Lk 11:52)

28:16-20

Luke 24:45-49

John 14:25-26

15:15-16

15:26-27

16:12-15

17:13-18

20:21-23

Acts 1:1-8



## The Reformation

At the fourth session at the Council of Trent in 1563, The Roman Catholic church declared that Scripture and Church traditions comprised a dual source of final authority and divine revelation and therefore, both were of binding authority. The Reformers countered that **Scripture alone** is the **supreme authority for the church in all matters of faith and conduct**; it alone has the absolute authority to bind the conscience of a person.

We might all agree that the Bible is necessary for guidance, but is it actually enough? Is it actually sufficient for "all matters of faith and conduct"? And what will this mean in practice?

What guidance does the Bible say it will give? 2 Timothy 3:15-17

While there are instances in the bible of guidance by dream, vision or intuition, does the Bible actually promise guidance apart from scripture itself?

How should we make specific decisions when the Bible doesn't tell us precisely which choice to make? For example: choosing a job. How does the Bible guide in this decision? What other factors, if any, should we consider?

Do some jobs make it harder to keep "godly priorities"? How should this affect decisions?

How - for example - should warnings about "the deceitfulness of wealth" (Jesus) affect this decision?

## Consider James 1:16-25.

How will God's word guide us?

What should be our attitude to God's word?

Since the garden of Eden, the origin and authority of the word of God has been questioned (Genesis 3:2-3). People's sinfulness is essentially a rebellion against God and His authoritative word. It is therefore not surprising that the Bible's divine origin and authority are consistently under attack. Most Christians - and others as well - will look for guidance in one of the following areas. Our Bible Teaching weekend will help think through the merits of each.

|           |            |
|-----------|------------|
| Tradition | Experience |
| Bible     | Reason     |

In which quadrant do YOU usually look for guidance?

*The Bible does not claim to say "everything about everything." But it does tell us **all we need** to live a life of **godliness and wisdom**. If you're looking for "God's will for your life," that's exactly what it is - that you live a life of godliness and wisdom as you **grow to be more like Jesus**. That "primary life commitment" will then shape every other decision.*

# 4

## **Giving God a Helping Hand**

### **Abraham and the Promises of God Study 3 Genesis 15-16**

*Faith* simply means relying on the promises of God. But sometimes it's tough. In fact, sometimes rather than relying on what God says is best, we can be tempted to fix things ourselves.

a) Revise... What were God's promises to Abraham?

- i) a huge number of descendants.      FIND A VERSE: .....
- ii) blessing - find a verse.      FIND A VERSE: .....
- iii) a land of their own.      FIND A VERSE: .....

b) Read about Abraham and Sarah's trip to Egypt (Genesis 12:10-20).

What is Abraham's motive in passing Sarai off as his sister?

How does Abraham's action show his attitude to God's offspring-promise?

c) **Read 15:2-3.** What does this reveal about his attitude to God's promise of "offspring"? Why?

d) What is Abram's response in Gen 15:6? And God's reaction?

e) **Read chapter 16 verses 1 to 4.**

Why does Sarah make her suggestion? (And what does she suggest?)

Why does Abraham say "yes"?

What does this indicate about Abraham's attitude to the promises of God?

Was this the right thing to do? What are the consequences for everyone concerned?

Interesting...there are strong parallels between this account, and the story of Adam and Eve in the garden. Commentator John Sailhamer points out that both follow the pattern "she said, he listened, she took, she gave." The comparison is even clearer in the original Hebrew verb forms.

f) God restates his promise in chapter 17, verses 15 and 16.

What is Abraham's response in verse 17 and 18?

Three angels come and re-inforce the promise in chapter 18.

What is Sarah's response in verse 12?

g) What is the RIGHT WAY to respond to God's promises? Where have Abraham and Sarah gone wrong?

**Read God's restatement of his promises in Gen 18:17-19.**

What new insight does verse 19 give into God's purpose in choosing Abraham?

What is "faith"?

What lifestyle should faith lead to?

**Read Romans 4.** *What important lesson does Paul draw from Abraham?*

*How does a person become "righteous"?*

*Whose Father is Abraham according to Rom 4:16-17?*

*What was Abraham's faith "in"?*

*What is our faith "in" according to Rom 4:23-24?*

How do you reconcile Paul's comments about Abraham's faith "not wavering" with the struggles Abraham actually had in Genesis 15?

*Does struggling with faith necessarily imply lack of faith?*

When our preferred life-outcomes don't seem to be working out, or when God seems slow in doing what we want, it's very tempting to give him a helping hand... usually by taking shortcuts or ignoring the requirements of righteousness. Have you experienced this temptation?

END OF STUDY 2

**For next time - we're skipping chapters 17-20. Make sure you read them for yourself!**

## 1.2.3 Testing

### Study 4 - Chapter 21-22

# 5

#### Finally... a Son

After all the promises, and all the waiting, Abraham and Sarah finally have a baby boy. It's the cause of much celebration... and some jealousy.

**Read the account of the birth of Isaac in Genesis 21:1-7.**

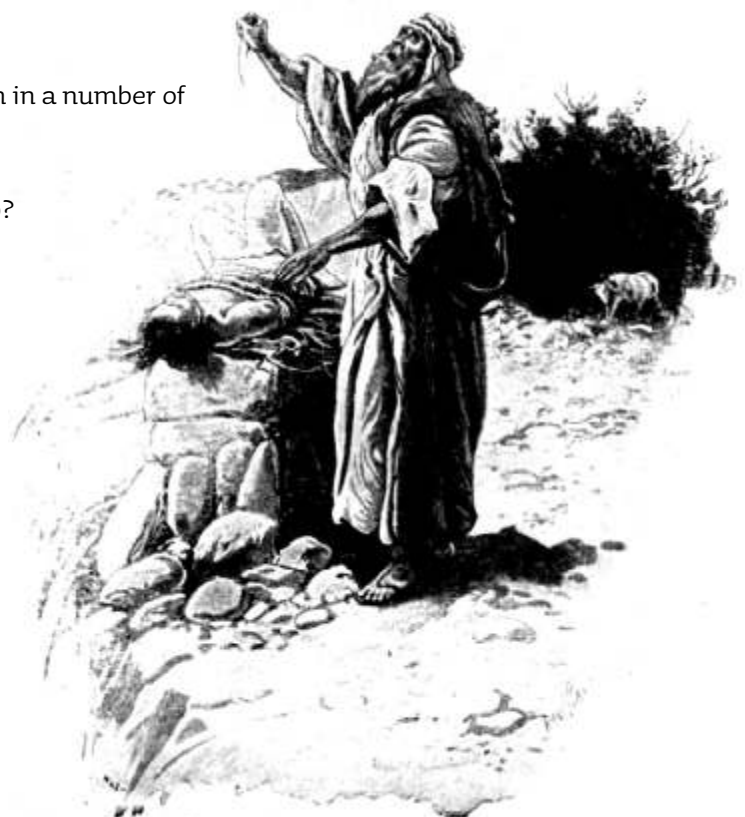
- a) Isaac means “*he laughs*.” What is so hilarious about his birth?
  
- b) What words in the text highlight the theme of promise and fulfilment?
  
- c) Trouble is brewing with Ishmael, the son of Sarah's Egyptian slave girl. No wonder he is jealous... because from Gen 21:8-13, who is the son of “promised blessing”?
  
- d) How does Abimelech, King of Gerah, sum up Abraham's life in 21:22.

**Read Genesis 22.** This is a deeply disturbing story on a number of levels.

- e) How does 22:1 put our minds (slightly) more at ease?
  
- f) Even knowing that this is just a test, how does the scenario God commands bring the promises under threat?
  
- g) Abraham's words in verses 6 to 8 can be taken in a number of different ways. Do you think he is...
  - just trying to put Isaac's mind at rest?
  - saying cryptically that Isaac is the lamb?
  - hoping that God will provide an animal?

h) At the last minute, God's angel stops Abraham from slaying his son. What has the test demonstrated?

i) Why - from Abraham's experience of God to this point - could he reasonably have expected this outcome?



ABRAHAM OFFERING UP ISAAC — GEN 22

j) What sacrifice **does** God actually provide?

What significance is there in the name Abraham gives the place?

However Abraham originally meant the words “*God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering,*” his words have a deep resonance in the New Testament. Right through the Old Testament, people had to provide their own sin offerings. **But read the words of John the Baptist as he introduces Jesus in John 1:29.**

Rather than requiring the sacrifice of Abraham’s son, God ultimately does provide the offering - he gives his own Son as a perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

k) What is the essence of Abraham’s faith throughout the account in Genesis 22?

l) Sometimes, trusting God might seem tough... and even costly. Read Hebrews 11:17-19. What light do these verses shed on Abraham's faith at this point?

What will Abraham-style faith look like for us?

Abraham knew God had created Isaac’s life under impossible circumstances, so he could be trusted with Isaac’s future. From our perspective in history, God has not only provided our sacrifice in Jesus - he brought Jesus back from dead as well. Our trust in God’s power in hard times should be built on this. And this trust should lead to confident obedience.

When do you find it hardest to trust God?

How does the fact that God has *already* provided the sacrifice for us shape your “faith”?

# 6

## A Spot for A Plot

Genesis 22-25

Read Genesis 22:20-25:34 before your group meets! (Okay, it's too late now. Don't panic. And DON'T try to read it all in your group, unless you're planning a loonnng meeting.)

The story of Abraham ends on a somber note... but there's still evidence of confidence in the promises of God, even in the fact of death. It's a great example of what faith is all about. Let's take a look.

### Goodbye to Sarah (Ch 23)

Genesis 23 tells of the death of Abraham's wife Sarah.

- a) Where does Sarah die, and why are these details relevant?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b) What is Abraham's view of his status in this place, and what's the Hittites' view?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- c) What does Ephron offer, and how does Abraham respond?

Why?

- d) Compare this with the account of the offer of the King of Gen 14:21-24. Does this give a hint of what's going on?

The reality is, to bury his wife in a plot of ground in the promised land, Abraham has to buy it from its current owners. He's staking a claim in a land that is not yet his own but he sees it as vitally important to bury his beloved Sarah in a plot that's sure to become part of the land God promised. In fact, when Abraham himself dies, he still hasn't taken possession of the land.

### Hello to Rebekah! (Ch 24)

- e) The long and repetitive account of the selection of a wife for Isaac, the son of promise, makes a simple point repeatedly. What is it? (eg 24:40, 24:50)



f) What connection do you see between the blessing on Rebekah in Gen 24:60 and the theme we've followed in these studies of Genesis 12-25?

### Goodbye Abraham! (Ch 25:1-11)

Read the account of Abraham's final days.

g) How does verse 5 remind you of a theme we've traced in these studies?

h) What is the significance of Abraham's burial place?

i) Read Hebrews 11:8-16. Observe the many things we can learn from Abraham's faith.

The fact is, Abraham didn't see God's promises fulfilled in his own lifetime. Like Sarah, he is buried in the plot Abraham purchased as an advance "stake" in the promised land.

Where should our final hope rest?

How should that affect the way we live in this present life?

What practical differences would it make to your life if this focus was more prominent?

What are you "longing for"?