

# Abraham – Living by Faith and Obedience

## Background

Abraham was chosen by God's grace alone, there was nothing special about him. He was the son of Terah, a nomad from the Ur of the Chaldeans. Throughout the life of Abraham, God would continue to appear to him and remind Abraham of the promise and covenant between them.

John Stott has written: "It may truly be said without exaggeration that not only the rest of the Old Testament but the whole of the New Testament are an outworking of these promises of God"

Genesis 12:1-3 is the text the rest of the bible expounds:

*<sup>1</sup> Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* ESV

There are three main elements to the promises Abraham received from God; people, land and blessing.

## People

Abraham's descendants will become a great nation and will be God's own people (Genesis 17:7). This is repeated throughout the Old Testament in the words 'I will be your God and you will be my people'.

## Land

Abraham is commanded to leave his homeland and travel to another. This is the Promised Land, the land of Canaan (Genesis 17:8)

## Blessing

Abraham's descendants will be blessed and through them 'all people on earth will be blessed'. The curse of the fall will be replaced by the blessing of salvation. God's plan of salvation was universal right from the very start, it encompassed all nations. God changed the patriarchs name from Abram ('exalted father') to Abraham ('father of a multitude') (Genesis 17:5). This great covenant came with a sign. Every male Israelite child was to be circumcised (Genesis 17:10-11). They thus bore a mark on their bodies that signified the special relationship established between God and His people.

**The promised Kingdom** – The covenant with Abraham is a promise of the kingdom of God: God's people (Abraham's descendants) in God's place (the promised land) under God's rule and therefore enjoying his blessing. It is a promise to reverse the effects of the fall. This was the proclamation of the gospel, which has now finally been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He, and those from all nations who trust him, are God's people; and we look forward to enjoying the fullness of God's blessing in heaven, the new Jerusalem.

Abraham had no earthly or human reason to believe in God's promises. He was very old and Sarah, his wife, was unable to have children. However, God promised Abraham that his heir would be his very own son (Genesis 15:4), and <sup>6</sup> *Abram believed the Lord, and he credited to him as righteousness.* Genesis 15:6. Abraham was accepted by God, not on the basis of his own goodness but by faith in the promises of God.

However despite these promises, Abraham was disobedient and took things into his own hands by having a child (Ishmael) with his maidservant Hagar. This demonstrated his trusting in the flesh (that is in human ability) and not in the promise. Sarah did conceive and gave birth to Isaac, just as God had promised. <sup>22</sup> *For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. <sup>23</sup> But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise.* Galatians 4:22-23. Abraham now had a son through which all of God's promises would be fulfilled.

Read Genesis 22:1-19. This is the supreme test of Abraham's faith and loyalty to God and His promises.

1. Given what we know about God's promise to Abraham, what strikes you as extraordinary about God's command to Abraham in this passage?

Isaac was the son through whom the promise was fulfilled (21:12). 1. Goes against who God revealed himself to be? 2. Abraham loved Isaac - 'Son only son, whom you love etc' heightens effect. 3. God gave no reason for it. 4. Not consistent with the promise. 5. Alienate him from Sarah and family. 6. Bad witness to surrounding nations

2. What is Abraham's response to God's command? (v1 and v3)

Responds 'Here I am' – servant. He arose early, leaves with all provisions for a sacrifice, 3 day walk – plenty of time to reconsider

V4-10 – was going to continue with sacrifice until God stopped him, obedient even to the end

3. Despite the knowledge of God's command to him, how does Abraham demonstrate his faith in God's promises in v5b and v8?

'We will come back to you' – Abraham believed that even if he did sacrifice Isaac God would somehow raise him from the dead (Hebrews 11:17-19)

'God will provide a lamb' – Abraham sure that God would provide a sacrifice. Echoes of Jesus sacrifice – Lamb of God

4. How do we respond to God's call in our lives, even when it seems to defy common sense? Using Abraham's example how should we respond? Discuss.

God wants us to hand over everything to Him. Abraham sending away Ishmael was end of his self-will, weakness. Handing over Isaac was so much harder – handing over strengths, very thing God had gifted him with. Must hand over our strengths to God, so we do not hold onto gifts but instead trust in the Giver. Be obedient to God's call. God often uses common sense to guide us, but will often go against common sense. We must be listening very carefully to what God is asking of us, and know His voice well. Our minds are not the final arbiter of what God wants, He is!

5. How does Abraham's test end? v11-13

Ram was offered instead of Isaac – substitutionary sacrifice.

6. Since another sacrifice is provided instead of Isaac, how does this account point us towards the sacrificial death of Jesus? v12

Mount Moriah is site of temple in Jerusalem built by Solomon (2Chr 3:1). Sacrifices happened here until Jesus was crucified on Calvary nearby. 'not withheld from me your son, your only son' – What God did with Jesus – ultimately fulfilling what Abraham was willing to do with Isaac. 1 John 4:9.

7. In v15-19 God confirms his blessing with Abraham. How and why does God confirm his blessing with Abraham?

Swears by His own name – there is nothing higher to swear by (Hebrews 6:17). Abraham was obedient and therefore God blessed him (v18). Showed that he put God first and then his beloved son.

8. God blessed Abraham because he was obedient. Does this mean that when we are obedient to God He will bless us? When we are disobedient does God stop blessing us? Discuss.

God is faithful. God's ultimate blessing is in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20). If we trust in Him then through Christ we receive his holiness, his righteousness, his blamelessness. Though we indeed aren't always faithful, we have Christ's witness which Abraham didn't have. However we are called to remain faithful to God, as that shows our love for Him (2 John 1:6). Offer our bodies as living sacrifices (Romans 12:2). God NEVER punished us for our disobedience if we are in Christ – Christ death is once and for all for all our sins – we have his righteousness. Romans 8:1.

9. How can we learn from Abraham's example and trust in the promises given to us in the gospel, even when we cannot understand what God is doing in our lives? Discuss.

**Application:** Faith in the promises of God, Obedience to God's call in our lives

**Pray:** Thank God for his faithfulness and promises. Thank Him that He sent Jesus to die in our place