

BIBLE OVERVIEW

SESSION II: THE KINGDOM PROMISED

What do you think?

1. What is the most familiar part of Abraham's story to you?
2. What factors motivated Abraham and Sarah to work out a plan to get a son?
4. What are the push and pull factors for emigration today?
5. How different is Abraham's experience from the factors you have noted above?

After Adam and Eve are thrown out of the Garden of Eden there are two lines of humanity. The first human to be born turns out to be a murderer and the second his victim. The two lines that are traced are those of Cain and Seth. Cain's line is characterised by rivalry and murder, and paralleled by the growth of urbanisation and industry: it climaxes with Lamech (Gen 4:17-24). God therefore sends flood in judgment on mankind (Gen 6 v7).

Seth's line is succeeded by a godly line, which leads to Enoch and Noah (10 generations from Adam). This family is 'redeemed' by an act of God's saving grace (the Ark). Again there is division in the line, with Ham representing the godless, and Shem fathering the godly (Gen 11:10-26). Abram comes 10 generations after Noah: this shows that the story is not haphazard. It is moving towards a goal. There is evidence in these accounts that God wants to establish his kingdom. He acts graciously, when humanity deserves judgement. The kingdom pattern is established in Eden. Humanity rebels (the fall); God judges (expulsion from the garden etc.); God shows grace (sustains life, promise of seed). Humanity rebels (Cain, Lamech etc...); God judges (the flood); God shows grace (Noah and the Ark).

Abraham and the family of promise

What's so different about him?

Genesis 12:1 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."² "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."³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."⁴

So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran.⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.⁶ Abram travelled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.⁷ The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.





This passage acts as a bridge between the world history of Genesis 1-11, and the history of salvation with which the remainder of the Bible is concerned.

Genesis 12:1-7

Who is taking the initiative in this passage?

What is Abram called to do?

What is promised to Abram?

What one word that appears repeatedly in the passage sums up God's purpose in calling Abraham?
Who will be blessed?



What does 'blessing' mean?

What happened to human relationships after the fall?

How might what is promised to Abram reverse this?

The Covenant Confirmed

Genesis 15:

¹ After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."² But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?"³ And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir."⁵ He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars--if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.⁷ He also said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it."⁸ But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I shall gain possession of it?"⁹ So the LORD said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon."¹⁰ Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half.¹¹ Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.¹² As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him.¹³ Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and ill-treated four hundred years.¹⁴ But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterwards they will come out with great possessions.¹⁵ You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age.¹⁶ In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."¹⁷ When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking brazier with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.¹⁸ On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates--¹⁹ the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites,²⁰ Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites,²¹ Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."

What is similar to Genesis 12:1-3?



How is Abram seen as righteous before God? v6 (cf Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6; James 2:23)

What is a covenant (v18)?

What is the covenant that God makes with Abram?

Why is there darkness, fire and smoke?

What is the significance of the smoking brazier with blazing torch passing between the animals?

Most of the remaining narratives concerning Abraham are concerned with the question of an heir. Circumcision as an act of personal consecration to God is added in Genesis 17 as a covenant symbol, though like the NT (Rom 2:29), the circumcision for which the OT looks is of the heart (Deut 10:16), which may have no immediate connection with the outward circumcision. After testing Abraham (which climaxes in Gen 22) the career of the patriarch ends with his last spoken word in Gen 24:7ff, which rehearses the promises of Gen 12:1-3.

Abraham eventually has a son Isaac, who in turn has two sons Esau and Jacob. The story continues through Jacob who is named Israel by God (Gen 32:28), and his twelve sons are the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel (Gen 49:28). Genesis 12-50 tells how God gave descendant to Abraham, how he preserved them from various dangers and caused them to grow in number (Cf Gen 47:27). The account emphasises that this happened despite the most unfavourable circumstances, and shows God's grace. God was at work in his family to "fulfil the oath which he swore to Abraham" (Gen 26:3).

However the book of Genesis closes with the family of Jacob in the land of Egypt. The book concludes therefore in anticipation. As Joseph put it in the last few verses "God will visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob" (Gen 50:24).



The book of Genesis could be summed up with one verse: Gen 50:20 ***You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*** Whatever mankind tries to do to thwart God's plans, God's will always ultimately prevails - this is not surprising as he merely spoke and the whole of creation came into being!

Looking forward to the fulfillment

Galatians 3:1-9

¹ You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. ² I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? ³ Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? ⁴ Have you suffered so much for nothing--if it really was for nothing? ⁵ Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? ⁶ Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." ⁷ Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. ⁸ The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." ⁹ So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

How is Abraham viewed as righteous before God?

Who are Abraham's children?

How are we viewed as righteous before God?

How was the gospel announced in advance?

Where will it see its ultimate fulfilment? [Matthew 8:5-13; Revelation 7:9-12]

Think through it

Nelson Mandela was sentenced to life imprisonment and served 27 years of that sentence. He was released on 11 February 1990. In 1994 he became the president of the national of South Africa. One of his famous quotes reads;

I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.

What keeps a man's hopes alive after such a long time of waiting?

When you next find yourself waiting, remember that God is faithful and rewards faith in his word.

