

STUDY GUIDE

CHURCH
NAME

T H E

COMEBACK

ABRAHAM, PART 1

GENESIS 12:1-7, GENESIS 15:1-21; GENESIS 21:1-7

01/28/2018



NEW VISION

MAIN POINT

Believers obey God's call by faith, receive God's promise by faith, and trust God's promise by faith.

INTRODUCE

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is the most significant promise you have made? Were you able to keep that promise? Why or why not?

What determines whether we believe a promise made to us?

The source of a promise, the nature of the promise, and the time frame in which it was made affect our decision to trust the promise. Most of us would likely say we believe promises from God. Today, as we look at the life of Abraham in Genesis, we will consider how willing we are to take God at His Word and surrender to His plan.

READ AND REFLECT

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 12:1-7.

God told Abraham some very specific things about how He would bless him. First, God promised to make Abraham into a great nation, meaning that he would represent an entire line of people. Then He promised to give Abraham a great name and a new land. Finally, God told Abraham that all of the peoples on the earth were going to be blessed through him.

What did Abraham have to sacrifice in order to obey God's call?

Why is it often difficult for us to take God at His Word? What does our unbelief say about our view of God's character and power?

To do all God called him to, Abraham had to let go of his community, security, and identity. To Abraham, these promises must have seemed extravagant and unlikely. His wife was barren. How could he be the father of a great

nation if he could not produce one son? How could his name be great on the earth if there was no son to carry it on after he died?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 15:1-6.

Many event-filled years have passed since God first made His promise to Abraham in Genesis 12. Abraham almost lost his wife to Pharaoh and the promised land to his nephew Lot. He almost lost his life and all his possessions in a war with four kings. He still had no child, and his current heir was a Syrian slave.

Why did Abraham doubt he would ever become a father? What indicates Abraham had given up hope?

While grateful for God's promises, Abraham wondered about the value of the reward if he had no son to give it to. Abraham had entered Canaan at age seventy-five with Sarah, who was then sixty-five years old. Several years had passed and the couple remained childless. Abraham may have wondered if he would ever have a son. It seems as though Abraham had little hope God would actually fulfill His promises. Fear and worry were starting to creep into his heart.

What does God's kind response tell us about His character and grace?

Abraham was persuaded by God's promises and by His power to bring them into existence. This kind of faith takes on the character of obedience. This kind of faith in God alone is credited for righteousness.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 15:7-21.

How did God respond to Abraham's doubts (vv. 9-10)? Why did God ask Abraham to do this?

It was a common Ancient Near Eastern custom to seal a covenant with the sacrifice of animals. According to this custom, when an agreement was made between two people, the lesser person in the agreement would walk between the severed pieces of the dead animals to indicate that if he broke his end of the agreement, he too would be torn in two.

Who is the lesser person in the covenant between God and Abraham? Who do you expect to walk between the pieces of the dead animals?

Who walks between the pieces of the animals (v. 17)? What does a "smoking fire pot and a flaming torch" symbolize? How does this story remind you of the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Smoke and fire are symbols in the Old Testament of God's presence. God met Moses in a burning bush (Ex. 3:2) and God led Israel out of Egypt in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Ex. 13:21-22). Thus in verse 17, God Himself passes between the pieces of the animals. By doing this, God was promising to bear the consequences of His own covenant (2 Corinthians 5:21). As the lesser person in the covenant, Abraham should have passed between the pieces, but instead God passes through the pieces giving us sure hope that He would fulfill His promises to Abraham and to us as the covenant God made with Abraham has been extended to us through Christ (Rom. 4:23-25).

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 21:1-7.

Finally, the long-awaited fulfillment of God's promise came about. What does Sarah's pregnancy teach us about God? What does Sarah's pregnancy teach us about faith?

What does it make you think about God that He had Abraham and Sarah name their son "Laughter"?

God is a promise-keeping God. He promised Abraham and Sarah that they would have a son, and when it seemed all hope was lost for that promise to come to pass, God made it happen. God is full of wonderful surprises. God knows we are fragile and that our faith can be fickle, but if we live in faith, even when it is small, God will forgive us of all our sins and fill our lives with His grace.

APPLY

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What are some ways that your heart is like Abraham's heart? In what ways are you struggling to surrender trust and control to God?

How does knowing that God always remains faithful to His Word help us through seasons when our faith is weak?

How might we tangibly encourage one another to believe God and surrender to His plans this week and in the weeks ahead?

PRAY

Spend some time thanking God for His promises and His faithfulness to always uphold His end of the covenant, even when we are unfaithful. Take time to thank God for sending Jesus and declaring us His righteous children.

COMMENTARY

GENESIS 12:1-7

12:1-3. According to Acts 7:2, The Lord spoke to Abram while he was still in Mesopotamia (Gen. 11:31). God gave Abram a one-verb command with four aspects to it. Abram was to go out from (1) his land, (2) his relatives, and (3) his father's house, (4) to a land chosen by God. Obedience to God often means leaving one thing in order to receive something else even better.

12:4. Having migrated with his father's household from Ur (11:31), Abram stayed an uncertain amount of time in Haran. Since Terah lived 145 years after the birth of Abram (11:26,32) and Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran, Abram literally fulfilled the command to leave his father's house (v. 1).

12:5. Abram was apparently his nephew Lot's protector since Lot's father had died in Ur (11:28). The group's journey to Canaan was about 450 miles.

12:6. Shechem is in north central Israel on the slope of Mount Ebal. Abram's grandson Jacob would live for a time in this region as well (33:18-19). Later, Abram's great grandson Joseph would be buried there (Josh. 24:32). The Canaanites were a distinct cultural group (Gen. 15:21), but the term "Canaanite" is also an umbrella term for many different people groups who were living in the region, including the Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Hivites, and Jebusites.

12:7. This is the first of three times Scripture indicates that the Lord physically appeared to Abram (cp. 17:1; 18:1). The Lord's promise to give the land of Canaan to Abram's offspring is the single most repeated affirmation in the Torah. At least 37 references are made to it in the books of Moses. The altar Abram built at Shechem is the first of four he is said to have built; others were set up between Bethel and Ai (v. 8), at Hebron (13:18), and at Mt. Moriah (22:9).

GENESIS 15:1-21

15:1. Abram's role as a prophet is shown here. Visions were one of two standard means (the other was dreams) by which the Lord revealed His word to people. The only other patriarch who is said to have received a vision was Jacob. The vision's content included a command (Do not be afraid), an assurance (I am your shield), and a promise (your very great reward). The Lord would reward him richly.

15:2-3. Neither God's protection nor His reward seemed important to elderly Abram since all his goods would go to Eliezer of Damascus, a slave born in his house. Engaging in something of a pity party, Abram made seven references to himself (in the Hebrew) in the space of twenty-two Hebrew words and twice utters the complaint that he was childless.

15:4-6. Ignoring Abram's apparent lack of gratitude, the Lord gave Abram one of the great promises of the Bible; the elderly patriarch would produce an heir from his own body. God then made the breathtaking promise that Abram's offspring would be as numerous as the stars. Old and childless, Abram believed the Lord, that is, he affirmed that God is dependable. God credited it to him as righteousness, that is, He judged or accounted that Abram measured up to the standard, conformed to the norm. Abram's faith and God's gracious response to it served as a paradigm of the Christian experience in three different New Testament books (Rm 4:3; Gal 3:6; Jms 2:23).

15:8-9. Abram, the shrewd businessman who had once dealt with earth's mightiest human—the pharaoh of Egypt (12:14-19)—now negotiated with the Lord God. How can he be assured of God's promise? Verse 9 provides the answer. God provided assurance in the form of a solemn commitment ceremony. The cow, female goat, and ram were mammals later authorized for sacrifice in the Law of Moses; however, this is the only time that three-year-olds—specimens in the prime of their lives—were used. Turtledoves and young pigeons were permitted for certain Israelite sacrifices (Lv 5:7). The ceremony here differs from other sacred rituals in the Old Testament involving animals in that no animal parts were burned.

15:13-16. Here the Lord revealed to Abram the prophet an outline of the events of Genesis 46 through Exodus 13. Like Abram himself, his promised offspring would live as foreigners. The land that did not belong to them was Egypt, where they would be enslaved and oppressed (Ex 1:11-14) for approximately 400 years (more precisely, 430 years; Ex 12:40). God would judge the nation they served through a series of ten miraculous plagues (Ex 7:14-12:30), after which they would go out with many possessions (Ex 12:35-36). Though Abram would not live to see these events, he would go to [his] fathers in peace—die a peaceful death—and be buried at the ripe old age of 175 (25:7). Abram's descendants would return to the land in the fourth generation, that is, after four hundred years in Egypt; in this case, each generation seems to be one hundred years, Abram's age when Isaac was born (21:5). The Lord also hinted regarding the purpose of the return of Abram's descendants to the promised land. In large part Israel's return to Canaan would bring God's judgment on the iniquity of the Amorites.

15:17. When the sun had set, the Lord caused a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch to appear and pass between the divided animals. Both elements symbolized essential aspects of God; the smoke perhaps representing divine inscrutability, and the flame God's power. By going between the divided carcasses, the Lord was solemnly obligating Himself to fulfill the terms of the covenant—symbolically indicating that He would Himself be split asunder if He failed to carry out His promises.

15:18-21. The second explicit covenant in the Bible between God and a person (9:9-17) is established here with Abram, obliging God to provide the patriarch with offspring and a geographic inheritance for them that began in the south with the brook of Egypt (either the Wadi El-Arish or the Shihor River—the easternmost branch of the Nile in Egypt's delta region) and extended as far north as the Euphrates River. The list of ten different people groups here is the longest list of Canaan's inhabitants in the Torah. This is the only list to include the Kenites, Kenizzites, and Kadmonites; the Kenites and Kenizzites were probably groups living in the Negev that coexisted peacefully with the Israelites. Perhaps the Kadmonites were the same as the Qedemites, a desert-dwelling enemy of Israel.

GENESIS 22:1-18

22:1-2. Abraham's ultimate test of obedience to God is described in 22:1-19. God used this event to affirm the sterling character of Abraham's faith by giving him the incredibly difficult task of sacrificing his son Isaac. Pagans in Canaan during the OT period regularly practiced child sacrifice by making them pass through the fire (2Ki 16:3) to give them as food to their gods (Ezek 23:37). With this command God was asking Abraham to demonstrate that he was as committed to the Lord God as pagans were to their gods.

22:3-4. Confirmation of Abraham's amazing trust in God is found first in the fact that he was up before sunrise (early in the morning) the next day to begin the journey. His diligence in going to the place God had told him about contrasts sharply with Jonah's actions (Jnh 1:3). Traveling from Beer-sheba, it was not until the third day that Abraham reached the Jerusalem area.

22:5-8. Evidence that Abraham believed God could raise Isaac from the dead (Heb 11:17-18) is found in his comment, we'll come back. Abraham carried the most dangerous elements of the sacrifice—the fire and the sacrificial knife—himself, perhaps as a sign of his protective love for Isaac. Ignorant of God's command and surprised that his father would forget the most important element in an animal sacrifice, Isaac asked Abraham where the lamb was. Abraham's faith-filled response was that God Himself would provide the lamb ("sheep").

22:9-14. Abraham followed the standard procedure for a burnt offering involving a living being. In describing his preparation, the Bible emphasizes only Abraham's systematic acts of obedience, omitting any mention of Abraham's or Isaac's feelings. Just before the knife was put to Isaac's neck, the Angel of the Lord spared him. The patriarch had passed the test, providing experiential evidence that he feared God more than he loved his only son. Exactly as Abraham had predicted (v. 8), God had miraculously provided a sheep—and the most prized variety, a ram. To memorialize the event Abraham named that place The Lord Will Provide.

22:15-18. As the Angel of the Lord who had the Lord's authority, the divine emissary delivered a second message (v. 12), this one in the first person. Because Abraham had passed the "priorities test" by obeying God and not withholding his only son, the Lord would indeed bless him with offspring, victory, land, and goodwill.