

OT Narratives Bible Study Series
Genesis 12-15 & 17 - Abraham & the life of faith

For Discussion:

Are there areas in your life that you're having a hard time trusting God with? Why do you think that might be?

Read Genesis 11:27-12:9 & 13:12-18

-Who was Abram (see also Joshua 24:1-3)? What did God call Abram to do, and what did God promise him? What was Abram's response?

- Abram was a descendent of Shem, son of Terah (11:27); Joshua 24:1-3 tells us that he worshipped other gods before God called him
- God called Abram to leave his family & home, to go to a place that God would show him
- God promised to bless Abraham (12:2-3)
 - to make him into a great nation, and make his name great
 - to make him a blessing --> all peoples on earth would be blessed through him
 - to bless those who blessed Him; to curse those who dishonored him
- God also promised him the land he was in, and numerous descendants (13:15-17)

- Abram responded in obedience and worship
 - obedience: packed up everything and went where God had told him to go (12:4-5) - seems he had no intention of returning (though he may have gotten sidetracked for a while in Haran, until his father died - 12:4 with Acts 7:2-4)
 - worship: in this passage, we see Abram building altars wherever he goes - at least 3 altars built here (12:7, 12:8, 13:18)

Read Genesis 15:1-21; 17:1-14

-Why might Abram have had reason to question God's promises to him? How did God reassure him?

- Abram was over 75 years old, and still had no offspring of his own - could not understand how God's promise of making him into a great nation would be fulfilled, since he had no heir

- God reassured Abram by reiterating the promise --> affirmed that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars

- God also made a covenant with Abram, that he and his descendant would possess the land of Canaan (after a delay)
 - covenant = a binding agreement, to the death --> penalty for breaking a covenant was death
 - signified by cutting animals in half and passing through the pieces
 - normally both parties making the covenant would pass through the pieces together (i.e. to bind both to the covenant), but in this case, only God passed through (signified by the torch and the firepot) --> He alone was the guarantor of the covenant

- some time later, God commanded Abram and his male descendants to be circumcised, as a sign of the covenant God had made with them (17:1-14)
 - gave Abram a new name at that time = Abraham ("father of a multitude")
 - this was when Abraham was 99 years old - up to 14 (or more) years after the covenant was made in Genesis 15 (judging by Ishmael's age in 17:25)

-How did Abram respond (15:6), and why is this significant? (consider also Romans 4:1-5, 18-22)

- Abram believed God, and God counted it to him as righteousness - i.e. Abram responded with faith/trust in God
- humanly speaking, Abram had reason not to believe, but he instead trusted God and took him at His word
- this is the key thought of Genesis 15, as illustrated by chiastic structure:

- A: Gen 15:1 – a vision of God
- B: 15:2-3 – Abram questions God
- C: 15:4-5 – God's promise to Abram
- D: 15:6 – Abram believes God & is credited righteousness
- C': 15:7 – God's promise to Abram
- B': 15:8 – Abram questions God
- A': 15:9-21 – a vision of God

-Abram as the pattern/father of faith --> Key passage on which the doctrine of justification by faith is based (Rom. 4; also Gal. 3, below)

-In what ways has God fulfilled His promises to Abraham?

-Exodus 2:23-25; 3:15-17; 12:40-41

-Israel in slavery in Egypt (as per Gen. 15:13-14); God 'remembered' His covenant with Abraham and worked to bring them into the land He had promised, after 430 years in the land

-Nehemiah 9:6-8, 22-25

-God fulfilled His covenant to give Abraham and his descendants the land of the Canaanites (13:14-17; 15:18-21; 17:8)

-1 Kings 4:20-21

-Abraham's descendants as numerous as the sands by the sea --> a great nation (cf. Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-16; 15:5; 17:5-6)

-kings have come from Abraham (17:6), with Solomon now ruling over all the land God promised Abraham

-Galatians 3:16

-God's promise to bless the world through the offspring of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3, with 22:18) is fulfilled in Jesus Christ

-Romans 4:1-5, 9-25; with Galatians 3:6-9

-God's promises to Abraham in Gen. 12 & 15 were not just for Abraham's physical descendants, but those who have the same faith as Abraham

-those who have the same faith as Abraham are the sons of Abraham (Romans 4:16-17; Gal. 3:7)

- "he is the father of us all" (Rom. 4:11-12; 16:17)

-Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith (Gal. 3:8) --> "preached the Gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed'" (Gen. 12:3)

-those who trust God who justifies the ungodly; and who believe in Him who raised Jesus Christ from the dead --

> our faith is counted as righteousness, as Abraham's was (Rom. 4:5, 23-25)

-those who are of faith receive Abraham's blessing (Gal. 3:9)

-Romans 11:25-29

-though Abraham's physical descendants (the nation of Israel) has fallen away at the present time, Paul makes it clear that this is only temporary

-they are undergoing a 'partial hardening' (Rom. 11:25) until the full number of Gentiles is saved (Rom. 11:25)

-but God one day will again save Israel and take them to Himself, because "they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." (Rom. 11:28-29)

-i.e. God has not forgotten his covenant with Abraham; it's just not yet completely fulfilled

-What does Abraham's example teach us about the life of faith? (you might also consider Hebrews 11:8-16)

-faith means trusting God and taking Him at His word, even when the way forward may not seem clear to us, and when fulfillment of His promises are still far in the future

-e.g. trusting God that he would have descendants that couldn't be numbered, even when he didn't have a single one

-may involve wrestling with understanding God and His purposes, but does not descend into distrust or unbelief

-looks beyond what we can see (or not see)

-based on a relationship with God

-faith shows itself in action & obedience - e.g. leaving family & home at God's command

-a life of active trust that places following God above personal comfort/convenience --> 'sojourners & exiles'

-a life of worship - seen in Abram building altars wherever he settled

For further reflection

Hebrews 11:6 teaches us that without faith, it is impossible to please God. Abram's faith in God was the basis of his acceptance as righteous in God's sight (15:6), and the basis of the intimate fellowship he enjoyed with God. And although he grappled with understanding how God's promises would be worked out through him, 'No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised.' (Rom 4:20-21). As a result, he continued to know God's presence, comfort and affirmation in his life, even as he waited for fulfillment of the things promised.

Spend some time reflecting on what it means to live by faith in your daily life. Are you trusting fully in God, fully persuaded that He will do all that He has promised? Are there promises that you're having a hard time trusting Him to keep? Commit your uncertainties, fears and anxieties in these areas to Him in prayer, and learn to place your trust fully in Him.

Additional Resources

CGYG/LIFE website: www.cgygfellowship.com (Resources section)

- Genesis Bible study series: http://www.cgygfellowship.com/BBS_Genesis.shtml
- OT Daily Devotional series

CGC website: OT Survey and Genesis adult Christian education materials: <http://www.cgctorenglish.chinesegospelchurch.ca> (Resources section)