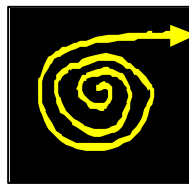
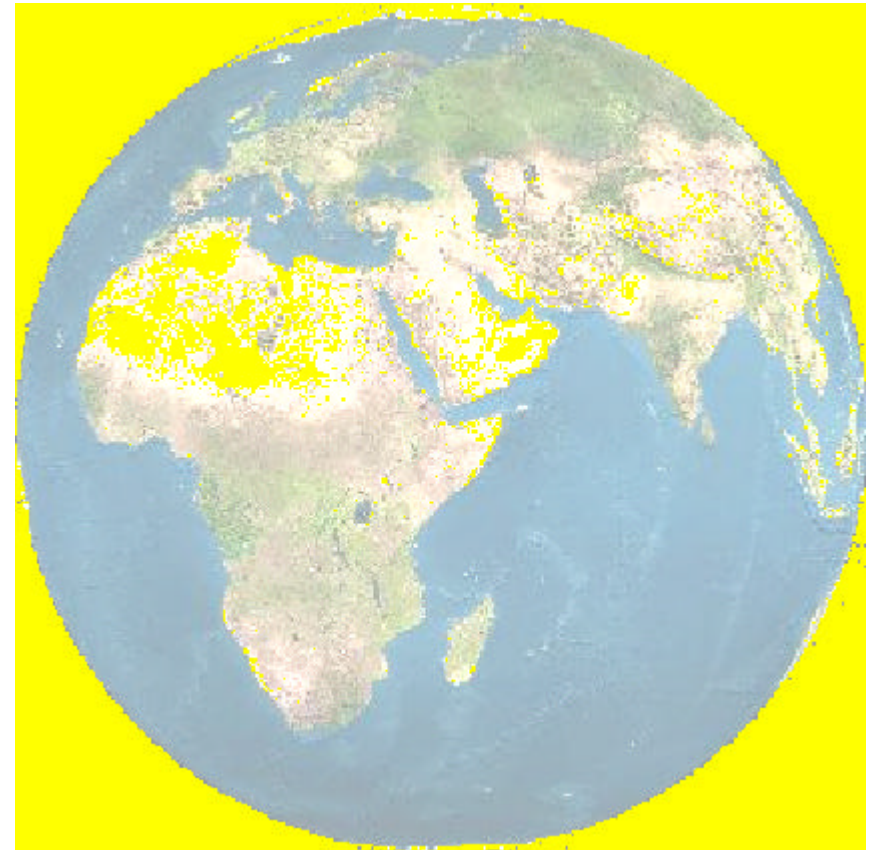


# The God who Promises



Central Productions

8 Studies on Gen 12-50



# Prayer Points

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# 1. A Promising Start?

Genesis 12

# Prayer Points

## *Setting the scene*

Have you ever tried doing something really well and in the end ripped it up or trashed it because it just wasn't what you wanted it to be?

Can you remember kids at school who, when learning to write, would tear out whole pages and begin all over again rather than literally have a blot on their copy book? Maybe you were 'that' person - your book ended up half the size of everybody else's.

Or have you ever watched siblings play together? The older one is creating a masterpiece in "Lego"! She painstakingly puts on the finishing touches then, just as she turns to get Mum's praise, the "Lego monster baby", James, touches and really does 'finish off' the masterpiece. There's a cry of outrage and what was lovingly put together is now destroyed or ignored.

Complete destruction or just giving up on the world was an option for the creator God when sin entered the world and disfigured his 'very good' creation. God's wonderful design of blessing and goodness was disfigured and cursed by the very creatures who were made to increase God's good order (Gen 1-2) – the man and woman.

## *How?*

Humankind chose independence over dependence on the creator God, rebellion rather than being subject to the Lord of the universe and futility over divine purpose (Gen 3). Curse replaced blessing, death is substituted for life and pain qualifies joy – welcome to our world.

What was significant is that God didn't give up, he didn't destroy the world.

Sin, spiritual 'republicanism' raised its head in the next generation in all its self-destructiveness. A brother murdering a brother is the ripening fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The ground is cursed, but the Lord remains patient (Gen 4)

# A life Full of Promise

## Events...

## Ages...

\_\_\_\_\_ Abram born to Terah in Ur with his brothers Nahor and Haran. He marries Sarai his half-sister and his brother Haran fathers Lot.

\_\_\_\_\_ Set out for Canaan but only get as far as Haran and they settle there.

\_\_\_\_\_ Abram 75 years old when he sets out with Sarai and Lot for Canaan. Gen.12v4

\_\_\_\_\_ Abram is 86 years old when Ishmael is born to him. Gen.16v16

\_\_\_\_\_ Abram is 99 years old he is told Sarah (90 years old) will bear him a son and he receives sign of circumcision. Gen. 17v1

\_\_\_\_\_ Abram is 100 years old when Isaac is born. Gen.21v5

\_\_\_\_\_ Sarah dies at 127 Abraham was 136 approx. Gen.23v1

\_\_\_\_\_ Isaac is 40 when he marries Rebekah. Gen. 25v20

\_\_\_\_\_ Isaac is 60 when Rebekah has Esau and Jacob Gen. 25v26

\_\_\_\_\_ Abram dies at 175. Gen.25v7

\_\_\_\_\_ Esau is 40 when he marries. Isaac aprox 100 Gen. 26v34

\_\_\_\_\_ Ishmael 137 when he dies Gen.25v17

\_\_\_\_\_ Isaac is 180 when he dies Gen. 35v29

\_\_\_\_\_ Joseph 30 when he works for Pharaoh Gen. 41 v46

\_\_\_\_\_ Jacob is 130 when he comes to Egypt Gen.47v9

\_\_\_\_\_ Joseph is 110 when he dies Gen.50v22

Sin and rebellion are the dominate characteristics of humanity despite a number of exceptions. The Lord is so fed up that he decides to clean up the world in one cataclysmic act of judgement (Gen 6). But even in this he demonstrates his grace and patience. In a storm tossed sea, a boat rides high on the water that has obliterated the earth (Gen 7). Within it lies what is left of humanity and the animal kingdom – the seed of a new beginning.

But things aren't really any better – we can't get back to Eden that way.

As human beings multiply so does their ability to offend God (Gen 11). No longer as individuals but as a co-operative. As a culture human beings band together by building a tower, to assault heaven itself in a breathtaking act of arrogance which attracts first God's attention and then his anger. Humanity is fractured along the fault line of language – their unity the foundation of the assault on heaven now in tatters.

The stage of history is now dark and foreboding. Sin and judgment seem to have taken centre stage, the LORD seems to have had disappeared. In the darkness a question forms in our minds and comes trembling to our lips, **"Has God had enough?"** If he has we are undone!

What is most remarkable about God's dealings with Abraham is that God should have any dealings with human beings at all!

Then down in the corner of this vast theatre appears a man called Abram in answer to that question. It's a strange answer but an answer none the less.

God's dealings with human beings have turned a corner and changed scale. An individual, a small family – and not much of one at that, now occupies the Lord's attention – and ours.

To answer the question, "has God had enough?" we find a genealogy in Genesis 11. It is a strange answer but some understanding of genealogies might help. (see the side bar)

1. How does the genealogy in Genesis 11 answer the question we ask after the Babel story, "Has God had enough?"

2. What characters are we being introduced to?

3. What information are we given about Abram?

## Genealogies

Genealogies are like instruction booklets– we don't read them, & if we do we don't understand them.

However genealogies play an important role in the Bible. They serve to introduce us to new characters who are going to become prominent in the story.

## Ur of the Chaldeans

In ancient times it was to be found on the banks of the Euphrates River, near the head of the Persian Gulf, on the edge of the desert.

Due to its position it was able to control traffic and therefore 'international' trade on the river and so became wealthy. It was the centre of the worship of the god 'Sin' and his temple called a ziggurat symbolised the heavenly mountain and the god's dwelling. It was the place where heaven and earth touched.

In the desert dwelt the shepherds despised by the people of Ur. It may well be that Abram left the sophisticated life of the city to become one of these despised shepherds.

## Water

Haran had a stable water supply as it was situated on the Balih river, 20 miles south of Edessa.

## Canaan

It was a new way of life with no large rivers and no guarantees, except for the god who made promises.

# A Family Tree

4. Add in the family details of Terah that we are told on the family tree in the appendix, and add any relevant information ie Joshua 24v2
5. Fill in the map of the Ancient Near East in the appendix with the details of 11v31. Use arrows to show the peoples movements.

6. Read Genesis 12v1-3  
What did Abraham leave and what was the significance of this?

7. There are five promise, in the table over the page fill in the gaps, listing them and summarising each one.

The promises will shape each episode in the life of Abraham. They will shape the purposes of God in the rest of the Bible.

7. How many times is the word "bless" used in these 3 verses?

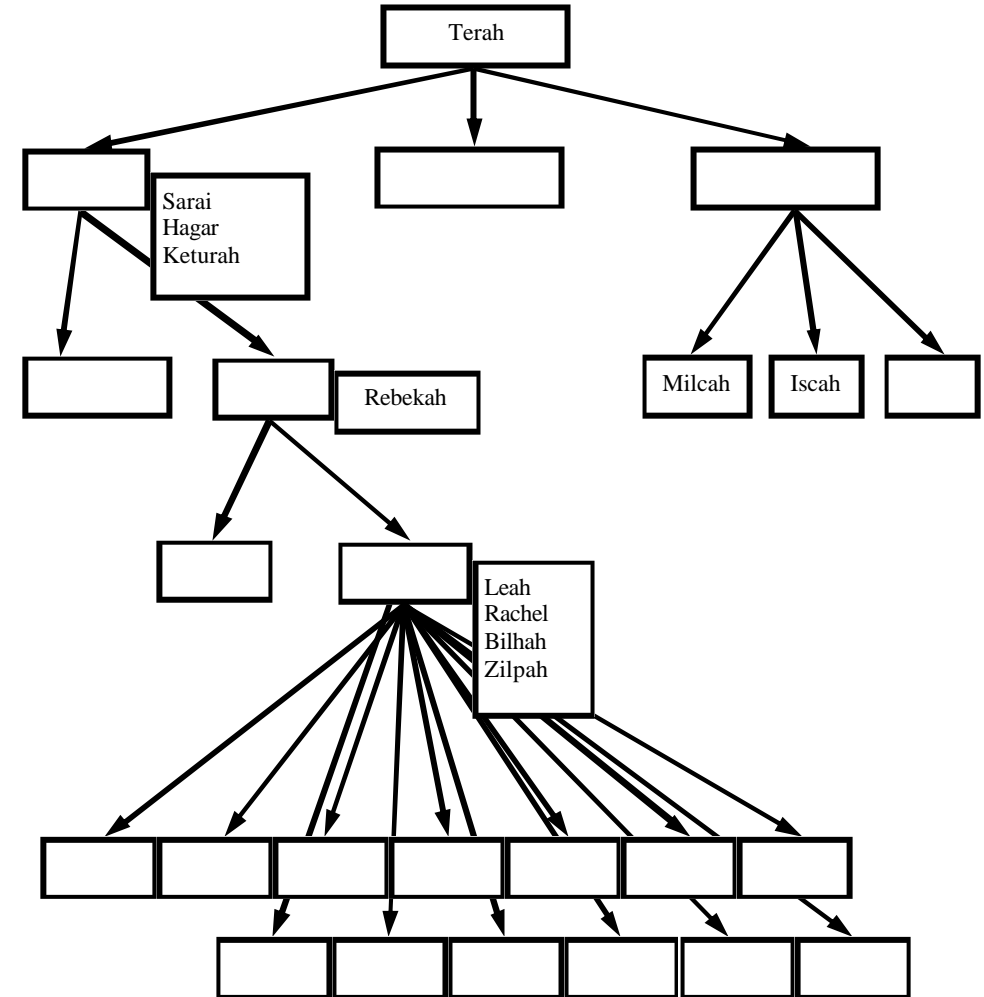
Abraham stands as God's alternative to a world gone wrong, God promises to bless him a number of times in a number of ways.

8. Look up Genesis 3v14, 3v17, 4v11, 5v29, 9v25. What do the blessings completely neutralise?

9. Read Genesis 12v4-9 Add the details to the map in the appendix.

10. What did Abram build when he came with his family to the land of Canaan?

11. When reading about the life of Abram, it is helpful to work out which promise is being brought into view. Read 12v10-20, which promise is particularly in view in this story?



	Promise	Summary
1.	<i>"go to the land I will show you"</i>	<i>Land</i>
2.		
3.		
4.	<i>"I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you"</i>	<i>Protection</i>
5.		<i>Blessing to the World</i>

12. Does Abram trust God to protect him?

13. Why does God save Abram from his own foolishness?

#### *New testament Perspectives*

In all the darkness and despair of the exile and the disappointment of the return to the promised land the Jews continued to trust in the God who made promises to Abraham.

9. How did God answer their question, "Has God given up on us?" Read Matthew 1v1-17

Abraham is the one through whom the promises come but at another level he is the model of faith. Learning from him and his family will teach us lessons about trusting the God who fulfils his promises in Jesus.

15. The Oxford English Reference Dictionary says of faith:

1. complete trust or confidence.
2. Firm belief, esp. without logical proof.
3. a system of religious belief (*the Christian Faith*).
4. belief in religious doctrines
5. spiritual apprehension of divine truth apart from proof.
6. things believed or to be believed.
7. duty or commitment to fulfil a trust, promise etc: obligation, allegiance (*keep faith*)

Discuss which of these definitions comes closest to the faith Abraham is

#### **Blessing & Curses**

Judges 17.1-2  
Now a man named Micah from the hill country of Ephraim<sup>2</sup> said to his mother, "The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from you and about which I heard you utter a curse—I have that silver with me; I took it."

In this strange story we see the connections between blessing and curses.

## Altars

In the bible altars are erected to commemorate significant moments, usually where the one building the altar had had dealings with God.

Both building the altar and offering a sacrifice on it for Abram were expressions of faith in the promises of God.

called upon to display and say why some are completely wrong and where they could be improved.

18. Joseph comforts his brothers not by minimising their actions against him, but does what? How does he do it? 50v19-21

### *New Testament Perspectives*

Read Acts 7:9-16. Stephen is preaching before the Sanhedrin rehearsing the history of Israel's relation to their God given leaders. Joseph is one of those leaders. There is a pattern to God's leaders.

1. They are rejected by God's people,
2. The leaders still save God's people
3. The leaders are vindicated.

19. Show this pattern in Joseph's life:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

20. Stephen's speech is aimed at showing how Jesus' ministry has this shape as well. Using the three points outline Jesus' ministry.

Joseph dies like his father looking toward the future and planning to join the exodus with the rest of Israel. Joseph is the most clear saviour figure of the patriarchs and once again we see the pattern of salvation through suffering and then exultation.



10. It became obvious that the Lord had supremely gifted Joseph for the task he had outlined in 41v33-36. This is all according to God's plan. What do you think the Lord is doing through Joseph?

11. The storing of the excess grain not only saves Egypt but the whole world. How does this fulfil one of the promises to Abraham?

12. Joseph's dreams come true when his brothers visit to buy grain – they come before Egypt's second in command and don't recognise him. Why does Joseph put his brothers through such trauma?

13. Joseph never acts out of spite or revenge but rather integrity, warmth and love, why? 45v4-7

Israel goes down to Egypt in chapter 47. Without knowing it, they are fulfilling the word of the Lord to Abraham in 15v13. The Exodus is four hundred years away.

14. Jacob comes to Egypt and is welcomed by Pharaoh. They are allowed to settle in the land Goshen. Even in Egypt Jacob knew his future and his families future was back in Canaan. What did he make Joseph promise? 47v28-31

15. In chapter 49 we have the 'blessings' of the sons of Israel that look beyond the immediate to the future. What is significant about the blessing pronounced upon Judah? 49v8-12

16. The quiet assurance and confidence of Jacob in death stand in marked contrast to his early 'grasping' life. What shaped his death? 49v29-33

17. Why would Joseph's brothers worry about Joseph's intentions now their father has died?

## 2. All That Glitters...

Genesis 13-15

Human beings have a marvelous ability to put their confidence in people or things that in the end will let them down. Examples of our gullibility litter the pages of history. But one of the most breath taking is that of one man's trust in Adolf Hitler.

In 1938 Neville Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, arrived back in London after a meeting with Hitler and Mussolini in Munich. He waved a piece of paper in the air and claimed it represented "Peace in our time"! Chamberlain is supposed to have said, "I trust Adolf Hitler."

Chamberlain thought that he had bought peace by handing over Czechoslovakia to Hitler.

Winston Churchill said at the time: 'The belief that security can be obtained by throwing a small state to the wolves is a fatal delusion.'

Of course we'd never put our confidence in anything as ridiculous as that? Would we?

Read Genesis 13.

1. Blessings, even from God can be 'mixed' and require tough choices. How did prosperity for Abram and Lot lead to difficulties?
2. What solution did Abram suggest to his nephew?
3. What strikes you as unusual about this arrangement?
4. What were the aspects of 'the plain of the Jordan' that made it attractive to Lot? Think of what happened in Canaan in the previous chapter and how the Jordan plain must have seemed more like home in Ur and Haran

5. What two notes of warning are sounded in the description of Lot's 'plot'? 13v10,13
6. What was the 'plot' Abram lived in? 13v12
7. Where was the promised land? 12v5,6
8. The Lord speaks to Abram and confirms his commitment to bless Abram and elaborates on two of the original promises. In what ways?

What motivates Lot seems to be a desire for security. With family now two steps removed (step one when he left the extended family in Haran and now step two moving from Abram) the matter of his own vulnerability comes to the fore. Living on the Jordan plain appears to give him security he craves, it is well watered for his flocks and it has the security of numbers – he pitched his tent right next to Sodom (Gen 13v12)

His choices are determined not by the promises the Lord has made to Abram – otherwise he would have wanted to stay in Canaan and as near as possible to Abram through whom he has already been blessed.

“All that glitters is not Gold” goes the old saying and it's certainly true concerning Lot's attempt at securing his future.

In the battle of the Salt Sea four northern kings come against five tax avoiding kings. The northern confederation came down the main trade route the 'Kings Highway', went into Edom and circled back and took all before them. As four kings faced five kings in battle, it was the locals who got the worst of it..

9. When we hear that Sodom and Gomorrah are taken and Lot is taken too, Lot has obviously been trying to get a little more security. How 13v12?

Joseph seems to be headed for greatness but his brother reject him. The hatred Joseph's brothers had toward him found an opportunity to show itself. He is alone and they decide to kill him and deceive their father. Only one brother, Ruben, plans to save him later but his plans are frustrated by Judah's plan to make some money out of the whole deal – Joseph isn't killed he's sold as a slave in Egypt to the captain of the guards! When Jacob hears he is inconsolable.

3. Chapters 38 and 39 give us a strong contrast between two sons of Jacob. List the differences.

Joseph descends further into obscurity and apparent hopelessness, but that's not the whole story.

4. Three times in chapter 39 v2, 20,22 the Lord is involved in the turn of events that confront Joseph. As we read this how does this effect the assessment of the drama?

#### *Upwardly Mobile*

Chapter 40 introduces us to a Joseph who not only dreams but whom the Lord gives the ability to interpret dreams. Joseph's ability to interpret truly is confirmed by the life and death of the head steward and the baker.

5. How long did Joseph wait for the cupbearer to remember his help? 41v1
6. Joseph does not become bitter through all these terrible circumstances. Why?
7. Why did the cupbearer remember Joseph?
8. How did Joseph respond to the claim that he could interpret dreams? 41v16
9. What did Pharaoh's dreams indicate?

# 8 Joseph

## Dream Brother

Genesis 37-50

Some time ago now an art professor was visiting the French Embassy in New York. The embassy is in a big old building. In a dim corner of the foyer there's a fountain. In the middle of the fountain there's a little statue of Cupid; the fellow who shoots people with his bow and arrow and makes them fall in love.

When this art professor saw it there, she started asking questions. As far as anyone knew, it had been there in the middle of the fountain in the foyer of the building since 1905. No one knew where it had come from.

The thing was, this visiting art professor had noticed some interesting features about the statue and how it was made. So she started some serious research.

And in the end, it turned out this little broken statue in the middle of the fountain in this building in New York is a genuine Michelangelo. It's worth millions and millions of dollars. It's been sitting there unappreciated and unrecognised for the last ninety years. People just walked past it every day even though it's the work of one of the greatest sculptors the world has ever seen. And now, people come there to the building **ESPECIALLY TO LOOK AT IT**. When just months before they'd walk right past.

God's leaders in the Bible follow a similar patten of being installed unappreciated but then acknowledged by God at least as his masterpiece.

1. How does Israel make the same mistake his parents made with Esau and himself? 37v3-4
2. Dreams have featured a number of times so far. We know God speaks through them. Joseph's two dreams antagonised his brothers further. Why? 37v5-11

10. It is surprising enough that Abram goes out after Lot let alone beat the five kings and frees Lot. How did Abram's 318 trained men destroy the northern confederation? 14v20

*A Tale of Two Kings – Genesis 14v17-24.*

11. There are two kings contrasted here. Who are they?

12. The King of Salem (Peace) and the King of Sodom have very different attitudes to Abram. Describe how the two different attitudes display themselves? Why the difference?

13. What is Abram's response to the blessing of the priest of 'God Most High'?

14. What does the King of Sodom offer and what is Abram's response?

15. How does Abram's response demonstrate his loyalty to the LORD, God Most High?

*"Cross Your heart and hope to die" Chapter 15*

16. Abram's loyalty to the LORD draws a response from Him. What does the LORD say and how does it relate to the immediate past events?

17. What blessing, as yet unfulfilled, does Abram raise as an issue to the LORD's declaration of protection and reward?

18. The LORD assures Abram of what? Is Sarai included?

19. Abram's response becomes the model of how humans should respond to the God who speaks and how they are declared righteous before God. How did he respond?

20. What did Abram believe?

The Lord having promised offspring reminds Abram of the promise of the Land. Abram asks how can he know he will get the Land? The Lord asked for a heifer, a goat and a ram each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon. Abram knew what was to be done, he cuts them in half and separates the pieces – the LORD is about to formally ratify his promises – he is going to make a covenant. As darkness falls, a still greater darkness falls on Abram and the Lord speaks.

21. What will happen to Abram's descendants?

22. If Abram makes no promises who bears the responsibility for maintaining the covenant?

### *New Testament Perspectives*

The shape of faith in the New or Old Testament is often pretty much the same.

Read 1 Corinthians 1v18-31

23. Who are the people who behave like Lot when faced with God's promise of salvation in the cross of Christ?

24. How do 'signs' and 'wisdom' seem to provide security?

25. What can't signs and wisdom do v21?

26. When are you tempted to trust in things other than God's promises in Christ?

27. How can we as a church be tempted to trust in things other than the cross of Christ?

17. Jacob holds on to his opponent like a boxer whose strength is diminishing, he suspects something of who this 'man' is. What does he want from him?

18. He not only gets the blessing he gets a name change to signify, a change in approach to the blessings? What does it mean?

The 'deceiver' has become the 'struggler', losing becomes the way to win.

The anticipated showdown with Esau is a non-event. But Israel finds it difficult to settle down. His wife dies and his sons display aspects of his own deceiving and grasping past nature.

### *New Testament Perspectives*

If we were honest there wasn't much about either Esau or Jacob that was attractive. Yet the Lord chose one over the other and to underline that it was a matter of choice and not a matter of a 'firstborn blessing' he chose the second – the grasping Jacob.

In a world where we are convinced that choosing the right brand of ... you fill in the blank is a moment in self-authentication, we can sometimes think we choose to follow Christ.

We need to see this from God's perspective. Read Romans 9v6-16

19. What could God's choice of Jacob over Esau be based on? 9v11

20. What principle does this establish? 9v12

21. Reflecting on the lives of Jacob and Esau who would win the salvation by work race?

The issue is that no human being deserves to be saved. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" Romans 3v23 but God in his great mercy works in the hearts of some so they can see the value of the blessings of God in Christ.

22. If you are a follower of Jesus what should your prayer be?

The symbolism of a normal covenant ceremony between two parties is such that each makes their promises walking between the pieces of the animals with the clear implication that God witnesses the agreement and if they fail to be faithful what has happened to the sacrifice will happen to them – they'll be cut in half.

# 3. Giving God a helping Hand

Genesis 16-17

In the last chapter, chapter 15, there is a clear expectation of what the Lord will do, or is there? From the beginning when God first called Abram and his barren wife to become a nation, to have a land, to live under his protection, to be famous and to be the means of blessing for the whole earth, we have been waiting but no one is 'expecting' yet.

We've been waiting for the Lord to do something! The covenant ceremony of chapter 15 with the reaffirmation of the promises have heightened our expectation but chapter sixteen begins with the uncompromising statement of the problem...

*"Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children."*

And has Sarai been mentioned in any context so far as part of the solution or only part of the problem? – she isn't mentioned by name in the detail of chapter fifteen. We suspected in the beginning that she would be involved but what about now?

If you talk to couples who are childless in our own day, you quickly get a sense of the agony and frustration associated with failed attempts to become pregnant, especially if they're in an IVF programme. Every month hopes rise only to be dashed again, and understanding and hopeful patience is replaced by a sense of recrimination and failure.

That's the situation in our culture, imagine the pressure in the ancient world – the world of Sarai. The inability to bear children was a failure that could lead to divorce. The pressure to get pregnant would be enormous – now add to that in Sarai's case the expectation of a whole nation to come from her, even more than that – the world being set right will come through the child you are to bear. Month after month, year after passing year comes and goes. "Are you part of the plan? Are you at the centre or just on the edge?"

A desperate situation calls for desperate measures, doesn't it? Sarai

11. What assurance was Jacob given that he would return?

12. Read 28v20-22 What do you suspect motivated Jacob's vow? Had the Lord asked him to make one? What does it reveal about his wrong understanding of the Lord's nature?

13. How is 29v1-14 similar yet different to chapter 24?

14. How is 29v14-30 similar to chapter 27? Is this God giving Jacob a dose of his own medicine?

15. Jacob's abundance (blessing) comes through manipulation and deception and he in turn is manipulated and deceived. What does Jacob need to learn about the Lord's blessings?

Jacob decides to leave and gets confirmation of this from the Lord. He takes all he has accumulated without telling Laban of his plans and is subsequently pursued by him all the way to the border of Canaan. After being warned by the Lord to tread extra carefully with Jacob Laban makes a covenant with him.

When Jacob survives Laban's 'attack', his mind races to his old nemesis, his brother Esau. Jacob sends a humble message but when he hears news of Esau's imminent approach, he fears the worse and goes into damage control, trying to preserve as much as possible in a bad situation. He also throws a prayer up to God. It's good to cover all bases. He sends bribes to Esau. He sends everyone over the river and he is left alone on the other side by himself... or nearly. Jacob has prepared for every adversary except the most dangerous one – the Lord himself!

Early in the morning Jacob wrestles with a man of unknown identity until daybreak.

16. There is a strange inconsistency in this man's power. What is it? 32v25

## Firstborn

A 'firstborn' son had special privileges not only while the father lived but also on his father's death he would receive twice as much as any other brother - a double portion. Esau's rank and position are unaffected. Considering that besides his large flocks Isaac only owned a graveyard - getting double is not significant. But one suspects that for the 'grasper' it is one step closer to getting God's blessing.

## Blessing

Isaac had a good many years to go although he is frail - blind. The blessing is the blessing that he has received and it is obvious he is attempting to undermine the word of the Lord uttered prior to the birth of the twins. But Isaac's plans fail - he cannot see!

shows itself in the contrasting attitudes toward the promises of the Lord. What value does each brother place on the birthright of the firstborn? 25v29-34

	Play on words	Who liked who	What they did
Esau			
Jacob			

- List the similarities between Abraham and Isaac in this area of life. Genesis 26
  - What is the significance of Esau's tastes in the light of chapter 24?
  - In 27v1-40 sibling rivalry and favouritism reach flash point over the question, "Who will get Isaac's blessing?" Do you get any impression from the story that Jacob and Rebekah are condemned for taking advantage of an old blind man? Why?
  - Esau naturally feels hard done by and wants to get even and will wait until his father dies. The plan is to send him to the relatives' house in Haran while Esau cools off. In what way does Isaac and Rebekah's actions mirror Abraham's in chapter 24 and in what way are they different? 27v46-28v9
- Dreamtime*
- Just as Jacob is about to leave the Promised Land for 'the ancestral home' the Lord appears to him in a dream. What is the substance of the dream? 28v10-15

might be barren in some ways but not in others, she can still hatch a plan to give God a helping hand.

- What is Sarai's solution? 16v1-2
  - What motives could lie behind Abram's agreement?
  - How do you think Hagar's 'instantaneous' conception would be interpreted and what effect would it really have had on Sarai? 16v4-6
  - How does Hagar use her 'blessing' (being pregnant) against Sarai?
  - How does Sarai respond to Hagar's despising of her?
  - How well does Abram respond to the accusation?
  - Can you think of another time when there was such a monumental display of 'buck passing' by three players in a drama. What does that suggest about the present 'solution'? Genesis 3v11-14
- Hagar runs away but is met by the angel of the LORD who commands her to return to Sarai and submit. However she doesn't return empty handed. She goes with a promise.
- Outline the promise God makes to Hagar.
  - How is the promise similar but different to the promise God made to Abram? Why the similarity and difference?

## Child Bearing

If a woman was unable to bear children, she could find a concubine who could carry a child for her husband.

As bizarre as it may seem to us today, such a practice was in line with customs in the ancient Near East. Martin Luther proposed a similar solution to the succession problem of Henry VIII so as to avoid him divorcing his wife!

Hagar bears Sarai a son for Abram when he is 86 years old and they call him Ishmael.

Chapter 17 opens twelve to thirteen years later. Ishmael is moving toward being considered an adult. God appears to confirm his covenant with Abram and springs a surprise on him.

10. God is revealing himself in a new way – “God Almighty”. Why will Abram need this new revelation of God’s power? 17v17

11. God has a new name because of what he will do in Abram and Sarai’s life but they will need a new name for their new status.

Abram to Abraham to signify...

Sarai to Sarah to signify...

12. List the promises of 17v7-8. Which is the most significant?

13. God Almighty calls Abraham to demonstrate his loyalty to his promises. How? 17v9-14

14. How is the promise to bless the nations included in this covenant in a small way?

15. What was Abraham’s response to the news that Sarah would be the mother of the child of the promise? 17v17-18

16. Abraham fell down laughing. What sort of laugh was it? The question was would he believe in God almighty.

17. What does ‘God Almighty’ say in response to Abraham’s request? 17v19

# 7. Jacob

## A Grasping Faith

Genesis 25-36

Is it possible to want the right things the wrong way? you bet! Just look around, we’ve made it a way of life!

People desperately want loving relationships but they want it without being hurt – how can that work in a world like ours, with people like us?

And so we have a culture that has become seekers of good relationships and they move from one disappointing relationship to another chasing after rainbows, all the time failing to realise that gold in relationships is produced in the refiner’s fire of difficulty.

But what about with God – can the same thing happen? Can we want the right thing the wrong way?

Jacob’s life is a testimony to wanting blessing without the blesser.

1. What similarity in situation is there between Isaac/Rebekah and Abraham/Sarah 25v21

2. The Lord answered Isaac’s prayer with interest – Rebekah has twin boys. She asks the Lord why she is jostled so much. How does knowing the answer shape our expectation of what will happen? 25v23

3. What is unusual about the Lord’s prophecy? 25v23

4. The names of the boys related to their appearance at birth. Fill in the table:

5. The biggest difference in the two boys is not physical, it’s spiritual. This



19. What is the consequence of being deflected? see Hebrews 11v16

20. What decisions do you need to make that will reflect that God's promises in Jesus shape your life?

18. Where did all of Sarai and Abram's planning to give God a helping hand get them?

19. If a baby is born a year later 17v21 who is the heir of the promise, who will get the credit?

20. How did Abraham respond to God's promises and call for response? 17v23-27

#### *New Testament Perspectives*

The whole of the Ishmael incident is figuratively used by Paul in his letter to the Galatians to demonstrate the futility of trying to bring about God's promised salvation by some human effort – giving God a helping hand.

21. Look up and read Galatians 4v21-31 and fill in the table of opposites.

22. How can we like the Galatians attempt to give God a helping hand with salvation? Galatians 3v1-3

22. What has God done to free us from the need to give him a helping hand? Galatians 2v20

23. How should we live in the presence of a God who is almighty, who doesn't need our help and has made us right with him through the work of his promised Son?

24. How should we express that?

tion, 'Will he let her go?' Why is permission given? 24v50

Rebekah is ready to leave as soon as possible for her new home and her new husband to start a new life.

*No 2 Funeral – Abraham*

11. How did Abraham insure the pre-immanence and safety of Isaac after he was gone? Genesis 25v5-6

12. How does the summary of Abraham's life demonstrate God's promises in action? 25v7-10

13. What does 25v11 mean for Isaac in terms of the promises God made to his father?

	Slavery	Freedom
Abraham's two sons...		
The mothers...		
The birth the result of...		
Which counts?		

*New Testament Perspectives*

Read Hebrews 11v13-16

14. How well does Hebrews 11v13 summarise the life of Abraham? In what respects?

15. What choices did Abraham make that demonstrate the motivation described in Hebrews 11v14-15?

16. What does the writer to the Hebrews say this indicates and what is its consequence?

17. How is our life and death to be like Abraham's?

18. What choices we make can deflect us from the path?

3. Despite all the flattery, what's the answer of the Hittites? 23v6
4. Abraham takes the inch that has been offered – they are willing to let him bury his dead – now he goes for the mile. He asks them to act on his behalf with \_\_\_\_\_ son  
of \_\_\_\_\_ to sell me the \_\_\_\_\_ for  
\_\_\_\_\_ as a burial site.
5. Abraham doesn't want the whole field, just the cave but Ephron offers him the whole lot! For how much? 23v14-15.

Abraham graciously rejects the offer. If it's not legally bought the offer can be withdrawn in the future. Abraham wants to own the plot outright and asks to be given a price. Ephron offers the whole lot at an exorbitant price. All Abraham has to show for a lifetime of trusting God who made great promises is a place to bury his family in! That was just the beginning – the foretaste.

#### *The Wedding*

Isaac needed a wife but where would Abraham get one from? Abraham's future and his family's future wasn't back in the land of his ancestors. It was in the Promised Land, Canaan. But even so it wasn't with the people of Canaan. Abraham's descendants would eventually dispossess them of the Land. So who would Isaac wed?

6. What was Abraham's solution? 24v1-4
7. Did Abraham understand the danger of a grieving Isaac returning to the old 'homestead'? 24v5-9
8. Abraham's servant goes to Nahor. He prays that he might be successful. He proposes a test. What will he test? What quality would be prized in a potential bride for Isaac? 24v10-14.
9. Does she pass the test? How is she like Abraham and his dealing with the three visitors? (Genesis 18)
10. The rest of the family is quickly alerted to this significant stranger – Rebekah's brother Laban welcomes Abraham's servant. Abraham's servant recites his task, its history and the Lord's blessing and then pops the ques-

# 4. What Happens When God Visits

Genesis 18-19

It is hot. The shimmering heat bends and twists the hills in the distance. A man of one hundred sits at the entrance to his tent, hoping for a breeze and exploiting the shade. The man is Abraham! He looks up. His eye catches a movement, one, two, three men walking through the bright haze. Who are they? Where are they going? These questions can wait, there are more important things to do. The old man stands and steadies himself and walks towards his guests. He knows what it is to be a stranger and the value of a welcome...

1. Who is the real visitor come to Abraham? 18v1
2. What is Abraham's response to three complete strangers landing on his doorstep? 18v2
3. Read 18v3-8. List the steps and extent of hospitality Abraham shows to his guests.
4. These strangers begin to reveal that they know more than ordinary strangers would? How 18v9?
5. This is followed by a specific promise that the Lord himself has made earlier to Abraham in 17v21. What was the promise?

# 6. Till Death do us

6. Sarah's laughter to the overheard promise is a repetition of Abraham's laughter in 17v17. What do you suspect motivates this laughter?

7. Sarah in 18v13-15 is caught in her unbelief. What does she need to be reminded of? 18v14

## *Abraham God's Confidant*

Read Genesis 18.16-21.

8. Why does the Lord disclose his agenda to Abraham? 18v18-19

9. How does the announcement of possible impending judgement on Sodom and Gomorrah fit this purpose?

The Lord is on a fact-finding mission to see if things are really as bad in Sodom and Gomorrah as they seem. The Lord is coming to visit and hold them accountable for their actions. Abraham addresses the remaining man as "my Lord". Abraham who is being called upon to teach his children what is right and just (v19) now explores the rightness and justice of God in relation to his judgement on the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Read Genesis 18.22-33.

10. What is Abraham seeking to define by these bold yet respectful questions?

11. In what ways does he show his respect?

12. In v33 Abraham finishes speaking and interceding. The Lord doesn't tell him to stop. What do you think that indicates?



What determines the choices you make?

What or who shapes how you spend your money?

What priorities have or will play a hand in whom you marry, if you marry or when you marry?

What about where you live or what work you do?

For the people of God we want to make decisions that are shaped by God's purposes in the world. It's always been the case.

In this last look at the life of Abraham we look at two of those moments of choice that need to be shaped by God's promise. They are life and death decisions – where will you be buried and who will you marry.

## *No 1 Funeral – Sarah*

In the time of the Patriarchs and in some cultures in our own day people like being buried with their 'ancestors' – 'gathered to their fathers'.

But the whole life of Abraham and Sarah has been at variance with so many 'norms'. They left home and family and have wandered in Canaan. Of course, if their future was back in Haran the bones could be sent back home. But home isn't in Haran it's in Canaan.

Abraham and Sarah have been given promises – promises about their future and the world's future. Promises that shape God's plan, and promises that have shaped theirs – promises that even shape their deaths.

It is the promises that motivate Abraham's purchase of a field.

The whole process of bargaining for and buying the cave is done with dignity and propriety and on the part of Abraham a fierce determination to own just enough land to be buried in.

1. In 23v4 how does Abraham acknowledge that he has no rights?

2. Despite having no rights to property and the desire on the part of the Hittites to avoid aliens owning property what does he want?

*Sodom & Gomorrah*

Read Genesis 18.22-33

13. Compare Lot and Abraham's hospitality? 19v1-3

14. Hospitality toward strangers has taken on immense significance in these chapters. How do the men of Sodom fare in the hospitality stakes? 19v4,5

15. Lot's attempt to calm the situation down at any expense is a monumental failure. What do the people he is trying to protect end up doing for Lot? 19v10,11

16. After reading 19v12-14 how many righteous people are there? What is the implication of this?

17. Lot and his family seem reluctant to leave Sodom despite the immanent judgement. What warnings and urging have to be made? 19v15-17.

What continues to be a source of wonder is that Lot still considers the city or the town to be the place of security. After all that has happened it is breath taking that he is bargaining to go to a town on the edge of hell.

18. Why did Lot's wife look back and why was she judged with Sodom?

19. Did the town of Zoar become a place of security for Lot?

In the end Lot's towns can't bring the security that Abraham's God can. In a cave in the mountains as Lot consols himself with drink, his daughters conspire to keep the family line going – and they do.

God's visitation is a time of salvation for some and judgement for others.

*New Testament Perspectives*

In the New Testament there is the story of God visiting another city.

Read Luke 19v41-44

The shocking thing is that when God comes to his own, his own do

not receive him. In Sodom the messengers of God were untouched, but when God's Son visits he is met with the hospitality of the cross, and the crown of thorns, the whip and jeers.

When God came to visit his city Jerusalem they killed him. They took him outside the city and humiliated him.

Judgement fell in Jerusalem that day. It fell on God's son for those who put their trust in him and not a city. But for those who looked to the city to provide protection it would lay in ruins 40 years later under the assault of the Romans and the carnage would be worse than that of Sodom and Gomorrah.

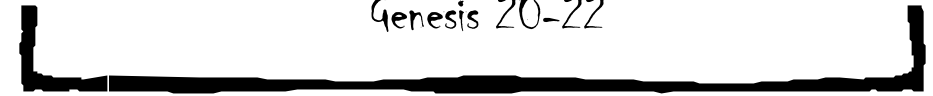
live.

18. Read Hebrews 11v17-19 How will our faith, if it is genuine, be shaped by the faith of Abraham?

19. How are we to die and save the world? If we follow Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith it will take more than wishful thinking.

# 5. Faith Under Fire

Genesis 20-22



Living by trust and not by sight is difficult for fallen human beings. The very structure and nature of Sin is like a pair of glasses. By sin's spectacles we interpret the world so that not trusting God but trusting anything else seems normal and appropriate.

In this section of Genesis, we look at Abraham relearning old lessons and finally receiving the promise of a son. But in the end we are confronted with the call of God to trust in him alone. That call is beyond our comprehension but as much as we are at first repulsed by it, we are drawn to it – the spectacle of one man before his God being called to give up everything in obedience.

At some points it is easy to draw lessons from the struggle Abraham has to trust God. This section has some of those elements. But there are other moments when the story makes us look into the crucible of God's purposes in Christ. Within that crucible strange elements are mixed together, ground up to form completely new compounds of faith. This section climaxes with one such a moment.

There is no attempt to paint Abraham the 'model' of faith in any other way than a 'warts and all' approach. He wouldn't be any use to us if he were.

Read Genesis 20

1. We find out from this section that passing Sarah off as Abraham's sister is a premeditated strategy. What is the strategy and what motivates it? 20v11-13
2. It's the move to a new area and the unknown that brings "plan B" to the fore, 'Plan A' was a matter of trusting in the promises. Which promise is in focus in this situation?
3. God's covenant partner Abraham has dropped the ball in God's plan to save the world – so God acts. What does God do and how has he already acted for the sake of his plan and Abimelech's nation? 20v3-7

Surely God is calling Abraham to do the unthinkable! Not only are we faced with the demise of the son of Abraham but this is the heir of the promise. Through him all that is cursed will be undone. Has God given up?

## Galatians 3v7-9

<sup>7</sup> Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. <sup>8</sup> 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." <sup>9</sup> So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

It is in the fearful questions that crowd our minds and grip our hearts that we will find an answer to this singular command of God.

Does Abraham trust God or the promises that God has made? That's the issue that lies at the heart of the test.

15. What did Abraham do? 22v3-10

16. What did Isaac do? 22v3-10

The knife is raised, the will is directed to the deed to be done, and then "Abraham, Abraham – STOP" The test is passed, and the Lord provides.

Read Genesis 22v15-19. Because Abraham was prepared to lose everything, the world will be saved. Saving the world by being disobedient would have failed.

## *New Testament Perspectives*

In the near death experience of Isaac and the faithfulness of Abraham we see what it takes to save the world. One man prepared to sacrifice everything in obedience to God.

17. Abraham didn't have to pay the price, God provided a lamb. How does the Lamb of God, Jesus demonstrate this sort of faith?

Read Hebrews 12v1-3 about the Lord who gave his life so that we might

4. Given Abimelech's response in 20v8-10 does Abimelech seem like the sort of person described in 20v11?
  
5. The Lord seems committed not only to preserving Abraham, making Abimelech dependent upon him no matter what he's done. How? 20v6-7
  
6. How does 20v14-18 demonstrate the promise the Lord made to Abraham to protect him by "blessing those who blessed him and cursing those who cursed him"?
  
7. The integrity of the promise is maintained and demonstrated. But what's your assessment of what has happened?
  
8. What right do Christians have to point the fingers at others when they have been blessed despite being unrighteous? Why?

### *The Promise Child*

9. In the story of the birth of Isaac (Genesis 21v1-7) God's actions are emphasised over and over again. What is the cumulative effect of this on us?
  
10. Sarah's laughter seems to be motivated by something other than the 'sceptical snort' she gave in 18v12. What is the motive?

### *Sibling Rivalry*

11. Ishmael demonstrates some of his mother's qualities in 21v8-10. Which ones?
  
12. The Lord resolves the tension between Abraham's love of Ishmael and Sarah's demand that he is cast out. How? 21v11-13

In the harsh realities of sibling rivalry the Lord steps in at the very last and saves Hagar and Ishmael and restates his blessing on Abraham's first son.

13. Genesis 21v22 show us that Abimelech and Phicol recognise the protection and blessing of the Lord upon Abraham and want part of the action. Which promise is in view?

The promise of the nations sharing in the blessing of Abraham and being blessed through him was fulfilled in more than just treaties concerning water rights. In Galatians Paul writes that it is ultimately when the nations have faith in Abraham's heir Jesus and in what he has done that they will fully share the blessings.

At this point we would be forgiven for thinking that it was all over bar the shouting. But for the man who has travelled so far in distance and faith there is still the greatest invitation to trust. When the Lord first spoke to Abraham it was to leave the security of the city and family and "go" to Canaan – with no visible means of support just the promises. The Lord comes and commands Abraham to "go" once again into the uncharted water of trust.

14. What does God call Abraham to do? Don't just write what it says write it in your own words.