



OT overview 2

Abraham – the nation of Israel is formed. Leader’s version

For an hour study, just do the starred * questions

Check in – ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

The Old Testament always points forwards to Jesus Christ; whatever we read in the OT is somehow linked to Jesus. Abraham lived about 2000BC.

What does the passage say and mean?

60 minutes

*1. **SHOUT OUT** Read Genesis 12 v 1-2. What 3 things did God promise to give Abram?

NB Abraham was called Abram until Gen 17 v 5.

God's people (a great nation, v2) will live in God's place (the land, v1), under God's rule and blessing (I will bless you, v2). (Vaughan Roberts, 'God's Big Picture').

Leave these 3 answers up on the flip-chart for the rest of the session.

*2. Abram was a man blessed by God, who would be the father of the nation of Israel. What did he do in Genesis 12 v 10-13 and what happens in v17-20?

He goes to Egypt because there is a famine and passes off his wife as his sister to save his own life. Sarai becomes part of Pharaoh's harem. Abraham was not always a fine upstanding citizen! Pharaoh finds out and throws Abraham out of Egypt (Abraham has become rich, v16, in Egypt, and takes his riches with him).

*3. God promised Abraham that he would be the father of a nation. Read Genesis 15 v 3-6. What was Abraham's problem and what did God say? What do we learn about Abraham through this?

Abraham had no child, so a servant would be his heir. God says he will have as many descendants as there are stars, and Abraham trusts Him. Abraham was made right with God by faith.

*4. Read Genesis 16 v 1-6. Why do Sarai and Abram resort to this and what does it lead to?

They have stopped trusting God to come through on His promise. They decide to use a human solution to their problem of childlessness, resulting in a broken relationship (between Sarai and Hagar). Abraham absolves himself of responsibility, resulting in the abuse of Hagar. Hagar's son is called Ishmael. Use this example to consider the consequences of sin and bad decisions.

(Note – Abram and Sarai had had a clear and personal promise from God that He would give them a son. Today we should hold onto the promises of the Bible, not expect direct revelation from God about our future. Whatever promises God may make to us will ALWAYS be in line with the Bible).

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Abraham was not perfect. He passed off his wife as his sister (twice!) to protect his safety. And he slept with Hagar in order to jump-start God's plan. But God still blessed him greatly.

What lessons can we learn from this?

Practically – lying or trying to manipulate a situation is not a good idea, it usually leads to a worse outcome.

Spiritually – we need to trust God to honour His promises and resist interfering in order to speed him up!

Grace – God didn't abandon Abraham when he messed up, God forgave him and then moved on. When God forgives, He forgets. We can take great comfort from this: there's nothing we can do that will drive God away from us - we can always come back in repentance.

Questions 5-7 are **SELF-DIRECTED QUESTIONS**. Let the group work on them in pairs.

*5. **SDL** Read Genesis 17 v 1-8. Abraham is 99 years old (he was 75 in Genesis 12 v 4) and he and Sarai are still childless. God renews the covenant with Abraham – what does God promise him?

- *You will be the father of many nations, v4. Kings will be your descendants, v6.*
- *I will be your God, v7.*
- *The land of Canaan, v8.*

People, place and blessing again. All of this is everlasting. God gives him a new name, Abraham (= 'father of many').

*6. **SDL** Read Genesis 17 v 11. What was the sign of the covenant (promise) between God and Abraham, and why do you think this sign was so important to the people?

Circumcision. As the sign of the covenant, it was the sign of spiritual identity as a Jew. It also became one of national identity.

*7. **SDL** Read Galatians 5 v 6. Why don't Christians need to be circumcised?

We don't need any outward or physical sign to belong to God's people, we just need to trust (have faith in) Jesus. The sign of the covenant of grace is the Holy Spirit living in us, not in any physical mark or ceremony (i.e. not in baptism, ability to speak in tongues etc).

*8. Read Genesis 21 v 1-5. What happens, and how do you think Abraham felt about this child?

Abraham and Sarah finally have a son, 25 years after the promise was made (12 v 4)! Abraham must have loved that child incredibly, since he was the result of God's promise, and was the child through whom Abraham's countless descendants (as numerous as the stars, 15 v 5) would come.

9. Read Genesis 22 v 1-2. What does God tell Abraham to do?

God tells Abraham to take Isaac and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on the mountain. This is shocking on several levels!

- *Child sacrifice is a horrific practice*
- *Some of the people who worshipped other gods in Canaan did sacrifice children. God has never required child sacrifice and, later in the OT, we read of his judgement on those who practice it e.g. Jeremiah 19 v 15.*
- *Isaac is the child the nation will descend from – he can't die!*

Don't let the group get worked up about God asking Abraham to sacrifice his child – this isn't the end of the story. And it's not about human sacrifice, it's about faith. Keep them engaged and keep the study moving!

10. How did Abraham respond to this command from God and does this surprise you? (Genesis 22 v 3)

Abraham obeyed! This should surprise us – we would expect Abraham to pretend he hadn't heard, or to go but not take the child with him etc.

11. Abraham says something to the servants that tells us how much faith he has in God. What is it? (Genesis 22 v 5)

We will come back to you. Abraham fully expects to bring Isaac back, although he doesn't know how this can be, in view of God's command. He is still trusting God with Isaac's life, and trusting God to keep the covenant to create a nation from Isaac.

12. What happens in Genesis 22 v 6-13?

Abraham and Isaac reach the top of the mountain, still without a lamb. Abraham ties up Isaac and puts him on the altar. Abraham raises the knife, and at the last minute, the angel of the Lord stops him. Abraham sees a ram caught in a thicket, which he sacrifices to God instead of his son.

13. Read Genesis 22 v 15-18. What promise does God make to Abraham (again!)?

Descendants, land and blessing.

14. Why did all this happen? Look back to Genesis 22 v 1.

God was testing Abraham's obedience. NB. God knew whether Abraham would be obedient – the test was to show Abraham the extent of his own obedience (as well as all those who heard about it).

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What has the account of Abraham's life taught you about trusting God?

*15. The New Testament book of Hebrews remembers the faith of people from the Old Testament. Read Hebrews 11 v 8-12 & 17-19. What word is used repeatedly?

Faith.

*16. **SHOUT-OUT** What promises has God made to us, that we can trust him to fulfil?

Focus on promises that are in the Bible, not on personal promises which may or may not really be from God. The main promises to highlight are forgiveness and eternal life.

*17. Read Hebrews 11 v 17-19 again. In what way does the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his own son point us to Jesus Christ?

God willingly sacrificed His Son on behalf of sinners; there was no substitute available, Jesus had to go through with it.

(If you are only doing the starred questions, you will need to explain that, in order to test Abraham's faith, God asked him to sacrifice his child Isaac. Abraham obeyed, and got all the way to raising the knife, before God provided a ram instead of the boy).

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The ram as a substitute for Isaac's life is a picture of Jesus dying as our substitute. How would you explain to someone on the wing about Jesus dying in their place?

Jesus died on the cross in the place of repentant sinners. It should have been each one of us dying for our own sins, but Jesus died for us, so that we can be forgiven if we repent and believe. He rose to life again so that we can have eternal life.

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From these dramatic accounts of Abraham's life, we can see that Abraham knew God; he didn't just know *about* God. What is the evidence for this?

What about you? Do you know, obey and trust God, or do you just know stuff about Him?

TIME-LINE: if you started making a time-line in study 1, do the next part of it now – ask the group to add what they have learnt today in the appropriate place. See the time-line on the TFC website for guidance of dates.

Check out – ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.

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7. Read Galatians 5 v 6. Why don't Christians need to be circumcised?

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