

The Cloud of Witnesses

Abraham

Lesson 1: Abraham – Called & Blessed

Reading

Genesis 12.

God has a plan for each of our lives

Here we find Abram having an encounter with God that totally and dramatically changed his life forever. Born in Ur, he moved north with his father and their family to Haran. It seems as if they were supposed to move on but chose to settle in Haran.

God was not satisfied with that and so came to Abram and told him to go South to Canaan. In His blessing to Abram, we find that not only had God a great plan and purpose for his life, but that it extended beyond his own family.

His family would become a huge nation in its own right but additionally, through Abram, God was going to bless everyone on the face of the earth. Wow!

Not a bad blessing, was it?

Abram had some choices to make –

Would he reject the invitation?

Would he reply – I'll take the blessing but stay here thanks?

Would he cringe and say he was quite happy with just Sarai?

Would he be selfish and demand all the blessing for his family and ignore his 'nation'?

Would he accept the blessing for his 'nation' but refuse to allow anyone else to benefit?

Abram took Sarai and Lot and headed south... and the rest as we say – is history. Today we are blessed because of the obedience of Abram. We are also blessed because the Jews told us about Jesus, refusing to keep the Good News to themselves. So God's promise has been fulfilled. Abram was blessed and so have all the peoples of the earth.

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Lesson 1 continued: Abraham – Called & Blessed

God has a plan for your life, too! It's vital you find out what that plan is because that is what you are on earth for! And think about it... God, the Creator of the Universe, has a plan designed especially for you – isn't that terrific! What more significance do you want?

What's more, not only will you be blessed by following through on it but others will benefit by it as well – because God is never self-centred but always – others-centred. Worth following up, isn't it?

Abraham would say to us today...

God is a Good God, serve Him and follow His plans for your life because they will not only be the best for you, but also cause others to be blessed through you.

Prayer

Father, it is amazing to think that You have a plan and purpose for my life. Thank You so much that You care that much about me. Please help me to fulfil all Your purposes for my life and to bring blessing to others and glory to Your Name. Amen.

Additional readings

Jeremiah 1:4–10 & 29:11–13; Psalm 139; Isaiah 61:1–11.

Questions

Do you know the plan God has for your life?

What is the next step towards its fulfilment?

Why is it important we keep checking up to make sure we are living within the plan God has for our life?

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Lesson 2: Abraham – Faces Failure

Reading

Genesis 16.

Don't try and force what God has promised

This must be the lowest point in Abram's life. God had promised him that he would be the father of many children. In fact, so many that their number would be beyond calculation. Abram found that impossible because he was already old and without an heir on the horizon, except for his servant.

God was quite specific in reply, telling Abram that he would have a child, and he would be the natural and birth father. The trouble was that time passed and nothing showed – Sarai did not become pregnant – she just went further and further passed the natural age of child-bearing!

Abram had obviously told Sarai of the promise and she was becoming as, if not more, frustrated than Abram. She had the real and additional stigma of being barren. Her frustration climaxed with her suggestion that Abram should have sexual intercourse with her Egyptian slave girl, Hagar.

Just like Adam fell, so did Abram. He took Sarai's advice, slept with Hagar and Ishmael was born. BUT that was NOT what God had planned! God had to visit with Abram again and become very specific that His child would come through Abram and Sarai!

So what of Hagar and Ishmael? Did God despise them? No. Were they part of God's sovereign plan and promise for Abram – NO! God provided for them and we read that eventually Ishmael also had 12 sons! (Genesis 25)

However, the chapter records – *And they lived in hostility towards all their brothers!* And they still do!

A moment of passion is so potentially dangerous! Surrogate motherhood is destined to be fraught with anxiety!

And the results we see today are there just because a man and a woman thought they would help God do His job. They wanted to hurry up what God had promised, and just like forcing a flower to open early, they ended up spoiling God's intentions.

If you have received a prophecy from God or God has promised something to you, let God sort it out, let Him bring it to pass. His ways are not our ways nor are His thoughts our thoughts. Let God be God!

Never forget, every day is one day nearer the completion and fulfilment of His Promises!

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Lesson 2 continued: Abraham – Faces Failure

Abraham would say to us today...

Don't do what I did, and live to regret it! You are still struggling today with the consequences of my mistake!

Prayer

Father, thank You for recording for us the mistakes and failures of the great men and women of old. Help us realise that they were just like us and that if You could forgive them and work through them, You can do exactly the same for us. As Your prayer says - Please lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the Evil One. Amen.

Additional readings

Exodus 2:11–15; 2 Samuel 15:1–13; 1 Kings 1:1–10 & 17–53.

Questions

Why are we so impatient with God to fulfil His plans for us?

Why is it important not to get sucked into this instant society?

What are the character traits God wants to grow in you right now?

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Lesson 3: Abraham – The Promised Child Arrives

Reading

Genesis 21.

God's promises are sure and certain

The Impossible happened! The baby arrived! The old man and the old woman became parents! Sarah (Sarai) was so happy she couldn't stop laughing and all who heard of the birth joined in!

The child that had been promised so very long ago was now lying in Sarah's arms crying. *How could it be? Who is this God we are trying to follow? How can He do these impossible miraculous things? And why, oh why did He choose us?*

How kind, gracious and forgiving He is. Even after we took 'life' into our own hands, He still forgave us and brought us to the point of utter exhilaration.

How blessed we are! Yes, His promises are true and trustworthy – it's us that have doubts, not God! He is able to do far more abundantly than we could ever imagine or dream of!

How would you feel if you were Abraham or Sarah? Overjoyed and a little apprehensive too, I guess? A baby is seemingly fragile enough without the parental care being 100 years old! No doubt they 'sterilised' everything and put up barriers around him to make sure that no harm befell him. If God had entrusted the baby to them, the least they could do was make sure they did everything physically possible to protect him from every harm or accident!

Did you notice how when God's timing finally arrived, the result was beyond description in its magnitude and significance? We so often want to settle for the mediocre or at best second best, not realising that what God has planned defies description.

What are you waiting for God to do? Hang in there – HE WILL DO IT!

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Lesson 3 continued: Abraham – The Promised Child Arrives

Abraham would say to us today...

Have patience and wait for God! Take it from me, His ways are awesome and His timing is perfect.

Prayer

Father, You truly are amazing! Please help me to not settle for second best. Thank You that every promise of Yours is available to us through our Lord Jesus Christ. Please help us live in the Victory He won at Calvary and appropriate all Your promises for Your glory. Amen.

Additional readings

1 Samuel 1:1-28; Isaiah 9:1-7; Matthew 1:18-25.

Questions

What is the most exciting thing that has happened to you since you became a Christian?

Why are children so precious to us?

Do you still pray for your children everyday?

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Lesson 4: Abraham – Passed The Test

Reading

Genesis 22.

Just trust and obey God

God is not so much interested in our comfort as in our character. God isn't wanting us to be happy all the time but obedient! I guess if there is one thing I have learnt over the years, it is that God wants us to trust Him in every circumstance of life.

Just when I congratulate myself on learning to trust God through one set of circumstances, He appears to send another one along of deeper significance and I'm left hanging on for dear life.

It's so easy in our world of convenience and instant gratification to treat God more like a genie of the lamp than the Holy God He is. We get into a fix, maybe even of our own making, and start screaming to God to get us out. And if He doesn't, we immediately think He doesn't love us or He is not the Good God we once thought He was.

Everything we experience here on earth is actually designed to prepare us for Heaven – scary thought, isn't it? To prepare us for a life of total obedience and immeasurable power. The trouble is power without obedience self-destructs.

We always want the power without the humble obedience. Without the heart-wrenching cry of – *“Not my will be done but Yours be done.”* Yes, we need to be prepared to offer that exclamation of ultimate worship to God, the Father – just as did Jesus, the Son (And just as Abraham did when he offered up his son Isaac).

The problem with that is, of course, that it only leaves our lips when God has challenged us and is about to take away from us the very thing we hold most dear.

You know what the greatest treasure in your life is. Maybe it's your job, your achievements, your wealth, your ministry, your spouse or your child.

Whatever it is - will you offer it up to God unreservedly? Because until you do, you will know nothing of what God means by *“obedience is greater than sacrifice!”*

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Lesson 4 continued: Abraham – Passed The Test

Abraham would say to us today...

No matter how much you think you are a Christian, the real test comes when what you treasure most has to be laid on the altar for God. Will you do that? I did and never regretted it.

Prayer

Father, none of us relishes those hard tests, and yet You desire that we learn to trust You in every area and through every circumstance of our lives. Please give us the courage to hold onto what You say and to be obedient to whatever You ask of us – so that one day we will hear those immortal words – Well done, good and faithful servant. Amen.

Additional readings

Genesis 6:8-22; Luke 1:26-38; Luke 24:13-35.

Questions

How do we reach that place where we can trust God in the most difficult of circumstances?

What do you believe God will do for you?

Are you prepared to let it go, so God can fulfil it in ways beyond your wildest dreams?

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Lesson 5: Abraham – Passed The Baton

Reading

Genesis 24.

Don't forget to leave a lasting legacy

Abraham lived 175 years – 75 after the birth of Isaac. As we saw in Chapter 22, Isaac was the 'apple of his eye', his treasured possession. However, we read that there was something else about Abraham that actually eclipsed his love for Isaac, and that was his love for God. God was Abraham's friend and Abraham was God's friend.

Abraham had lived long enough and had experienced enough of life to know that there is only one thing that really matters. Our relationship with God. Yes, we can enjoy this life and this world but neither has any real meaning outside of a relationship with God, our Creator. Anything else just degenerates into a selfish pursuit of happiness, which is totally illusive since it is based upon our volatile emotions.

Knowing what he did, that a relationship with God brings meaning and purpose to this life and a certain future in the life to come, Abraham had enough wisdom to share his faith with his family and his workers. Yes, it didn't just happen – he was obviously intentional about it. How do we know? – Because he was successful at it!

He wanted to make sure that Isaac married a girl from a like-minded family – and definitely not one from the local tribes who were godless. Not only that, but he must have chatted about God wherever they went. His awe and reverence for God together with his simple trust in His word and promises spoke volumes to all those who came into contact with him, especially his own household.

We even find his servant praying to God for help in finding the right girl for Isaac and how God dramatically answered that prayer. Yes, Abraham wanted to pass on a legacy. A life of obedience to God, which always results in blessing to us and to those we mix with.

What are you doing about that?

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Lesson 5 continued: Abraham – Passed The Baton

Abraham would say to us today...

None of the achievements or accolades of this world will last a week after you are dead. So what are you doing about investing in eternity? That's what really matters! Will your children serve God for the whole of their lives, even after you're gone?

Prayer

Father, please forgive us for concentrating so much on the here and now. Help us to see through the inconsequence of this world, to behold the eternal values and blessings of Heaven, and help us pass on to succeeding generations a hope and a vision that will inspire them to follow You to the very end. Amen.

Additional readings

Joshua 23 & 24:14-27; 1 Chronicles 28:1-21; 2 Timothy 2:1-2; Matthew 28:19-20.

Questions

What are you passing on of eternal value to your children?

Jesus said – Make disciples. Are you?

What would you like to be remembered for and what are you doing to make sure that happens?