

Genesis Series – Part 4 - Father Abraham

Lester Zimmerman

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Today is part four of a series on the book of Genesis. So far, we looked at CREATION and then the FALL of Adam and Eve that has affected all of humanity.

We looked at the DESTRUCTION of sin in the story of Cain and Abel that in many ways reflects our battle with sin in our own lives. Pastor Brian encouraged us with the truth that through the power of the Holy Spirit we can overcome sin in our lives.

Today, we move from destruction to God RECREATING a plan to bring salvation to the human race. The plan entails God reaching out to a husband-and-wife team named Abram and Sarai.

He invites them to journey with him and if they will obey and trust him, he will create a great nation out of them through which the whole earth will be blessed. In fact, the Messiah would be birthed from their family line and bring salvation to all who would put their faith in him. Through Jesus all the earth is blessed!

God changes their names to Abraham and Sarah and they became the patriarch and matriarch of the Jewish nation and to all the followers of Jesus as well. Abraham gets a lot of press, but the bible has a lot to say about Sarah too.

17:15-16 God also said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.”

God used them as a husband-and-wife team to birth the Jewish nation and to bless the earth. In the New Testament, women are called daughters of Sarah and she is listed in the Hall of Faith of Hebrews 11 as a woman of great faith along with her husband Abraham. (*Heb 11:11*)

Our focus this morning will be on chapters 12 thru 17.

- READ **Genesis 12:1-9** *Show verses out on the screen*

Summarize chapters 12-17:

- 12 – Abram settles in Canaan. Soon after, because of a great famine, Abram moves his family to Egypt. But because Sarai was so beautiful, and he thought Pharaoh would kill him to get his wife, he tells her to tell people she is his sister. Pharaoh then takes her and begins to prepare her to be one of his wives and God brings a serious disease on

Pharaoh, so he gives Sarai back to Abram. – *Abram had some real issues – did this twice- needed to attend our marriage retreat and see Counselor Ben Dodd. – The Bible is brutally honest about people's failures but in it we see God uses imperfect people in his redemptive story. People like you and me that struggle to get it right.*

- 13 – Lot and Abram separate their growing herds and workers and settle in different areas. Lot moves toward sinful Sodom and Gomorrah which later proves to be a bad choice. *It's not good to see how close we can get to sin.*
- 14 - Lot and his family are captured, and Abram's warriors rescue them
- 15 - God makes an everlasting covenant with Abram
- 16 – Sarai decides to use her servant as a surrogate mother and Ishmael is born. 14 years later Sarah gives birth to Isaac
- 17 – Circumcision becomes the Jewish sign of covenant and God changes Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai to Sarah. God gave them a new identity just as he does to all who accept his son Jesus. He now calls us sons and daughters.

Let me draw out a few of the many lessons we can learn from these passages. Some practical insights to live by.

1. Obedience precedes blessing. 12:1-9

Vs. 4 So Abram left, as the Lord told him....

Abram and Sarai obeyed God and walked away from the home, family, and friends they knew and all its securities. There were great promises and blessings ahead for Abram and Sarai but before the blessings there were hard steps of obedience. The same is true of us today.

- Sometimes submitting to God's will involves sacrifice and pain in your life. But if you walk in obedience, you will be blessed.
- God may be leading you to a place of greater service and usefulness. Don't let the comfort and security of your present position make you miss God's plan for you.

God called Abram and Sarai to come out and leave their old life - just like he does all those who want to follow him and walk in blessing today.

2 Corinthians 6:17 Therefore, come out from among unbelievers, and separate yourselves from them, says the LORD. Don't touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you. ^{NLT}

To walk in the Spirit is to obey the promptings of the Spirit. I remember when God called Erma and I to leave our ministry and friends in Baltimore and return to Lancaster County.

- I resisted for a while. I didn't want to move. I didn't want to leave my friends. I didn't know what we would do for jobs. I didn't know where we would live. It was a hard step.

But God was asking us to take a step of obedience and trust him. Blessings eventually follow obedience. We are very blessed today because of obedience.

2. God blesses those who support Israel. 12:2-3

Vs.3 "I will bless those who bless you and I will curse those who curse you."

This is an amazing promise God gives to Abram and the Jewish people that continues to this day. Individuals and nations that bless Israel will be blessed by God. It is one of the reasons our country has prospered. But we can quickly lose the blessing if we turn against Israel.

Psalms 122:6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you."

God made an everlasting covenant with Abram and the Jewish people.

- **Everlasting means God stands by His promise as long as the earth stands.** In this everlasting covenant he promised them everlasting land.

Genesis 15:18-21 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates— the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."

Genesis 17:7-8 I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."



(Show map of the land promised to Abraham)

Through disobedience, Israel lost much of their land, but God would again and again bring them back to their land because he had made an everlasting covenant with Abraham and his seed. They have an everlasting right to the land he promised.



(Show map of Israel today)

Israel today is surrounded by many Muslim nations. Israel is only a sliver of land in their midst, yet much of the world hates them. The Muslim nations blame them for the conditions of the Palestinians and yet do little to help them themselves. They don't seem to really care. They just hate Israel. Like Ishmael did Isaac.

Anti-Semitism is a spiritual thing. The devil hates God's chosen people the Jews as well as Christians who have been adopted and grafted into that vine.

Israel today is a secular government so while I support their right to the land, it doesn't mean I must support all their policies. But to be clear, I stand with Israel as does our church and the Hopewell Network.

3. God tests our faith to strengthen it. 12:10

Soon after Abram and Sarai take the big step of obedience to follow God's call their livelihood and very lives are in danger of being destroyed by a great famine.

- Why did God allow a famine in the land where he just called Abram to?
- They must have wondered if they had missed God somehow. Where was God's promise of blessing?

Sometimes we find ourselves in similar situations. We decide to follow Jesus and it seems all hell comes against us. We take a step of faith and obedience and run into hard times. The promises of God don't seem to be working for us. Our prayers seem to go unanswered. We feel like we are in a spiritual or financial famine.

It seems God allowed this situation to strengthen Abram and Sarai's faith. Abram still had some issues he needed to work on as we see in his treatment of his wife in Egypt. Father Abraham needed some work if he was to be the father of multitudes.

- **God's blessings can destroy us if our character is weak.**
- I have seen this firsthand with some successful people as well as pastors.

Following God does not mean we will not face obstacles. But God will only allow those things that help us grow.

- **God is more committed to the growth of our character than he is our comfort.**

If you are going through a tough season right now, take heart! God will bring you through to the other side. Stop fighting and complaining and allow God to do his inner work in your life.

This wasn't the last test Abram and Sarai would face. The next huge test was trusting God to fulfil his promise that Sarai would become pregnant, and a son would be born to become a great nation.

Sarai was not able to have children which was a great shame and pain to women in that culture. Infertility is still very painful for those who walk that journey. It was 25 years since God had told Abram he would make a great nation out of him, and she was now 90 years old and Abraham 100.

So, she decided to help God out by giving her maid servant to Abraham to be a surrogate for her to have a child. And so, through Hagar Ishmael was born and there has been strife between Ishmael's seed and Issacs's seed, the Arabs and Jews, ever since.

Doing things our way produces Ishmaels in our lives. We need to learn to trust and wait on God. **The promises of God rest in the timing of God.** At 90 years old Sarah did become

pregnant and had a son she named Isaac. **God is not limited by natural or spiritual barriers. He will do what he has promised in his timing and in his way.**

4. God blesses a generous spirit. 13:8-12, 14:20

One of the reasons God choose Abram was because he was a very generous man. God likes to use generous people because they reflect an important aspect of God's nature. God uses them to become channels of his blessing to others.

In chapter 13 - Abram gives the best land to his nephew Lot, even though he had the right to choose it for himself.

In chapter 14 - Abram tithes to the priest Melchizedek. The Bible mentions offerings before, but this is the first mention of the tithe, and it was before it was required by the law. Abram wanted to give testimony that all he had comes from God and belongs to God. God still blesses the tithe today.

God has blessed Petra Church in many ways because of our generosity to our community and the nations. We have sent out people, built mission churches, given away land and money, offered the use of the Homestead farmhouse for a housing ministry, provided community gardens, given free use of our fields to bless our community and free use of our facilities to our network.

- And God has greatly blessed us in return. You can't outgive God. He loves to bless generous people and he honors seed faith.

Challenge: Make the choice to be a generous person and trust God for your needs.

5. We are saved by faith and live by faith. 15:6

The scriptures point to Abraham and Sarah as the basis of New Testament faith. Abraham was proclaimed righteous, not because of his good works, but because he put his faith in God.

Sure they stumbled in their faith at times but they kept growing in their faith.

15:6 Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

In the same way today, we are saved and proclaimed righteous before God, not because of our good works, but because we have put our faith in the finish work of Jesus on the cross.

Rom 4:1-3 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

Eph 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.

Gal 3:7,14 Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

And so, we become the children of Abraham and Sarah as we walk in the faith of Abraham and Sarah.

Jesus set us free from performance religion and gives us a living relationship based not on performance or good works but simple faith and trust in Jesus.

Conclusion:

How about you? What are you counting on to save you? If today you stood at the Pearly gates and God asked why he should let you in, what would you say?

There is only one answer that will get you in. *“I put my faith in your Son, Jesus for the forgiveness of my sins and the promise of eternal life.”*

God then opens the book of life to see if our names are written there. All those who accept Jesus have their names entered into the book.

- The Prayer Ministers are available to pray a salvation prayer with you this morning so you can know that your name is written in the book of life.
- Online – call in this week – one of the pastors will pray with you.

Abraham and Sarah demonstrate to us that it is by grace through faith that we are saved - it is the gift of God.

Closing Song: Amazing Grace