

# Abraham Pt 2

## Genesis 15-17

### Intro:

We saw last time that:

**Abraham** is mentioned 154 times in the book of Genesis and 261 times in the Bible. 68 of those times are in the New Testament.

**Abraham** is referred to as:

**The Father of the nation of Israel** and **the father of all who believe**

And God is often distinguished from false gods as **the God of Abraham**

**Abraham** is revered by the Christians, Jews and Muslims which combine to make up almost 4 billion of the world's 7 billion inhabitants

**Abraham's** story is recorded in Genesis 11 – 25. These 15 chapters follow Abraham through a series of events as God begins to work out the promises first given to him.

His story is covered in a series of at least 16 vignettes

- His calling
- His journey to Canaan
- Fleeing to Egypt
- Rescuing Lot
- His dark dream
- His encounter with Hagar
- Sign of circumcision
- Sarah's laughter
- Destruction of Sodom
- Journey Back to Egypt
- The birth of Isaac
- Departure of Ismael
- Offering Isaac
- Death of Sarah

- A bride for Isaac
- Abraham's death

Following Abraham, Genesis focuses upon the life of his descendants Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

## Exposition:

15:1-6

### Justified by Faith

Chapter 15 begins as Abraham has his 4<sup>th</sup> encounter with the Lord

- Gen 12:1 – The call to leave Ur and the outline of the promise
- Gen 12:7 – Upon arriving in Canaan he is promised that this would be his land
- Gen 13:14 – After Lot departs, The promise of land is reaffirmed and the promise of descendants as the sand of the sea is added

### Genesis 15:1

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I *am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”

After defeating Chedorloamar and his allies and refusing the riches of Sodom, Abraham returns to presumably to the Area of Bethel where he has another encounter with God. Here God promises to be both his shield (a necessity after agitating kings) and his reward (Another necessity after rejecting the loot of Sodom)

Instead of celebrating this grand promise, Abraham cries out from the depths of his heart:

### Genesis 15:2-3

<sup>2</sup>But Abram said, “Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house *is* Eliezer of Damascus?”<sup>3</sup> Then Abram said, “Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!”

Abraham does not seem interested in great wealth as much as he wants to see the promises of God worked out in his life.

God had previously promised him descendants, as the sand of the sea yet at the present moment the closest thing he had to an heir was the son of a servant who he had acquired when traveling through Syria.

God responds to the outburst from Abraham:

#### Genesis 15:4-5

<sup>4</sup>And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." <sup>5</sup>Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

His response clarifies the promise in a way that makes it much more personal but also much less probable. Abraham is told that the descendants will come from his own body. This is remarkable when we consider how old he is and how he is described.

Gen 12:4 – Abraham is 75 when he entered Canaan

Gen 16:3 – Abraham is 85 when he marries Hagar

So here in Gen 15 Abraham is probably in his early 80's

The New Testament describes Abe this way:

#### **Romans 4:19**

And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the **deadness of Sarah's** womb.

#### **Hebrews 11:12**

Therefore from one man, and him **as good as dead**, were born **as many as** the stars of the sky in multitude—

innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

God then takes Abraham outside and shows him the star lit night sky and promises that his descendants will not only come from his own body but will be innumerable as the stars of the sky

Abraham's response to this is one of the most important statements in all of Scripture

Genesis 15:6

<sup>6</sup>And he **believed** in the LORD, and He **accounted** it to him for **righteousness**.

Moses presents belief as the means of attaining righteousness

The context is very simple;

- Abraham believes in the promise of God despite all reason.
- The result is that he is treated as righteous not because of his actions but because of his faith in the promise of God

This brings up a very important Biblical truth – **Faith trumps Action**

Action –

- A man with a sorted past (an idolater who put his wife's life at risk)
- Is doubting the promises of God

Belief –

- Despite his doubts he chooses to trust the promise of God and as a result is counted as righteous

The NT uses the word **Justified** to speak of the condition of a person who trusts in the promise of God for salvation

So important is this truth that this verse is used in 3 different NT books to develop the doctrine of salvation and the practice of Christian living

Romans 4:3

For what does the Scripture say? “**Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.**”

In the book of Romans Paul spends a great deal of time developing the need and means of salvation. He begins by proving that all people are sinners then concludes that salvation cannot be achieved by works of the law but must be received by faith.

### Romans 3:28

**<sup>28</sup>Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.**

To illustrate this point Paul takes us back to Genesis 15:6 and reminds us that Abraham was justified by faith in the promises of God.

To further develop the argument that salvation is the same for all, Paul reminds us that this happened before the act of circumcision, which was the seal of the covenant between God and man. In a sense Paul is saying that Abraham was justified while he was still a gentile, prior to the establishing of the Hebrew race.

The application is that all humans can be justified by faith in the finished work of Christ and not by our deeds or adherents to a religious system.

Salvation is received by faith in Christ alone

### Romans 4:23-25

**<sup>23</sup>Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, <sup>24</sup>but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification**

Paul uses this same passage in his argument with the Galatians

### Galatians 3:6

Just as **Abraham** “**believed God**, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”

The believers in Galatia were being tempted to return to a legalistic form of Christianity that placed restrictions on them similar to the Mosaic Law. Paul uses this passage to explain that just as we are saved by a miraculous work of the Spirit so to does the same working of the Spirit perfect us.

He famously writes:

### Galatians 3:3

<sup>3</sup>Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

One of the main problems with legalism besides the fact that it does not work is that we are forced to measure our Christian growth by the things we are doing. If we set up dietary laws and certain days as being above others, then we consider ourselves righteous when we are eating and observing right. On the other hand, if we live under grace we will be forced to measure our growth by how we are being conformed into the image of Christ

Finally James uses this same passage in his argument regarding faith and works

### James 2:23

And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “**Abraham believed God**, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” And he was called the friend of **God**.

James has often been placed at odds with Paul because of his emphasis on the need for a faith that works. Although he is in no way contradicting Paul, he does base his argument on the fact that Abe was justified by faith and the proof of that was the works that followed.

James sites to scenes from Abraham’s life.

- One - The offering of Isaac and declares that this work justified him
- Two – His belief recorded in Gen 15:6. James’ argument is that the proof of the genuineness of his faith was the actions that followed.
- While our own works or adherence to a religious system can never save us, a saved person will show evidence in their actions that they have truly been justified by faith.

## 15:7-21

### Abraham’s Dream

After declaring Abraham righteous God affirms that the covenant will include not only descendants but also a land

#### Genesis 15:7

<sup>7</sup>Then He said to him, “I *am* the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.”

To which Abraham asks:

#### Genesis 15:8

<sup>8</sup>And he said, “Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?”

The remainder of Chapter 15 focuses upon an offering that Abraham made to the Lord and a prophetic dream that followed.

The dream is recorded in:

#### Genesis 15:12-16

<sup>12</sup>Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror *and* great darkness fell upon him.<sup>13</sup>Then He said to Abram: “Know certainly that **your descendants will be strangers in a land *that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years.*** <sup>14</sup>And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. <sup>15</sup>Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old

age. <sup>16</sup> But in the fourth generation **they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.**"

This dream contains prophecy that will be fulfilled over the next 400 years

- Abraham's descendants will dwell in a land that is not theirs
- They will serve and be afflicted for 400 years
- God will judge that nation
- God will bring them out with great possessions
- They will return to Canaan

All of this will be recorded in the opening chapters of Exodus when after 400 years have transpired, God hears the cries of His people and raises up Moses to deliver them from bondage in Egypt

There is one more aspect of this prophecy that is extremely important. God declares that:

- This will all happen **after the iniquity of the Amorites is complete**

History records the brutality and wickedness of the inhabitants of Canaan.

God will withhold his people from occupying the land for more than 400 years to give the people ample time to repent

When Israel finally drives Canaanites from the land it is a form of divine judgment that is finally meted out

**The mercy of God is clearly expressed in this passage.**

- God waits 400 years giving the Amorites time to repent
- God's own people suffer beyond measure while His mercy is being extended to others
  - We read of slavery, persecution, and attempted genocide
- The same is true today.



- The heart of believers everywhere cry out for Christ to come back,
- God puts up with mockery and the mistreatment of His people while his hand of mercy is continually spread out
- One day time will run its course and God will mete out judgment upon those who reject Christ
  - The bowl judgments in Revelation 16 happen when the cries of the saints for God to make all things right are finally answered. Until then the mercy of God is being extended toward.

## Chapter 16

### God's Little Helper

Chapter 16 takes place 10 years after Abraham and his family entered Canaan. We cannot know how long prior to this Abraham first heard the call of God. Since his initial call Abraham has been promised:

- A Land - But he is living as a nomad
- Descendants as the stars and sand – But he currently has no children

At this point in the story we come to another time when Abraham and Sarah's faith falter.

#### Genesis 16:1-2

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no *children*. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar.<sup>2</sup> So Sarai said to Abram, "See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing *children*. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her." And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai.

Abraham agrees to take Hagar as his second wife and to have children through her. This is clearly an example of faltering faith the evidences itself by thinking we need to help God fulfill his plans. Notice:

#### Hebrews 6:12

<sup>12</sup>that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

**This is a very important principle as it relates to receiving the promises of God**

If we are going to partake of the promises of God we need both faith and patience

Patience comes from a compound Greek word meaning “Far off Passions”

Patience shows itself when we do not let our emotions drive our actions, but we keep them in check by clinging to what God has promised

This seems to be where Sarah failed. She has the promises of God, but she is unwilling to endure the waiting period before these things will be fulfilled.

She decides to figure out a way to receive the promises of God without having to wait.

Instead of waiting she:

- **Looked at her circumstance**

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

After all this time had passed she was farther away from the fulfillment of the promise than ever.

**Genesis 18:11**

*Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing.*

The New Testament describes her as simply “past the age”

- **Looked to her own resources**

*And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar.<sup>2</sup>*

Not being able to believe that God would provide she sought to help him out using the resources that she had at her disposal. In this case it was a young Egyptian maidservant

- **She drew her own conclusions**

So Sarai said to Abram, "See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing *children*. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her."

Polygamy was a legal form of marriage at the time of Abraham. While it may have been legal that did not make it moral, ethical, wise or within the confines of the will of God.

Abraham is not an innocent bystander in the story. We find that he is unwilling to stand on the promises of God and gives into the pressure from his wife.

#### Genesis 16:4

<sup>4</sup>So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes.

The faltering faith of Abraham and Sarah resulted in birthing consequences they never imagined.

- First Sarah now despised Hagar. She must have thought very highly of her before to offer her to Abe, now she despised her and began to mistreat her
- 16:6 – reads she dealt harshly with her.

Harshly can mean to afflict. It is possible that Sarah began to beat Hagar or at least to verbally and socially mistreat her

- Finally and most difficult is that their sin gave birth to Ishmael.

We can never know the far-reaching effects of our sins or our righteousness

#### Genesis 16:6

<sup>6</sup>So Abram said to Sarai, "Indeed your maid *is* in your hand; do to her as you please." And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence.

Hagar is now pregnant and the harsh treatment she is under causes her to run. Since she is from Egypt she begins a journey back toward Shur, which was East of Egypt

It is here in the wilderness where Hagar has an encounter with God. This passage is filled with beauty and symbolism

- 15:6 - Hagar is afflicted and pregnant
- 15:7 - The Lord finds her in her condition.

It is worth noting that she is not seeking the Lord but fleeing from her difficulty when the Lord finds her

- 15:7 - This is the first mention of The Angel of the Lord

It is clear from the context that this is not an angelic visitation, but what is called a theophany or a Christophany (An appearance of Christ prior to the incarnation)

His first visit is not to a king, priest or prophet; it is not even to Abraham the father of all who believe. His first visit is to a woman who was in many ways like a single mom in despair.

- 15:8-12 – God had a plan that her despair made it impossible for her to see

God promises

- She will have a child
- He will be blessed and become a great nation
- He will be a wild man

There is much said today of the Arabs and particularly Muslim Arabs being descendants of Ishmael. That is in fact false. There would be no way to trace Muhammad's lineage back to Ishmael for there was no reason for idol worshippers in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD to want any connection with him. All historical evidence is that the descendants of Ishmael were integrated into other people groups and cultures 700 years before Christ or 1400 years before Muhammad

That being said, the very existence of Ishmael allows for the claims of Islam to having a right to the Land

### Genesis 16:13

<sup>13</sup>Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said, “Have I also here seen Him who sees me?”

Hagar responds with worship and expresses how God is the one who saw her in her affliction and how she had met with God

Some of the other names for God in the OT include:

- [El Shaddai](#) (Lord God Almighty)
- [El Elyon](#) (The Most High God)
- [Adonai](#) (Lord, Master)
- [Yahweh](#) (Lord, Jehovah)
- [Jehovah Nissi](#) (The Lord My Banner)
- [Jehovah-Raah](#) (The Lord My Shepherd)
- [Jehovah Rapha](#) (The Lord That Heals)
- [Jehovah Shammah](#) (The Lord Is There)
- [Jehovah Tsidkenu](#) (The Lord Our Righteousness)
- [Jehovah Mekoddishkem](#) (The Lord Who Sanctifies You)
- [El Olam](#) (The Everlasting God)
- [Elohim](#) (God)
- [Qanna](#) (Jealous)
- [Jehovah Jireh](#) (The Lord Will Provide)
- [Jehovah Shalom](#) (The Lord Is Peace)
- [Jehovah Sabaoth](#) (The Lord of Hosts)
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- Taken from Blue Letter Bible

## Chapter 17

### A token of the Covenant

25 years after entering the Canaan and 13 years after the birth of Ishmael God appears again to Abraham

### Genesis 17:1-2

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I *am* Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. <sup>2</sup>And

I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.”

The purpose of the appearance is to call Abraham to holiness and to reaffirm the covenant that has been made

- Call to holiness –

“I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.

The secret to holy living is to realize that we are walking out our lives in the very presence of God

If He was aware of Hagar as she sat by a spring of water in the wilderness He is certainly aware of us as we sit before the computer screen or our smart phones

- He reaffirms the covenant

I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.”

At least 11 times in the chapter God will say “I Will”

Abraham has nothing left, he is old, his wife is old and his attempts in the flesh to fulfill the promise have proven vain. Now God will step in and accomplish what only God can do

- The covenant includes
  - A reminder that God will make Abe a father of many nations
  - A name change that is fitting for his position
  - A reminder that the covenant is everlasting and involves the gift of a land
  - And a sign or a token of the covenant

God promises to do all that for Abraham and his descendants, in return God asks for them to be circumcised

What is circumcision?

- Physically it is the cutting away of the male foreskin
- Spiritually it speaks of the cutting away of the flesh
  - Paul explained that circumcision followed faith. God chose Abe, Abe believed God and years later was circumcised
  - Circumcision is explained in Romans

### Romans 2:28-29

<sup>28</sup>For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; <sup>29</sup>but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God.

God requires all who will be in covenant with Him to be circumcised

### Genesis 17:10-14

<sup>10</sup>This *is* My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and **your descendants** after you: **Every male child** among you shall be circumcised; <sup>11</sup>and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. <sup>12</sup>He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, **he who is born in your house** or **bought with money** from any foreigner who is not your descendant. <sup>13</sup>He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and **My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant**. <sup>14</sup>And **the uncircumcised** male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person **shall be cut off** from his people; **he has broken My covenant.**”

This is not the requirement of the NT believer

Galatians 5:6

<sup>6</sup>For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

It is worth noting how Abraham responded to the command

### Genesis 17:23-27

<sup>24</sup>**Abraham was ninety-nine years old** when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. <sup>25</sup>And **Ishmael** his son **was thirteen** years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. <sup>26</sup>That very same day Abraham was circumcised, and his son Ishmael; <sup>27</sup>and **all the men of his house**, born in the house or bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

Abraham is an example of leadership

- The first cut was inward
- Second cut was in the home
- Third cut was toward those who worked along with him