

Men and Women of God – Abraham

Worship: Our God is an awesome God, He reigns from heaven above.

Big Picture:

God promises a. To make Abraham into a great nation through whom all peoples on earth will be blessed (Gen 12 v 1-3) and b. To give the land in which Abraham lives (then occupied by the Canaanites) to Abraham's descendants (Gen 12 v 6-7).

These two promises summarised in Gen 17 v1-7 are sometimes known as the Abrahamic covenant the sign of which was circumcision Gen 17 v 9-14.

The Jewish people can from Abraham's son Isaac (the son of the covenant – Gen 17 v 21) and it is believed that the Arabic people descended from Ishmael (Abraham's first son born to Hagar the Egyptian maidservant of his wife Sarah).

(Islamic traditions consider Ishmael to be the ancestor of Arab people, excluding Arabs who are descendants of Ya'rub. Arabs who are from Ishmael-descendant tribes are occasionally referred to as "Arabized-Arabs" to highlight their ancestry. The Prophet Muhammad was of these Arabs. However, many modern Arabs also believe their tribes and houses to be of Isaac's blood line, in particular in Southern Palestine.

Jewish traditions are split between those who consider Ishmael the northern Arab ancestor and those, like Maimonides, who believe that the northern Arabs are descended from the sons of Keturah, whom Abraham married after Sarah's death).

Abraham

Name: God changes his name from Abram (exalted father) to Abraham (father of many) (God also changes his wife's name from Sarai to Sarah).

Father: Terah who moved with his family (including Abram) from Ur of the Chaldeans to settle in Haran. (Abram was called by God to leave Haran and go south and settle in the land of the Canaanites).

Wife: Sarai (Sarah)

Half-Sister: Sarah, his wife (Gen 20 v 12)

Sons: Ishmael (with Hagar), Isaac (with Sarah), Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah (with Keturah whom Abraham married after Sarah's death) Gen 23 v 1,2 and Gen 25 v 1,2

Brothers: Nahor and Haran

Nephew: Lot

Abraham, through whom God founded the Hebrew nation, has many Biblical references including in Stephen's speech before the Sanhedrin (Acts Ch 7 v 1-8) as well as in Hebrews Chapter 11 - what is sometimes called the 'Faith Hall of Fame.' (Heb 11 v 8-12 and 17-19.)

VAK Moment

Any Biblical maps that you might have which map out the journeys take Abraham takes, in particular the journeys from Ur of the Chaldeans to Haran and then to Canaan, would be especially useful

Bible Study

I hope that you will agree that a single session Bible study on Abraham is somewhat of a challenge. Therefore, although very interesting and very worthy of further study, we will not be covering Melchizedek or Abram's pleading for Sodom or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, but rather on Abraham's three specific acts of faith mentioned in Hebrews Chapter 11.

Abraham's Faith

A Biblical definition of faith: Hebrews 11 v 1 'Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.'

1. Stepping into the unknown

Abraham had faith enough to obey God and go when he did not know where he was going (Heb 11 v 8 and Gen 12 v 1-5) and in doing so left a known, comfortable environment.

What are the necessary conditions for stepping out into the unknown?

Stepping out of the boat, doesn't necessarily mean moving c400 miles to live in tents among strangers, but what might it mean for us?

What was the furthest that we have stepped into the unknown because we knew that God was leading us?

Ask if anyone in the group feels that they are being called by God to step out into the unknown and pray for those people at this moment.

How does Abraham's experience of being asked to be different and to live as an alien and stranger in a foreign land (see 1 Pet 2 v 11,12) with the promise of so much more to come still at some point in the future, remind us of our current experience as Christians? (our hope of a life with Jesus in heaven and of Jesus coming again and ultimately of a new heaven and a new earth) –John 14 v 2, Rev 22 v 20, , 2 Pet 3 v 13 and Rev 21 v 1)

To what extent do we feel that we are living as aliens and strangers in the world?

If we don't feel that way what might that mean?

Encourage the group to be distinctive and different wherever we are (not through circumcision! but rather through being salt and light and living holy lives – Matt 5 v 13-16 and Heb 12 v 14).

2. Believing the impossible (Gen 18 v 14 ‘Is anything too hard for the Lord?’ – compare with Luke 1 v 37 ‘For nothing is impossible with God’)

Abraham believed that God would give him numerous offspring and would make a nation through him (Heb 11 v 11 and Gen 15 v 5,6). But his wife Sarah was barren (Gen 12 v 30)

Abraham had faith but it was limited by his patience and his human understanding:

- **Impatience**

Against a backdrop of being barren (Gen 12 v 30) and the years advancing, Sarah takes it in to her hands to persuade Abram to fulfil God’s promise by asking him to sleep with her maidservant, Hagar (Gen 16 v 1-3). Abram goes along with the plan without asking God if that was what God wanted, if that was how God had intended to fulfil his promise. They were impatient to see what God had promised and took action into their own hands.

When God doesn’t seem to act do we sometimes take action ourselves?

What might be the consequences of us taking matters into our own hands? (Ishmael was made into a great nation (Gen 17 v 20, Gen 21 v 18) but would always live in hostility towards all his brothers (Gen 16 v 11,12)).

How might we understand God’s timing better?

Conversely, how can we insure that we don’t use God’s timing as an excuse for not doing something when we should?

- **Human Understanding**

Our human understanding can lead us to doubt.

In Gen Ch 17, after God changes both Abram’s and Sarai’s name, and says to Abraham in v 15-17 that Sarah will be blessed to be the mother of nations with kings of peoples coming from her, Abraham falls face down and laughs and what he says to himself in v 17, reveals that Abraham doubts what God has said because Sarah is a barren woman beyond the age of child bearing (Gen 18 v 11). His doubts reveal that he has limited God to working only within his human understanding. (Note that Sarah too laughs at the news Gen 18 v 12).

How can our human understanding limit what we think God can do?

How can we resize God? (the sky at night....)

Ask the group for times when God has exceeded their expectations/understanding and what they learnt from that.

3. Prepared to sacrifice what we love the most.

Abraham obeyed God in being prepared to sacrifice Isaac, having faith that God could raise the dead (Heb 17-19 and Gen 22 v 1-19). (Similarities here with God and Jesus).

An amazing act of faith by Abraham!

To what extent are we prepared to give up the things we love the most? (the point is not necessarily that we have to but that we are prepared to, are willing to.) Compare the story of Jesus speaking to the rich man in Mark 10 v 17-27 (Note v 27 'Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.'

Testing may come in different ways. Note here that God directly tested Abraham (Gen 22 v 1,2) v God allowing Job to be tested (Job Ch 1,2).

Conclusion

Ask the group to summarise what they have learnt from Abraham and how this might affect their own relationship with God.

(Abraham, a great man of God and of faith, still doubted at times. His doubts arose impatience – God didn't seem to be acting so he tried to accelerate God's plans without asking for directions and from restricting God's power to the level of his own human understanding.)

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