

Abraham: Father of Faith

Booklet Two



Bible Studies from Genesis 18-22



Abraham: Father of Faith

Booklet One

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Study 1 | The Call of Abraham
Genesis 11:27-12:20 |
| Study 2 | Abram and Lot
Genesis 13:1-14:24 |
| Study 3 | God's reassurance to Abram
Genesis 15:1-21 |
| Study 4 | God's call for a response
Genesis 17:1-27 |

Booklet Two

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Study 5 | A challenge for Sarah
Genesis 18:1-15 |
| Study 6 | Judgment and Salvation
Genesis 18:16-19:29 |
| Study 7 | Hagar and Ishmael
Genesis 21:1-21 |
| Study 8 | A test for Abraham
Genesis 22:1-19 |

Study 5

A Challenge for Sarah – Gen 18:1-15

1. Have you ever laughed at someone's plans? Ever doubted that an improbable vision would ever be fulfilled? Ever been proved wrong in your scepticism?

2. Read Genesis 18:1-8. What is admirable about Abraham's behaviour here?

3. Read Hebrews 13:2. How does the writer to the Hebrews read this story in Genesis? How comfortable are you with the idea of entertaining strangers? What steps can you take to be more open to the idea?

4. Read 18:9-15. In what ways has God's promise to Abraham become more specific as the story has unfolded? See 12:2; 15:5; 17:3-6; 17:19. What new information is added in Genesis 18:10?

5. What chance did Sarah have of conceiving a child at this point in time? How does Sarah's story echo through the rest of the Bible? See Gen 30:22; 1 Sam 1:19-20; Luke 1:30-37.

6. Why might God have waited until now to deliver on his promise? What point might he be making?

7. Is v14 an 'open cheque' for us? How does the wider context of the story help us understand this verse?

8. Read Luke 18:18-30. What parallel is there with the story in Genesis 18?

9. Are there aspects of God's mission that you think are impossible? Any promises to us that you think are unlikely to be fulfilled?

10. Pray that God might be increasing our faith in his ability "to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Eph 3:20).

Study 6

Judgement and Salvation – Genesis 18:16-19:29

1. Do you remember the first thing you ever gave up because of your faith?

2. Read Genesis 18:16-19. Why does God have this conversation with Abraham? See also Rom 15:4, 1 Cor 10:11.

3. Read the rest of Genesis 18. Does this passage teach us that God can change his mind? What do you think of Dale Ralph Davis' explanation below?

These verses don't merely communicate information but act as an invitation. It's as if the Lord is saying to Abraham 'Now please talk to me about this situation'...Of course, there will always be some who object to God's technique and perhaps accuse him of being devious. But why can't the God of heaven be at least sophisticated as we are? We sometimes don't use a direct approach; we may state something with the intent of drawing out a certain response...that is God's way with Abraham, and it tells us that God moves our prayers, that he draws us to pray.

Faith of our Father, pp. 96-97

4. Read the account of God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19:1-29. What do you make of Lot's character? Fill in the table below.

Positive Attributes	Negative Attributes

How does 2 Peter 2:7-8 describe Lot? How might we understand Lot's more negative attributes in light of this verse? Rom 5:17 might help.

5. Many people are sickened by Lot's offer in v8. How might vs 12-14 shed new light on the situation? Hint: read the text footnotes, or read v14 in the KJV!

6. What clear instructions do the men give Lot? How does Lot respond?

7. What does this story teach us about life as a person who is receiving God's salvation? See also Luke 17:28-33

8. In what ways might we resist God's saving work in our lives? What or who might we be tempted to turn back to? Pray about these matters.

Study 7

Hagar and Ishmael – Genesis 21:1-21

1. Have you ever taken matters into your own hands, only to realise later that you were mistaken?
2. Read Genesis 16:1-6. What is driving Sarai's actions here? How would you describe the outcome?
3. When are you tempted to lose patience with God? What hasty actions could we easily fall into? What outcomes could be born out of such hastiness?
4. Read Genesis 21:1-11. In what way is this passage significant for the whole Abraham saga? What would it have been like living in the same household as Sarai (now known as Sarah) and Hagar?
5. Read a Chapter 21:12-20 and list the actions that God takes towards Hagar. What is attractive about God in these verses?

6. What do these verses teach us about how God reacts to the mess that we humans can make? How might God's graciousness be seen in response to our hastiness within our own lives?

7. How is God's response to Hagar instructive for us in our dealings with others? See also Matt 5:44-45.

8. Have you ever caught yourself acting more like Sarah than God when it comes to dealing with those outside of God's family?

9. Pray that God might fill us with patience as we wait for his plans to be fulfilled and graciousness as we interact with those others who are outside of God's family.

Study 8

A test for Abraham - Genesis 22:1-19

1. When do you find God to be at his most perplexing?

2. Read Genesis 22:1-8. What does God instruct Abraham to do? What is Abraham's reaction?

3. What is sustaining Abraham's reaction here? What does Abraham know of God? What does Hebrews 11:17-19 add to the picture?

4. Consider the following promises of God. Do you feel that any are beyond trusting?

Matthew 16:24-25	Mark 10:29-31	John 14:26
1 Cor 12:7	1 Cor 15:51-52	Phil 4:6-7

5. Read Genesis 22:9-14. How does the author build up the tension in the story?

6. What does God end up doing?
7. How do the promises of Q.4 echo what we see here in Genesis 22?
8. Read Genesis 22:15-19. Is Abraham's obedience without benefit? What motivation do we find in these verses to embark on a life of radical obedience?
9. When was the last time you were radical in your obedience towards God? How might Abraham's experience here in Genesis 22 train us for such obedience?
10. Pray that when God's path for us seems incomprehensible and beyond our capacity to obey, we might be so confident of God's goodness that we find the ability to walk in obedience anyway.

Leader's Notes

Study 5

A Challenge for Sarah – Gen 18:1-15

1. Have you ever laughed at someone's plans? Ever doubted that an improbable vision would ever be fulfilled? Ever been proved wrong in your scepticism?

A question to get people thinking along the lines of this study's theme.

2. Read Genesis 18:1-8. What is admirable about Abraham's behaviour here?

Look how quick Abraham is to offer hospitality. Look at the lengths he goes to be hospitable!

3. Read Hebrews 13:2. How does the writer to the Hebrews read this story in Genesis? How comfortable are you with the idea of entertaining strangers? What steps can you take to be more open to the idea?

The writer to the Hebrews sees Abraham as entertaining Angels without knowing. Our willingness to offer hospitality can have effects that extend beyond what we might ordinarily expect. Think of the person who comes to Christ because of a simple kindness shown by a believer. Hospitality comes more easily to some than others; there is room for varying degrees within the church. But challenge people to think of practical ideas where they can take a step in the direction of being generous with their hospitality.

4. Read 18:9-15. In what ways has God's promise to Abraham become more specific as the story has unfolded? See 12:2; 15:5; 17:3-6; 17:19. What new information is added in Genesis 18:10?

A nation > many nations > a son with a name Issac > by this time next year (18:10)!

5. What chance did Sarah have of conceiving a child at this point in time? How does Sarah's story echo through the rest of the Bible? See Gen 30:22; 1 Sam 1:19-20; Luke 1:30-37.

Nil, as she was beyond child bearing years, ie had gone through menopause. But notice how many of God's servants were born in similar improbable circumstances! Such a birth would become a sign that God is about to do something big.

6. Why might God have waited until now to deliver on his promise? What point might he be making?

The point is that God's plan is his doing, by his power. A echo of the type of salvation we would receive, ie entirely God's work.

7. Is v14 an 'open cheque' for us? How does the wider context of the story help us understand this verse?

An 'open cheque' might suggest that this is a promise that God can do anything we might wish for. But the context is that God's actions are always part of his purposes. God can do anything, and will do it if it's part of his plan.

8. Read Luke 18:18-30. What parallel is there with the story in Genesis 18?

Salvation is an impossible thing, especially if there is some competition for a person's heart (like money was for the man in Luke 18:18-30). But like we see with Sarah, if God gets to work, the impossible becomes possible. Note Luke 18:27.

9. Are there aspects of God's mission that you think are impossible? Any promises to us that you think are unlikely to be fulfilled?

Is there anyone who you think is beyond salvation? Is there a future that we cannot achieve as a church? Did God really mean it when he said x,y,z. (try and articulate some promises of God that we find hard to believe are possible). You could also ask "what might it look like to be more positive about what is possible?"

10. Pray that God might be increasing our faith in his ability “to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us” (Eph 3:20).

Study 6

Judgement and Salvation – Genesis 18:16-19:29

1. Do you remember the first thing you ever gave up because of your faith?

A question getting at the theme of Lot's hesitation to turn his back on an environment that was clearly not good for his spiritual wellbeing. There is SO MUCH in this story; we will barely scratch the surface. However a theme we will focus on is Lot and what we can learn from his presentation in these chapters.

2. Read Genesis 18:16-19. Why does God have this conversation with Abraham? See also Rom 15:4, 1 Cor 10:11.

V 19 seems to suggest that God is revealing his purposes to Abraham in order to give him something to teach his descendants about. This purpose of the OT is picked up in the two NT texts mentioned in the question.

3. Read the rest of Genesis 18. Does this passage teach us that God can change his mind? What do you think of Dale Ralph Davis' explanation below?

These verses don't merely communicate information but act as an invitation. It's as if the Lord is saying to Abraham 'Now please talk to me about this situation'...Of course, there will always be some who object to God's technique and perhaps accuse him of being devious. But why can't the God of heaven be at least sophisticated as we are? We sometimes don't use a direct approach; we may state something with the intent of drawing out a certain response...that is God's way with Abraham, and it tells us that God moves our prayers, that he draws us to pray.

Faith of our Father, pp. 96-97

3. Read the account of God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19:1-29. What do you make of Lot's character? Fill in the table below.

Positive Attributes	Negative Attributes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Sitting at the gate, a position of an elder.</i> - <i>Welcomed guests like Abraham did</i> - <i>Sought to protect his guests</i> - <i>Pleads with sons-in-law to escape</i> - <i>Plus in ch 18 the inference is that in speaking with God Abraham is trying to save Lot on account of his righteousness.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>He is an elder in Sodom of all places! Why is he here?</i> - <i>Offers up his daughters (but v12-14)</i> - <i>Hesitates in leaving</i> - <i>Doesn't escape all the way, seems to whine a bit.</i>

How does 2 Peter 2:7-8 describe lot? How might we understand Lot's more negative attributes in light of this verse? Rom 5:17 might help.

2 Peter is very positive about Lot's character. Perhaps we see here that righteousness is a gift (as described in Rom 5:17), and that any positive elements in his character are the product of God's grace rather than something Lot produced himself. Lot remains a somewhat imperfect character, but righteousness and salvation is his. You can also ask "Why is Lot saved?" The answer is "not on account of his own righteousness, but on account of God's promise to Abraham" See v 29.

5. Many people are sickened by Lot's offer in v8. How might vs 12-14 shed new light on the situation? Hint: read the text footnotes, or read v14 in the KJV!

This is a terribly distressing and difficult verse. Two of the better explanations are:

- a. *Lot's offer is evidence of the effect living in Sodom has on someone. We are meant to be disgusted at Lot's offer, but we marvel that God saves him despite his depravity.*
- b. *Lot is actually lying when he offers his two daughters in order to try and buy time. Verse 12-14 can be read to indicate that this might actually be the case. Verse 14 is somewhat open to translation. Lot's sons-in-law can either be betrothed or already married (note NIV footnote and KJV). If already married then he has no virgin daughters to offer. This reading makes sense of other aspects of the text: why the men ask if there are any other member's of Lot's household, why Lot then goes out to fetch them.*

6. What clear instructions do the men give Lot? How does Lot respond?

The instruction is to escape, but Lot hesitates.

9. What does this story teach us about life as a person who is receiving God's salvation? See also Luke 17:28-33

If we are recipients of God's salvation, then we should order our lives to reflect what God is saving us from. Why keep on playing with sin when God has redeemed us? Many Bible verses apart from Luke 17:28-33 repeat this theme. Prov 26:11, Rom 6:1-2. 2 Peter 2:20-22

8. In what ways might we resist God's saving work in our lives? What or who might we be tempted to turn back to? Pray about these matters.

Study 7

Hagar and Ishmael – Genesis 21:1-21

4. Have you ever taken matters into your own hands, only to realise later that you were mistaken?

A question introducing a theme we see in Sarah's actions.

5. Read Genesis 16:1-6. What is driving Sarai's actions here? How would you describe the outcome?

Some background looking at the origins of Hagar's story. Sarai is obviously getting impatient with God, and seeks to take a shortcut rather than waiting for God to do things in his time. The outcome is messy with the development of household conflict. Should have left things in God's hands!

6. When are you tempted to lose patience with God? What hasty actions could we easily fall into? What outcomes could be born out of such hastiness?

There are some obvious answers: starting a relationship that is not in God's plan for human relationships because it doesn't look like he is providing; Getting impatient with a lack of church growth so we look to water-down the message. But try and encourage some thinking outside the box on this too.

4. Read Genesis 21:1-11. In what way is this passage significant for the whole Abraham saga? What would it have been like living in the same household as Sarai (now known as Sarah) and Hagar?

Isaac is finally born! But note that the fulfilment of the promise doesn't solve all the issues – even when God fulfils a promise to us it doesn't mean that life is then all blue skies and green lights. The tension between Sarah and Hagar (obviously still bubbling along after all this time) rises to the surface. Abraham's household was not the perfect example of happy families!

4. Read a Chapter 21:12-20 and list the actions that God takes towards Hagar. What is attractive about God in these verses?

Grants Ishmael his own blessing and promise, hears the distress of Hagar and Ishmael in the desert, speaks words of comfort to Hagar, provides water. While Sarah's actions disappoint us, God proves himself to be more merciful than his own servants. He shows himself to be moved by the tears of a destitute mother and Son, who don't even figure in his main course of action. He cares about the little people.

6. What do these verses teach us about how God reacts to the mess that we humans can make? How might God's graciousness be seen in response to our hastiness within our own lives?

It's a great OT example of the mercy of God in light of the mess that humans can make. Remember this whole business was started when Sarah (then Sarai) became impatient with God and took matters into her own hands.

7. How is God's response to Hagar instructive for us in our dealings with others? See also Matt 5:44-45.

Even if people are outside God's family, it doesn't stop God from bestowing a form of grace upon them. This is what theologians call God's common grace. While not a grace that leads to salvation, it is a form of mercy nonetheless. In Matthew 5:44-45 we are called to imitate such an attitude to those on the outside.

10. Have you ever caught yourself acting more like Sarah than God when it comes to dealing with those outside of God's family?

Time for some confession! It always helps if the leader of the group admits to something first!!

9. Pray that God might fill us with patience as we wait for his plans to be fulfilled and graciousness as we interact with those others who are outside of God's family.

Study 8

A test for Abraham - Genesis 22:1-19

1. When do you find God to be at his most perplexing?

One theme in this passage is the confusing path that God sometimes asks us to walk. Sometimes the Bible calls us to do things that we just don't understand, or don't make sense on our current environment. Abraham can teach us a thing or two about such situations.

5. Read Genesis 22:1-8. What does God instruct Abraham to do? What is Abraham's reaction?

To sacrifice Isaac, the very son he waited 25 years to receive! Without complaint, Abraham complies.

6. What is sustaining Abraham's reaction here? What does Abraham know of God? What does Hebrews 11:17-19 add to the picture?

It's interesting that Abraham is so willing to comply, given at other times he has questioned God's plans (ch 18). It seems that by this stage Abraham trust in God is pretty unshakeable. Note his response in v8. Hebrews 11 adds that Abraham knew that God would resurrect Isaac if it actually came to that. The details might have been a mystery, but Abraham knew the promise of offspring through Isaac was no lie, so sure, he'd start the process of sacrificing Isaac. This doesn't mean that Abraham knew exactly what was in God's mind though.

7. Consider the following promises of God. Do you feel that any are beyond trusting?

Matthew 16:24-25

Mark 10:29-31

John 14:26

1 Cor 12:7

1 Cor 15:51-52

Phil 4:6-7

5. Read Genesis 22:9-14. How does the author build up the tension in the story?

Notice the awkward conversation between Father and Son in vs 7-8. Vs 9-10 especially, the climax is drawn out step by step as we are invited to picture each physical movement by Abraham.

5. What does God end up doing?

He provides a ram in place of Isaac. Notice also the place is called "God provides" rather than "Abraham obeys" in v14. We can so easily miss God's action of providing what is needed.

6. How do the promises of Q.4 echo what we see here in Genesis 22?

In many of these promises there is an element of God providing something for us. Obedience is made easier when we grasp that in the midst of our obedience God is providing what we need.

7. Read Genesis 22:15-19. Is Abraham's obedience without benefit? What motivation do we find in these verses to embark on a life of radical obedience?

These verses make it seem that Abraham is being blessed on account of his works. However, we need to place these verses in the context of the whole story. These blessings are not new, and were put in place before Abraham did anything worthy of praise. But these verses do remind us that God isn't irresponsible to our obedience, and his blessings can take on a sharper, more meaningful quality on account of our positive response to God.

8. When was the last time you were radical in your obedience towards God? How might Abraham's experience here in Genesis 22 train us for such obedience?

An opportunity to really challenge the group to make a sacrifice for God, to search out something in their life that is overdue for a change, to address a fear that is holding them back in an area of obedience. Abraham helps in that

he shows us that the more we know of God, the more we walk with him and experience his faithfulness, the easier it is to do radical things for him.

10. Pray that when God's path for us seems incomprehensible and beyond our capacity to obey, we might be so confident of God's goodness that we find the ability to walk in obedience anyway.