

Abraham

The Call of Abraham

☐ Read Hebrews 11:8-10.¹

📖 “The LORD had said to Abram,² ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.’” (*Genesis 12:1, NIV*)³



1. In what ways did Abraham demonstrate faith by leaving his country, people, and father’s household? What did he give up? Why did he give it up?

The Promise of God

☐ Read Hebrews 11:11-12. Though Abraham was too old and his wife Sarah was “barren” (unable to have children), Abraham “considered him faithful who had made the promise” (11:11). Who was “him” who made the promise? God! What was the promise?⁴

- 📖 When Abraham was called, God told him, “I will make you into a great nation ... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (*Genesis 12:2-3*).
- 📖 After Abraham settled in Canaan, God told him, “I will make your offspring (descendants) like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted” (*Genesis 13:16, NIV*).
- 📖 A while later, God told Abraham, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them ... So shall your offspring be” (*Genesis 15:5, NIV*).
- 📖 About 24 years after the call of Abraham, he still had no children through his wife Sarah. But God told him, “You will be the father of many nations” (*Genesis 17:4*). God also said, “I will bless [Sarah] and will surely give you a son by her” (17:16).

The Questions of Abraham

- ☐ In general, Abraham believed God’s promise, but he sometimes wondered how it could be fulfilled. Though Abraham had a deep faith, he experienced some degree of doubt at times.⁵
- ☐ About 10 years after the call of Abraham, Sarah got tired of waiting on God. So she suggested that Abraham father a child through her maidservant Hagar (16:1-2).⁶ Abraham agreed, and “Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave [him] the name Ishmael” (16:2, 15).

¹ “city with foundations” – a firmly founded, permanent dwelling place, in contrast to tents; “the heavenly Jerusalem” (12:22); “the unshakable kingdom” (12:28); God’s kingdom consummated in the new heavens & earth.

² “Abram” became “Abraham” in Genesis 17:5. However, I will use the name “Abraham” throughout this handout.

³ Where did Abraham receive this call? Many say Ur (Neh. 9:7; Acts 7:2-4), a large, sophisticated, and prosperous city (assuming it was the Sumerian Ur in southern Mesopotamia). Others say Haran (in northern Mesopotamia), an important city of commerce and trade. Perhaps the initial call occurred in Ur, and then it was renewed in Haran.

⁴ The essential elements of the “promise to Abraham” are many descendants, a land, and universal blessing through Abraham’s offspring. The focus here is on the promise of many descendants (offspring).

⁵ Prior to God’s promise that Abraham’s offspring would be too numerous to count (Genesis 15:5), Abraham lamented to God, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household (Eliezer) will be my heir” (15:2-3, NIV). But God responded, “This man will not be your heir, but a son from your own body will be your heir” (15:4). About 24 years after the call of Abraham, God told Abraham that he and Sarah would have a son (17:16). “Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, ‘Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?’” (17:17, NIV; cp. 18:10-12 where Sarah also laughed).

⁶ This practice was according to social custom in Mesopotamia (e.g., the Code of Hammurabi).

- ❑ After she became pregnant, Hagar began to despise Sarah. Sarah blamed Abraham. Abraham told Sarah “Do with her whatever you think best.” Sarah “mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her” (16:4-6), but Hagar returned after talking with God (16:7-15). After Sarah finally had a son (Isaac), conflict arose again, and Sarah persuaded Abraham to drive Hagar and Ishmael away, with God’s okay (21:8-14). God was gracious to Hagar and Ishmael (21:15-21), but hostility would continue between the descendents of Ishmael and Isaac (16:12; 25:18).
2. What did Sarah’s plan indicate about her “faith?” What did Abraham’s actions indicate about him? How well did Sarah’s plan work?⁷

The Faithfulness of God

- ❑ Human faith may be weak at times, but the faithfulness of God is always strong and reliable.
- 📖 “Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him” (*Genesis 21:1-2, NIV*). (This son was Isaac.)

The Faith of Abraham

- ❑ Abraham remains a great example of faith. He is “the man of faith” (*Galatians 3:9*).
- 📖 “Abraham believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (15:6).
3. Read Romans 4:18-25. What was the basis of Abraham’s faith? What was the basis of Abraham’s righteousness before God?⁸ How does this apply to us?

Discussion Questions

4. How is God’s call to Abraham similar to His call to become a follower of Christ? How can Abraham’s example of faith (in responding to God’s call) apply to us as Christians?
5. Sarah got tired of waiting on God,⁹ so she did what was “expedient” or “practical” (according to the world’s standard) instead of doing things God’s way. In what areas of life do we sometimes use this approach? What can happen when we do things our way (or the world’s way) instead of God’s way?
6. What helped motivate Abraham to persevere (keep going) in faith? What should motivate and encourage Christians today, even when things look difficult or impossible? How can we stay motivated and encouraged?

Reflection/Application

- Read footnote 8. Biblical faith is in response to God’s Word. Whatever your level of faith, continue to listen to God’s Word & respond appropriately. Review and apply this handout.

⁷ It certainly did not work in fulfilling God’s promise, because God determined to fulfill his promise through the son of Sarah (Genesis 17:18-21). Sarah’s way could not take the place of God’s way.

⁸ The basis of his faith was God and His word. Faith is an active trust in the faithfulness of God. Abraham believed the promise of God and showed his faith by his actions. Abraham was declared righteous because of his faith. This is also true for us. We are declared righteous before God through faith in Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of the promise (Galatians 3:6-9, 16). We are saved by God’s grace, through faith, not by good works (Ephesians 2:8-9).

⁹ Other questions: Since God promised Abraham many descendents, why would God allow Sarah to be “barren” (unable to have children) for so long? What can we do when we get impatient with God?