



ABRAHAM AND SARAH FOLLOWING A FAITHFUL GOD

STUDY NOTES

Introduction

In 2019 we're focussing on what it means to follow Jesus' call on our lives. A call to share his love with the people of Wick, Littlehampton & the World.

What is God calling us to as a church?

Is the Lord calling me to serve the people and places I already know?

Maybe God is calling me to something new?

I believe that God's call to Abraham, and its ongoing relevance for us as inheritors of the promise, will help us answer those sorts of questions.

The format of these notes is only a guide, designed to move from an opening general discussion, into God's Word, understanding first in the original context and then how it applies to our lives.

As always, your time together may move on to other passages and lines of discussion. Hopefully these notes can root each discussion in Scripture as we ask for God's help to live as disciples of Jesus. I hope that you will spend time each week praying for one another, and the prayer suggestions are intended as an addition to your own personal prayer requests.

I hope and pray that the Lord will show you once again just how faithful he is. Although the journey can be hard, he is good all the time.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Thomas Nelson". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the main body of text.

ABRAM/ABRAHAM and SARAI/SARAH

We join the story in the era after the flood, as people attempt to create a monument to their own greatness. If this pride had gone unchecked, it would have been deadly for humanity designed to know and worship their creator. So, the Lord scatters them and then initiates a plan to introduce a people who can show the world what it means to live in God's place, under God's rule and knowing God's blessing. Abram and Sarai (later renamed Abraham and Sarah) will be the couple through whom God will begin this plan. However, even as chosen people there are many bumps along the way...

1. The World Needed a Plan

Getting started...

What sorts of things in day to day life do you find confusing?!

Read Genesis 11:1-9

Understanding what was happening...

How is humanity developing in the early verses of chapter 11?

Why is their pride (v4) such a problem?

Did you notice the almost-sarcastic description of what the Lord did in v5?

Do you find God's response in vv6-8 surprising?

What do your Bible footnotes tell you about the meaning of the word Babel?

Does there seem much hope for humanity getting back to God by Gen. 11:9?

Applying to our situations...

Is pride still something we struggle with?

What would it look like for us to live in ways that give God the glory?

How does this story remind us that God is creator and we are his creation?

Does God still allow hard things to happen, to save us from something worse?

Prayer

Often the world still feels 'confused.' Perhaps pray for people to come to know the God who made them, for us all to lay down our pride and instead to trust in the God who made us and had a plan to save us.

2. Calling Abram

Getting started...

Have you recently gone somewhere without knowing what to expect?

Read Genesis 11:27-12:9

Understanding what was happening...

How did God prepare Abram to take his family on a long journey? (11:31)

What did God promise to Abram and why is it significant?

Which word appears most in the promise and what does that say about God?

Is Abraham faithful to God's call? (v4)

If you have time, read 12:10-20 and notice that Abram was not perfect!

Applying to our situations...

Are there times in your past that God was preparing you for something?

What might God be doing in your life right now as preparation?

Are you ever worried about what God may ask of you?

How does this passage help you trust in the same God who called Abram?

Will God use us, even though we are not perfect?

Prayer

It's a good week to pray for God's call on our lives. It needn't be uprooting, it could be to live out the call to love God and neighbour where we already are.

3. Lot's Choice

Getting started...

When faced with a big decision, how do you usually go about making it?

Read Genesis 13:1-18

Understanding what was happening...

Are Abram and Lot criticised for their wealth?

What are the problem(s) they face as they journey together? (vv6-7)

What do we learn of Abram from him giving Lot the first choice of land?

On what basis does Lot make his choice? (vv10-11)

Do you think it matters that this is outside the land God promised Abram?

How does the text hint that Lot might be moving towards trouble?

How does God extend the promise to Abram in vv14-17

Applying to our situations...

How do we ensure that our possessions don't become a problem for us?

Do we also have to wait sometimes to find out what God has in store?

Do we make the most of our advantage over Lot of having Scripture as a guide?

Prayer

Perhaps pray that God's Spirit would speak through God's Word to give God's wisdom to one another in the decisions we make.

4. God's Promise to Abram

Getting started...

When was the last time you were outside on a clear, starry night?

Read Genesis 15:1-18

Understanding what was happening...

How does Abram react to God's promise in vv1-2?

Has there been any development in the promise from 12:2-3?

Why would Abram be so frustrated with still having no heir?

How does God restate his promise to Abram?

Why is v6 so significant in the context of the whole Bible? (see Romans 4:2-5)

Will it always be plain sailing for Abram's descendants? (v13!)

The ceremony is odd to us, but what's the significance of God passing through alone?

Applying to our situations...

Which of the Bible's main promises do apply to us?

As you think about them, how do you feel about God's promises?

Are there times when you also feel like questioning what God is doing?

Does this account give you hope that you can do that and God will answer?

How does this sacrifice remind us that God is faithful to love and save us?

Prayer

It might be good to pray for those who feel let down by promises, and also to know how to trust in the promises which are ours in Jesus.

5. God's covenant with Abraham

Getting started...

Do you know why you were given your name?

Read Genesis 17:1-8

Understanding what was happening...

Why does Abram fall face down? (Clue is in God's name, v1)

What is the covenant God makes with Abram?

How do your footnotes explain the change in Abraham's name?

Is there significance for us that Abraham is the father of more than 1 nation?

Applying to our situations...

How does Jesus help us walk faithfully AND forgive us when we don't?

Do you ever think about what God calls you? "daughter", "son", "friend" etc
Flick forward to Galatians 3:7-9 and see how we are included in the promise of Genesis 17:7!

How does it feel to know that through Jesus, we're included in the promise?

Prayer

Perhaps pray for those who feel let down by broken promises, and for us all to know the assurance of being included in God's everlasting promises.

6. God will keep his promise

Getting started...

How careful should we be with the words 'I promise'?

Read Genesis 18:1-14 and 21:1-4

Understanding what was happening...

Do you find the identity of these three men a little mysterious?

Who might they be, and how definite can we be if we're not told in detail?

What do verses 3-8 tell us about Abraham's hospitality?

How does their prophecy build on the story up to this point?

Do you think you would laugh in Sarah's situation?

In 21:1-4 - what is the significance of Isaac's name? (see Bible footnotes!)

Applying to our situations...

How careful do we have to be in how we apply God's promises? (In other words, are we all promised children in old age?)

So, what does this promise and fulfilment tell us about our God?

Do we often have to wait before we see God's good purposes fulfilled?

Is there another miraculous birth of a baby boy in Scripture and does he fulfil any of God's promises for us?

Prayer

There may be people around you, or yourself, for whom this is not an easy subject. Please pray sensitively, and for us all to trust that God will keep his promise to all his people of a place with him forever.

7. God will provide

Getting started...

What would you say is the hardest thing you've ever had to do?

Read Genesis 22:1-18

Understanding what was happening...

Why might God 'test' Abraham at this point in his life?

V2 really rubs in how horrendous this would have been, doesn't it?

In v5 does it sound like Abraham already trusts God that Isaac will survive?

How about in v8? (see also Hebrews 11:17-19)

Did God provide a sacrifice with his head caught in the thorns?

Does the foreshadowing of Christ's sacrifice help make sense of this challenging story?

V18 uses a word (translated offspring or seed) that can mean through 'many' or 'one' all nations would be blessed. Does this also point forward to Jesus?

Applying to our situations...

Do you know a God who's own son would sacrifice himself to give you life?

How do you feel to know that God did that for you?

Does it help you trust God when you see the way that Scripture points us to Jesus?

Are we ready to trust the Lord with even the most precious things?

Prayer

Today it would be good to pray with real thankfulness for Jesus' willing sacrifice, and that many more would believe in him and be blessed.

8. God will Guide

Getting started...

How easy is it to misunderstand things across different cultures?

Read Genesis 24:1-7

Understanding what was happening...

Does their way of going about arranging marriage seem odd?

Why was it important for Isaac to marry within Abraham's wider family?

Why was it important for Isaac not to go back, but to live in this new land?

At the end of his life, how do we see Abraham's faith in action? (v7)

Applying to our situations...

How important is it to try and understand the cultural context of Scripture, before we try and apply it to our own lives?

Do you find it easier or harder to trust God as time goes on?

What is important for us in how we make big life decisions?

Does looking to Jesus as the fulfilment of God's promise help you trust God?

What have you learned from Abraham's journey that will inspire or help you on your own walk with the Lord?

Prayer

As we draw to the end of the series, perhaps pray one thing for each other or for yourself that you feel God has laid on your heart.