

Term 2 Sermon Series

# COVENANT

Genesis 12-23

Land  
People  
Blessing



*'...and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you.'*

GENESIS 12-23

STUDIES 1-9

Bible Studies: Term 2 2021

**THOUGHTS, NOTES  
And ANSWERS**

GENESIS 12-23 - COVENANT

# GENESIS 12-23

# COVENANT

*‘...and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you.’*

Bruce Waltke on Genesis 12:1-3: *The gracious God’s broad new strokes to bless the earth come suddenly and brilliantly upon the canvas of sacred history. The Lord has not spoken to his saints since his covenant with Noah, in which he resolved to bless the earth and never again to treat it with contempt (8:20–9:17). Now suddenly his creative word to bless the tribes and nations—which he has scattered—redirects the course of history. This word of benediction counterbalances his words of malediction against the tower builders.*

Waltke, B.K. *Waltke on Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2001) p204.

In this series of studies we look at further foundational chapters in the story of God’s working with human beings

Throughout these there is much for us to learn about the world we live in, the Lord God we serve, our environment, our fellow human beings, our neighbors and ourselves.

May God grant us his grace (demonstrated throughout these chapters) so that we can ‘read, mark, learn and inwardly digest\*’ what he is saying to us and so live lives in better service to Him.

Greg Holmes - APRIL 2021

*\*From the Book of Common Prayer, 1662, Collect for 2nd Sunday in Advent*

## GENESIS 12-23 - COVENANT

### THE STUDIES

Week Ending	Study	Passage	Title	Page No
Sun 25 Apr	<b>1</b>	<b>Genesis 11:27-12:9</b>	Call and Covenant	6
Sun 2 May	<b>2</b>	<b>Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-18</b>	Lies in Egypt and Again	9
Sun 9 May	<b>3</b>	<b>Genesis 13</b>	Partings	11
Sun 16 May	<b>4</b>	<b>Genesis 14</b>	Rescue	13
Sun 23 May		Pentecost Sunday		
Sun 30 May	<b>5</b>	<b>Genesis 15 / 17</b>	Covenant	13
Sun 6 Jun	<b>6</b>	<b>Genesis 16; 18:1-15</b>	A Son??	18
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Sun 27 Jun	<b>9</b>	<b>Genesis 22-23</b>	Abrahams Test	25

Studies 2 and 5 pick up later references to the same sin or the renewal of the 12:1-3 covenant.

### Helpful References:

Kidner, D. Genesis (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries) (Leicester, IVP, 1967) (*An Oldy but a Goody*)

Reid, A. Genesis: Salvation Begins (Sydney South, Aquila, 2000) (*A newish Australian perspective- thoroughly recommended.*)

Wenham, G.J. "Genesis" in Carson, D.A., France, R.T, Motyer, J.A., Wenham, G.J. (Eds) NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY : 21st Century Edition (LEICESTER, IVP, 1994)

Longman, T(III). Genesis (The Story of God Commentary) (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2016).

And the Mark Dever sermon on Genesis at

<http://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/sermon/>

The outline of Genesis on the Bible Project website.

<https://thebibleproject.com/all-videos/>

### Further References:

Baldwin, J. The Message of Genesis 12-50 (The Bible Speaks Today) (Nottingham, IVP, 1986)

Hartley, J.E. Genesis (New International Biblical Commentary) (Milton Keynes, Paternoster, 2000).

Kent Hughes, R. Genesis: Beginning and Blessing (Wheaton, Crossway, 2004).

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Von Rad, G. Genesis (Old Testament Library) (London, SCM Press, 1961).

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Walton, J.H. Genesis (The NIV Application Commentary) (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2001).

Wenham, G.J. "Genesis" in Carson, D.A., France, R.T, Motyer, J.A., Wenham, G.J. (Eds) NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY : 21st Century Edition (LEICESTER, IVP, 1994)

## GENESIS 12-23 - COVENANT

### PLEASE NOTE:

It is probably worth my while explaining what I attempt to do in these 'notes'. My first work on them is to ensure that you can actually answer the questions. It is easy to ask questions that no-one is able to interpret. I then attempt to give some thoughts of my own on each question and then to bring to bear materials from my reading on the topic. Sometimes these are direct answers to the questions but, also sometimes, they are extra, I hope, relevant ideas.

It proves impossible in these studies to delve into all of them and I would encourage all people who lead or indeed do the studies to look more widely than the questions and allow God's word to speak to our minds, hearts and lives.

This is a vitally important section of the Bible, not the least because it lays so many foundations for what the LORD is doing in world. These studies, as I reflect on them, to some extent only scratch the surface. I would recommend studying these chapters with the help of one of the commentaries listed in the question booklets.

### THE SECTIONS OF THE STUDIES

#### ***LISTEN TO THE STORY***

It is good to read the passage for the week at the start of each study. These passages vary somewhat in length. You can decide for yourself whether you want to read the genealogies aloud or not.

#### ***EXPLAIN THE STORY***

These look at the basic ideas in the passage. I would recommend that each week you do these simply to get the flow of the text and its important points.

#### ***EXPLORE THE STORY***

As the heading suggests, these dig deeper into the themes of the passage or look more widely at Scripture. It is probably among these that you need to make some choices. Of course if you decide to have a go at them all I am sure it will be worthwhile.

#### ***LIVE THE STORY.***

As the Bible constantly reminds us we need to walk the Christian life in obedience and love. These Questions seek to get us to think about this.

*We need to make the rubber of the 'idea' hit the road of our lives, thoughts and actions. - One of the problems in writing 'application' or 'impact' type questions is not knowing where all the individuals in groups etc. are up to. If you can see a better application of the material - DO IT. - The important thing is to relevantly think about the impact the passage has on us.*

***Please note that my answers below are not the only 'correct' answers or what you are trying to get to in the study. I have set them out as a guide to my thinking only and an assistance to you.***

*These Notes are meant to be the start of the assistance I am willing to give in regard to the studies. If you need anything further DO NOT hesitate to contact me.*

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## GENESIS 12-23 - COVENANT

### Some Background Thoughts:

### Abraham

From Fee, G, Stuart, D. How to read the Bible Book by Book (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2002)

#### **Genesis 11:27–25:11    *The Account of Terah***

You can hardly miss seeing that Terah's son, Abraham, dominates this family story. Here you can watch how skillfully the narrative is presented. It introduces Abraham's family, who have moved partway to Canaan (11:27–32), with a special note about Sarah's barrenness (11:30). The key moments are in 12:1–9, where God calls Abraham to leave Haran and "go to the land I will show you" (12:1) and promises to make him "into a great nation" and to bless "all peoples on earth" through him (vv. 2–3). After obediently traveling to the land inhabited by Canaanites (vv. 4–5), Abraham traverses the whole land and then is promised, "To your offspring [seed] I will give this land" (vv. 6–7), whereupon "he built an altar there to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD" (vv. 8–9). In the rest of the narrative, you will see these several themes played out in one form or another: The *promised land* will be given to the *promised seed*, who will become a *great nation* and thus a *blessing to the nations*—even though the Canaanites now possess the land and Sarah is barren!—and so Abraham *trusts* and *worships* the God who has promised this.

Thus the first narrative, which is about Abram's failure in Egypt (12:10–20), has to do with God's protecting the *promised seed*. The first Lot cycle (chs. 13–14) focuses on *great nation* and *promised land* while introducing Sodom and Gomorrah, and indicating Abraham's considerable significance in the land. The back-to-back narratives of chapters 15–16 come back to the *promised seed* from a *barren woman*, while the centerpiece narrative of chapter 17 focuses on all the themes together. The next narrative focuses again on the promised seed from a barren woman (18:1–15), which is picked up again in the series of three narratives in chapters 20 and 21 (Abimelech, the birth of Isaac, the expulsion of Ishmael). These narratives bookend the second Lot cycle (18:16–19:38), which begins with the great nation that will be a blessing on the nations (18:18). Here the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the incestuous conception of Moab and Ammon stand in contrast to Abraham's trust in God for the promised land, a theme picked up again in 21:22–34.

Four crucial narratives then conclude the family story of Terah. First comes the testing of Abraham as to whether he would be willing to give up to God his firstborn son (ch. 22). In this crucial narrative, be sure to note

- (1) the renewal of the promises (vv. 15–18),
- (2) Abraham's obedience and implicit trust in God throughout,
- (3) God's provision of a sacrifice in place of Isaac.

Taken together, the deaths of Sarah (ch. 23) and of Abraham (25:7–11) complete the promised-land motif—a piece of the future promised land is purchased so that their bodies can rest there, waiting for the future to be fulfilled! These enclose the story of Isaac's marriage, which is included in the Abraham series because it continues the promised-seed motif, as does the introduction to the narrative of Abraham's death (25:1–6).

Note finally that unwise choices made in moments of shaky faith do not thwart God's purposes (the Pharaoh and Abimelech stories in chs. 12 and 20, and Hagar in ch. 16), while Abraham in his turn "believed the LORD, and [the LORD] credited it to him as righteousness" (15:6, a text that becomes especially important in Paul's letters). Thus Abraham's regular response to God is *worship* and *obedience* (12:7–8; 13:4, 18; 14:17–20; 22:1–19).

## GENESIS 12-23 - COVENANT

### Study 1: GENESIS 11:27-12:9

### Call and Covenant

#### A Reading Guide:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Gen. 11:27-32	Gen. 12:1-3	Gen. 12:4-9	Heb 11:8-16	John 8:48-59

**Briefly go back over the events of Genesis 1-11.**

The major events are:

Creation and Fall

Cain and Abel

Noah and the Ark

The Tower of Babel

In each of these there is rebellion against the LORD's good order and then God's judgment and his act of grace toward the sinners.

However, in the 'Babel' incident, up to the end of chapter 11 we have seen no grace note.

#### Listen to the Story.

##### **Read Genesis 11:27-12:9**

Longman (Story of God) "*Walter Brueggemann helpfully described 12:1 – 3 as a second creation account. Whereas in the first creation account God created the cosmos and all that it contains by the power of his spoken word, here he calls a new people into being by the power of his word.*"

#### Explain the Story.

##### **1. Whose family are we now (in 11:27-32) given an account of?**

Terah who is the son of Nahor.

Wenham (WBC): "*It is characteristic of the patriarchal narratives that the heading should mention the father, while the stories focus on the sons. Thus "This is the family history of Isaac" (25:19) introduces the stories of Jacob and Esau, and "the family history of Jacob" (37:2) heads the Joseph story.*"

Significantly, it is noted that Abram's wife, Sarai is "barren, she had no child". (v30).

Wenham (NBC): "*Two things are important to note. First, that Sarai was childless, a catastrophe for a woman in the ancient world. Secondly, that Lot was Abram's orphaned nephew, whom he seems to have adopted. He accompanied Abram, and it looks as though he would have been his heir if Sarai had not had a child.*"

##### **2. From 12:1 which member of Terah's family does the account focus on?**

Abram. (Who later becomes Abraham)

It is to Abram that God speaks and deals with for the next several chapters.

##### **3. What does the LORD direct Abram to do? What does Abram do?**

Abram is directed to up stakes and go ....??

The destination is vague.

Abram obeys.



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Walton (NIVAC): "Yahweh makes the covenant initiative offer to Abram (12:1–3), in which he asks Abram to choose. He must decide whether to abandon his land in favor of the land Yahweh offers. He must decide whether to abandon what family he still has in favor of the family Yahweh promises (against all logic, given Sarai's infertility). He must decide whether to set aside his blessing, his inheritance, for the inheritance Yahweh describes. The initiative offers much, but its cost is significant. Abram must trust Yahweh to deliver what he has offered in order to give up so much that Abram already has to gain."

### 4. What promises does the LORD make to Abram?

We will deal with these in more detail below.

Basically there are 3 promises – A land, descendants and blessing.

Some commentators see up to 7.

### 5. What does Abram then proceed to do?

He does what he is asked to do.

Moves himself and his considerable household to where God wants him to go.

He then builds an altar to the LORD at Shechem

Wenham (NBC): "From Haran to Canaan. Leaving homeland and family was a much greater decision in a traditional society than in today's mobile, individualistic culture. Abram risked everything he held most dear to obey God's call. Christ similarly challenges people to venture everything to follow him (Mt. 10:37-39; Phil. 3:8)."

## Explore the Story.

### 1. Unpack the exact character of each of the promises made to Abram.

#### Land?

At this point this is all rather vague – the extent or nature of this land is not set out. Abram will know that all the land around is at this stage settled.

It is worth noting as we go through how the extent of the 'land' gets more and more defined. Note v7

#### People?

Abram is promised that he will become a great nation. Starting it must be said from elderly Abram and his barren elderly wife

#### Blessing?

This could be split into two. There is blessing for Abram and from that blessing for the nations.

As we go through these studies we will be focusing, as the chapters do, on the promise of children.

### 2. Why are these promises so important for the rest of the 'story' of the Bible?

It is important as we go through these studies to note the 'progress, or otherwise, of these promises.

These verses set the agenda for God's work in the world.

To use Graham Goldsworthy's expressions God is developing God's People (People), in God's Place (Land), Under God's Rule (Blessing).

Every time we come to Scripture it is helpful to look at how this passage is part of this great plan to fulfil the promise to Abram/Abraham

At every stage and up to now Jesus has been working his will out to call people to himself, to bless them and to finally have them dwell with him.

### 3. Read Hebrews 11:8-16. What does this tell us about Abram/Abraham?

Abram is held up as one of the great heroes of faith who have gone before us as examples.

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We will see as we go on that Abram had feet of clay but in the end his faith shines through

4. **Waltke: "The call of God to Abraham is the sneak preview for the rest of the Bible. It is a story of God bringing salvation to all tribes and nations through this holy nation"** Note Genesis 26:24; 28:13-15; 49:8-12; Ex. 3:6-8; Deut. 34:4; Deut. 33; Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:8. Waltke: *"The call of God to Abraham is the sneak preview for the rest of the Bible. It is a story of God bringing salvation to all tribes and nations through this holy nation, administered at first by the Mosaic covenant and then by the Lord Jesus Christ through the new covenant. The elements of Abraham's call are reaffirmed to Abraham (12:7; 15:5-21; 17:4-8; 18:18-19; 22:17-18), to Isaac (26:24), to Jacob (28:13-15; 35:11-12; 46:3), to Judah (49:8-12), to Moses (Ex. 3:6-8; Deut. 34:4), and to the ten tribes of Israel (Deut. 33). They are reaffirmed by Joseph (Gen. 50:24), by Peter to the Jews (Acts 3:25), and by Paul to the Gentiles (Gal. 3:8). The expansion of the promise of 12:1-3 from individual to national to universal salvation is the essential movement of Scripture. The Bible is a missionary guide: concerned with bringing salvation to all the families of the earth. Abraham as a blessing bearer of salvation is an anticipation of the blessing-bearing Christ. When Christ ascends into heaven, he extends his pierced hands, hands that blessed infants and gave sight to the blind, to bless his church (Luke 24:50-53)."*

### Live the Story.

1. **How does each of the promises made to Abram apply to you, here and now, in 21<sup>st</sup> century Kiama?**

The questions to ask yourself are:

- Am I one of God's people.
- Am I dwelling in God's Place
- Am I submitting to God's rule.

2. **What does Abram leave behind? What do we need to 'leave behind' in order to obey Jesus, the LORD and to enter into covenant relationship with him.?**

For discussion.

Reid: *"The way we do today what Abram did in his day is to align ourselves with Jesus. Such an alignment means taking u our cross and following Jesus."*

**For Next Week: Genesis 12:10-20 and Chapter 20.**



## GENESIS 12-23 - COVENANT

### Study 2: GENESIS 12:10 -20; 20:1-18

### **Lies in Egypt and again**

#### A Reading Guide:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Gen. 12:10-16	Gen. 12:16-20	Gen. 20:1-7	Gen. 20:8-18	Heb. 12:1-6

#### Listen to the Story.

##### Read Genesis 12:10 -20; 20:1-18

This study looks at two occasions that Abram/Abraham felt the need to hide his relationship to Sarai/Sarah.

#### Explain the Story.

**1. Where is Abram in this account (12:1-10)? Why are he and his household there?**

There is famine in Canaan and Egypt has food.

Walton (NIVAC): *"Famine is common enough in the climate of Palestine since its productivity depends on rainfall. In contrast, Egypt is more impervious to drought and famine because it is dependent on the annual flooding of the Nile rather than rainfall. This makes Egypt a natural destination for those who are driven from the oppressive climate of Canaan."*

**2. What happened in Egypt in regard to Sarai? With what consequence?**

Sarai's beauty may present a problem thinks Abram so we will pretend she is my sister. Sarai is 'taken into the palace' (whatever that means) and Abram and household are treated well.

Note here that Pharaoh takes Sarai as his wife implying some physical relationship.

God, however, is not pleased and acts against Pharaoh.

Pharaoh works this out and Abram and company are thrown out.

This all has some parallels to the Exodus story later.

**3. Read 20:1-18. What happened in Abimelech's territory? With what consequence?**

(Note that by this time Abram has become Abraham)

This story is much the same.

Except – God comes to Abimelech and exposes the ruse.

Abimelech had not 'gone near her'

Note the outcome in v14-18 which may indicate the respect Abimelech had for Abraham and Abraham's God.

#### Explore the Story.

**1. What similarities and what differences can you see in these two stories?**

Some differences are pointed out above but you may see others.

The main similarity is the Abram/Abraham is trying to work out things for himself and trusting in God's protection.

**2. What, in the end, is Abram/Abraham's sin on both these incidents?**

Lack of faith.

He has the promises of God but feels the need to lie in order to protect himself and his family.

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Note that the incident in Egypt actually jeopardises the family line. If Sarai had become pregnant to Pharaoh...

And if Abimelech had 'touched' her this would have cast doubt on the son that was born within the year. God having promised Abraham this in 17:21

### 3. Is Abram/Abraham a bit 'thick'? (I mean, same thing, twice!)

(And it may have been more than twice -note 20v13c)

Seems a bit that way but put yourself in his place:

He is simply a nomadic herdsman, a rich and successful one at that, who finds himself in the territory of settled kings who have armies and hold the power.

He should have had faith – but it failed him.

Just like ours fails us so often.

The great thing is that God is Faithful and remains so.

### 4. Where is the LORD in all of this?

In the Egypt episode the LORD acts – brings disease on Pharaoh's household.

In Abimelech's case the LORD speaks to Abimelech and also acts.

In all of this Abram/Abraham is protected and God remains faithful to his promises.

Indeed Abraham comes out of the Abimelech incident being blessed with goods and access to land.

### Live the Story.

#### 1. To what extent is Abram/Abraham simply a victim of his own circumstances and societal position?

For Discussion

But remember, sin is sin.

Longman: *"Everyone struggles with habitual sins or, to put it another way, bad behavior or attitudes that we cannot shake. We might call it sexual addiction, alcohol dependency, or an anger-management problem, but when it comes right down to it, they are sins that we keep coming back to again and again. We sin and repent. We may manage our actions and feelings for a period of time, but we do it again, and again, and again. What can we learn from Abraham's life about habitual sins and our relationship with God? First, God does not let our sin slide...a second point, God does not let Abraham's habitual sin derail his relationship with Abraham or the purpose of his life."*

#### 2. When are you tempted to take things into your own hands and not trust God?

For Discussion.

In think impatience is often involved – at least it is for me.

**For Next Week: Genesis 13:1-18.**

## GENESIS 12-23 - COVENANT

### Study 3: GENESIS 13:1-18

#### Partings

##### A Reading Guide:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Gen. 13:1-9	Gen. 13:10-13	Gen. 13:14-18	Jam 3:13-18	Matt 5:1-10

##### Listen to the Story.

###### Read Genesis 13:1-18

Kidner (TOTC): *"The lifelong test of Abram's obedience to the vision takes a new turn in this chapter in the temptation to self-assertion against Lot, and in the lure of the cities of the plain."*

##### Explain the Story.

###### 1. Where do Abram and those with him travel to now?

They leave Egypt and travel to the Negev and finally to Bethel (well between Bethel and Ai) where he again builds an altar.

There is something of a survey journey in Abram/Abraham's wanderings in these chapters as he puts down markers (altars) to map out the 'land'.

###### 2. What 'glitch' arises? What is Abram's solution?

There is friction between Lot's herdsmen and Abram's herdsmen over space. The text notes that the Canaanites and the Perizzites also lived around about.

Abram's solution was to propose that they go in different directions, *"If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."* v9

###### 3. What choice does Lot make? Why?

Walton (NIVAC): *"It is possible to get a good view of the Jordan Valley and the northern area of the Dead Sea from the hills around Bethel. While the area around the Dead Sea is not a hospitable region today, the text makes it clear that the area had a far different quality prior to the Lord's judgment. There are extensive areas along the Jordan Plateau that do provide ample grazing that may also be represented in this narrative."*

Lot chooses the good-looking land.

But note v13.

Waltke: *"The narrator underscores the folly of Lot's choice by framing his decision (13:10–13) with two parenthetical remarks foreshadowing Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction. The first remark anticipates God's destruction of the cities of the plain that Lot chooses (13:10), while the second notes their wickedness that causes the destruction and that Lot in unbelief chooses to ignore (13:13)."*

###### 4. What is Abram left with?

Walton NIVAC: *"Once Lot moves out of the land, the Lord gives Abram the land of Canaan (13:14–17). His itinerant wandering now takes on new purpose, almost equivalent to conquest, since everywhere he walks will be given to him and his family."*

Abram moves on to Mamre/Hebron and builds an altar.

##### Explore the Story.

###### 1. What do we note from verse 2 about Abram's lifestyle?

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In Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) terms Abram was a very wealthy man.

From the context we gather that he was also nomadic. Not so much moving day to day but moving and settling for a while and then moving on according to the grazing, seasonal or political climate.

2. **Note Matthew 5:9 and James 3:18. What does this have to say about Abram's behaviour?**

Here Abram has acted as the peacemaker between Lot and his people and himself and his people.

He makes the gracious choice.

Jesus says we too are to be peacemakers.

3. **What element of 'pilgrimage' can you see in Abram's 'wanderings'?**

Kidner (TOTC): *"The fact that Abram rose to the occasion in faith is traceable to verses 1-4, which present his journey to Beth-el as a pilgrimage (note the phrases that go beyond mere geography in verses 3, 4, and the climax in 4b): a renewal of his lapsed obedience..."*

4. **What is the 'sequel' for both these men?**

Kidner (TOTC): *"The sequel for both men is instructive. Lot, choosing the things that are seen, found them corrupt (13) and insecure; choosing selfishly, he was to grow ever more isolated and unloved. Abram, on the other hand, found liberation. With the call of 12:1 at last fulfilled, the promise of 'land' and 'seed' was now amplified (14), reiterated (note the threefold 'thy seed' in 15, 16) and made, in token, tangible (17). Both sight and action followed believing: his blind choice (9) was rewarded by God's 'Lift up now thine eyes' (14); and what the eyes took in as panorama his steps were to explore in detail (17). We may perhaps compare the sequence of verses 14 and 17 with that of Ephesians 3:18 and 4:1."*

### Live the Story.

1. **Where are the promises of Land, People, Blessing up to now?**

LAND – Further definition is given to the land but Abram still does not 'own' any of it. Yet he is trusting God to provide.

PEOPLE – Still no son.

BLESSING – Abram is wealthy in earthly terms and in choosing to allow Lot the apparent best is blessed by God with the reaffirming of the promise.

2. **Dissension seems to be a characteristic of God's people in all their history. What can we learn from Abram's example?**

Discuss.

Waltke: *"Abraham's generosity, coupled with his willingness to forego his rights, reconciles the conflict with Lot (see 13:9). A major theological concern of this story is the priority of peace between brothers. Christians are to give up their rights and prosperity to restore relationship between people. Generosity and peacemaking kiss one another (Prov. 25:21-22). As Wenham explains, "The generosity and peaceableness displayed by Abraham on this occasion is applauded from one end of Scripture to the other (e.g., Lev. 19:17-18; Ps. 122; 133; Prov. 3:17, 29-34; Heb. 12:14; James 3:17-18). Indeed, peacemaking and reconciliation are so central to God's character as revealed in Christ (cf. Matt. 5:22-26, 43-48) that Paul often calls God 'the God of peace' (e.g., Rom. 15:33; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23; cf. Eph. 2:14-17)."*

**For Next Week: Genesis 14:1-24.**

## GENESIS 12-23 - COVENANT

### Study 4: GENESIS 14:1-24

#### Rescue

##### A Reading Guide:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Gen. 14:1-12	Gen. 14:13-16	Gen. 14:17-24	Heb 6:19-7:17	Psalm 110

##### Listen to the Story.

Read Genesis 14:1-24

##### Explain the Story.

**1. Read v1-12. What happens here? Why does it involve Abram?**

There is a series of battles, uprisings and victories.

(This is the Middle East what would you expect!!??)

Wenham (NBC): *"Four kings, led by Kedorlaomer of Elam (part of Iran), conquered the Jordan valley. Thirteen years later a rebellion by the cities of the plain led to another invasion by the same eastern coalition. The armies of Sodom and Gomorrah were defeated, the cities were sacked and Lot was taken captive."*

**2. Read v13-16. How is Lot 'saved'?**

Abraham, leading his very small armed force (318 men) defeats these invaders and Lot is rescued along with many other captives and lots of plunder.

**3. Read v17-24? What happens here?**

Two significant players turn up after Abram's defeat of the 4 kings.

First the King of Sodom ...

Then the enigmatic Melchizedek, King of Salem (most likely Jerusalem).

Melchizedek offers his thanks and praises God and receives a tithe of the plunder.

The King of Sodom makes demands!

##### Explore the Story.

**1. Note the amount of historical and geographical detail here. How does this help us in being confident in the scriptures?**

Modern historians and archaeologists can identify some of these places. The detail suggests that this can all be verified one way or another.

Wenham (NBC): *"The names of the kings (Amraphel, Arioch, Kedorlaomer and Tidal) have an authentic second-millennium ring, but current archaeological evidence does not allow us to identify them precisely. Shinar is Babylonia; Ellasar may be in eastern Turkey; Elam is in modern Iraq; and the Goiim may be a reference to the Hittites."*

**2. Who is Melchizedek? How does he relate to Abram and Abram to him?**

Waltke: *"Here is a king-priest of the Most High God who is able to mediate God's blessing to Abraham, God's mediator of blessing to the nations (12:3). Accordingly, Melchizedek is greater than any earthly king. Yet he emerges suddenly on the narrator's canvas without comment on his birth or ancestry. Just as quickly he disappears without mention of his fate or death. The final editor of Genesis was likely aware of Psalm 110. In that psalm David anticipates a future king-priest after the order of Melchizedek who will rule and judge the nations. Presumably, the narrator did not intentionally gap the expected information but*

## GENESIS 12-23 - COVENANT

*lacked it and stood in awe of this mysterious heavenly figure whom David calls "my Lord" (Ps. 110:1)."*

Longman: *"The bottom line is that Abram clearly recognizes Melchizedek as one who shares his faith in the same God, and we should leave it at that, though we cannot tell how the Canaanite priest-king came to this knowledge. Not only does Abram consider Melchizedek a fellow worshiper of the true God, he also shows him deference when he receives a blessing from him (a superior blesses and an inferior receives the blessing), and he responds by giving him a tithe (a tenth) of the plunder."*

I have appended at the very end of these notes some further information about the enigmatic Melchizedek.

### 3. **Read Hebrews 6:19-7:17. What does this have to say about Melchizedek and Jesus?**

Melchizedek this passage claims is a 'type' of Jesus – An Old Testament example, forerunner.

Jesus, who is prophet, Priest and King, is seen as a Priest (a representative of Man to God and God to Man) not from the line of Aaron but 'one is the order of Melchizedek. One who can make the only, once for all sacrifice for sins – by dying on the cross and paying our penalty.

Longman: *"Let me begin by saying that it is precisely the mystery of the two Old Testament references to Melchizedek that appeals so much to the author of Hebrews. The author exploits the ambiguities of the Old Testament figure in order to make his important point concerning Christ as priest. He is an exalted priest — so exalted that he transcends the normal categories. He is so much better than Aaron, the priests, and the Levites that he is of a whole different order."*

I have also appended at the very end of these notes some further discussion of this passage by David Peterson.

### 4. **What do you discern about the characters of Abram, Melchizedek and the King of Sodom from this account?**

Waltke: *"The attitudes of Melchizedek and Abraham toward the plunder contrast radically with that of the king of Sodom. The king of Sodom "came out" (14:17), but Melchizedek "brought out" (14:18). Melchizedek's first words were "Blessed be Abram," and the king of Sodom's were "Give me.""*

It is surely significant that the narrator records the names of all the kings, including the 'baddies' but does not give the King of Sodom's name.

Wenham (NBC): *"The attitudes of Melchizedek and the king of Sodom are deliberately contrasted. They exemplify the two kinds of reaction to Abram predicted in 12:3. Melchizedek is one of those who bless Abram, whereas the king of Sodom clearly disdains (the NIV's curse is too strong) him. Consequently, Melchizedek could expect to be blessed by God, whereas the king of Sodom could look for a curse. Already (cf. 13:13) the fate of the city of Sodom (ch. 19) is being hinted at."*

### **Live the Story.**

#### **1. What does this account teach us about Abram's commitment to family?**

For discussion.

#### **2. Where can you discern the 'hidden' hand of the LORD in this account of conquest, war and victory?**

For Discussion

**For Next Week: Genesis 15:1-18 and 17:1-27.**



## GENESIS 12-23 - COVENANT

### Study 5: GENESIS 15:1-18 AND 17:1-27

## COVENANT

### A Reading Guide:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Gen. 15:1-7	Gen. 15:8-18	Gen. 17:1-14	Gen. 17:15-27	Rom 4:1-12

### Listen to the Story.

**Read Genesis 15:1-18 and 17:1-27**

In this study we look at the two major instances of covenant renewal in Abram/Abraham's story.

### Explain the Story.

#### From Chapter 15.

#### 1. What is Abram's 'complaint'?

Abram's reply to God's reassurance in v1 is to basically say, 'That is all very well but where is the son you promised?'

#### 2. How does God answer it? (Outline the events.)

The LORD – reiterates the promise and broadens it multitudes of descendants

(Abram trust God in this v6 – we will come back to this verse)

The Lord the reiterates the land promise.

(Abram wants to know – how?)

God demonstrates his commitment to the promise by performing a somewhat strange, to our eyes, ceremony.

In the midst of which he tells Abram about a 400 year 'exile' his descendants will go through a prediction of the 400 years.

But Abram "*will go to (his) ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age*"

#### 3. What is the prediction in v13-14 all about?

This is an obvious prediction of the Joseph story and the Exodus story which both play an important part in the future of Abraham's descendants and the forwarding of God's plan of salvation.

This will in the end mean the possession of the land which is only achieved in token in these chapters, indeed in Genesis.

#### From Chapter 17.

#### 4. What are God's promises here?

Now God further fills out the descendants promise – Abram (becomes Abraham) and will be the father of many nations. Indeed, kings will come from him.

Towards the end of chapter God further impresses on Abraham that Sarai (now Sarah) will bear a legitimate son for him. He also promises to bless Ishmael and his descendants.

Given some prominence to the blessings to flow from Abraham to all the peoples of the earth. (12v3)

#### 5. What is to be (now) Abraham's response?

Abraham is to institute and perform the covenant sign of circumcision of all the males of his household.

### Explore the Story.

## GENESIS 12-23 - COVENANT

1. **Note 15:6. What is so important about this verse? (See Romans 4:22-25; James 2:18-24)**

Wenham (NBC): "Abram accepted God's reassurance, he believed the LORD (6). The verbal form suggests an ongoing activity, i.e. he kept believing the promise, he kept relying on the Lord. So God credited it to him as righteousness. Righteousness is that state of acceptance by God which comes from perfect obedience to the law. Abram's failure to fulfil the law's demands completely is obvious in Genesis, yet his faith in God's promise of a child is here said to count as righteousness. For Paul, this shows that faith, not works, is the prerequisite to acceptance by God (Gal. 3:6-14). Jas. 2:18-24 and Heb. 11:8-9 point out that Abraham's faith was proved genuine by his good works. This 'faith that works' is central to the Christian understanding of salvation and upright living."

Waltke: "Genesis 15:6 is foundational to the doctrine of justification by faith, not by works (see Gal. 3:6-14). Abraham is not sinless, but he believes the promise of the birth of an heir from the dead (see Rom. 4:17-21; Heb. 11:11-12), and God counts that equivalent to meeting the moral demands later stipulated in the Mosaic covenant (see Ps. 15). According to Nehemiah (Neh. 9:8), God makes a covenant with Abraham because he finds Abraham's heart [p. 247] faithful. Abraham is the model for our faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, faith that God will credit to us as righteousness (Rom. 4:22-25)."

2. **What is signified by the 'bizarre' ceremony toward the end of chapter 15?**

Please note that the idea is only 'bizarre' to modern, western readers. To the original readers of Genesis this would be an understandable practice.

Waltke: "To Abraham, God specifically predicts four hundred years of oppression in Egypt, Israel's deliverance with great riches, and the possession of Canaan. Abraham functions as a prophet of God, entrusted with knowledge of the future tribulations and exaltations of his descendants. In this prophetic trust, God humbles himself to obligate his life to his people. In passing through the carcasses, he commits to death if his word is untrue. The reason the God of Israel lives in the petitions and praises of his people is that he keeps his prophetic promises. God's prophecy also reveals his sovereign control over history. To be sure, other religions have seers and prophets, but none has prophets who give such a comprehensive view of history and such specific detail as Israel's prophets. No other god of the ancient Near East survives; all passed away, for none could reveal history or speak truth like the God of Israel (cf. Isa. 41:21-29)"

3. **Circumcision (17:10-14) is a sign of the covenant. What other covenant signs are there? What covenant sign do we have as Christians?**

The rainbow was the sign for Noah, circumcision for Israel and you could argue that baptism is the sign for Christians.

Kidner (TONTIC): "Circumcision itself was widespread in the Near East; the Philistines from the west were thought outlandish for not practising it. The new feature was its new meaning, to mark the threshold not of manhood (as among modern Arabs) but of the covenant; hence its early administration (12). It implied commitment to God's people (14b) and to God (Jer. 4:4); it also came to symbolize the discarding of heathen ways (Josh. 5:9) and of one's natural selfwill (Deut. 10:16; cf. Col. 2:11, 12). Notice that the covenant was open to Gentiles (12b, 13), but they must wholly belong to the community (cf. Exod. 12:45)."

4. **After 2 significant 'fails' before chapter 15 and another in chapter 16, what is God's response to Abram/Abraham's frailty?**

## GENESIS 12-23 - COVENANT

God's response is to remind Abram/Abraham of the covenant, to strengthen it and the to remain, as always faithful to it.

Kidner (TOTC): *"The two stages of covenant-making, in chapters 15 and 17, not only tested Abram's faith by the long delay but brought out two sides of the one transaction. The earlier chapter fixed the basic pattern of grace and answering faith; nothing was asked of Abram but to believe and 'know of a surety'. Now emerge the implications, in depth and extension: in depth, for faith must show itself in utter dedication (1); in extension, for the whole company must be sealed, one by one, down the generations (10ff.). Together then the two chapters set out the personal and the corporate participation; the inward faith and the outward seal (cf. Rom. 4:9, 11); imputed righteousness and expressed devotion (15:6; 17:1)."*

### Live the Story.

1. **"I am your shield and your great reward". What comfort is that to 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians in a seemingly lost and hostile world?**

For discussion.

2. **Do you have faith? Where is it placed?**

Waltke: *"Abraham's life reveals truths of faith for the Christian. Abraham requests assurance that he will possess the land, for he understands that possessing the land will require dispossessing the pagans. Bolstering Abraham's faith, God concretizes his covenant. The land belongs to God. For Christians to possess life in Christ, the old "kings" and "gods" must be dispossessed. To this order God has promised his Spirit as a guarantee of our inheritance (see Eph. 1:11-14).*

*God will remain faithful to his covenants, despite the weaknesses of his human partners. As the next scene (Gen. 16) of Abraham's story will show, Abraham and Sarah's faith is "defective." Likewise, Noah, Israel, David, and Peter fail after God covenants with them. Nevertheless, God's covenant stands. He remains faithful."*

**For Next Week: Genesis 16:1-15 and 18:1-15.**

## GENESIS 12-23 - COVENANT

### Study 6: GENESIS 16:1-15 AND 18:1-15.

### A Son??

#### A Reading Guide:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Gen. 16:1-6	Gen. 16:7-15	Gen. 18:1-15	Gal 4:21-31	Rom 4: 16-25

#### Listen to the Story.

Read Genesis 16:1-15 and 18:1-15.

In this study we look at the birth of a 'substitute' son for Abram and Sarai and then at the further direct promise of a Son and God himself visits Abraham.

#### Explain the Story.

##### From Genesis 16

##### 1. What is Sarai's solution to the problem of no son arriving yet?

Sarai, it seems, is tired of waiting and suggests that Abram fathers a son by her servant girl, Hagar.

Walton (NIVAC) often has some interesting and thought provoking commentary on our 20<sup>th</sup> century attitudes to these things including this one: *"The ancient world did not understand that conception was the result of male sperm fertilizing the female egg. They simply thought that the male deposited the seed in the woman, who then acted as an incubator for the child. They certainly had no understanding of genetics, though they undoubtedly realized that often children had characteristics of the mother. Nevertheless, one incubator would do as well as another. We have already established that this was a legitimate option in society of the time, but does it suggest a lack of faith on Abram's part? It is difficult to sustain a case against Abram on that count. He has been told in 15:4 that the heir will be his biological son, and the Hagar option does indeed give Abram a biological son. Abram suffers as much from lack of specific information from God as we sometimes experience in our decisions. Is he trying to "help God out?"—perhaps in a way, but mostly he is just trying to consider all the options. God has not indicated precisely how he will secure an heir for Abram."*

##### 2. What is the result of this? What is the problem that creates?

The result is a son, Ishmael. This creates tensions between Sarai and Hagar. The word used is despise.

The outcome of all of this friction is that Hagar flees from Sarai.

##### 3. What is the significance of the interaction between the LORD and Hagar?

The LORD is interested in all of Abram's household and will bring blessing on Ishmael's descendants as well.

Note that Ishmael is the 'father of the Arab nations.

Of interest: Waltke: *"The angel's announcement to Hagar bears striking similarities to his announcement to Mary (Luke 1:28–33, 46–56): the greeting of the messenger (Gen. 16:8; Luke 1:28), the announcement of conception (Gen. 16:11; Luke 1:31), God's favor (Gen. 16:11; Luke 1:30b), the name of the child with etymology (Gen. 16:11; Luke 1:31), and the child's future achievements (Gen. 16:12; Luke 1:32–33), followed by thankful response (Gen. 16:13; Luke 1:48). In that light the contrast between these two offspring is more remarkable."*

## GENESIS 12-23 - COVENANT

**From Genesis 18:1-15**

**4. Who are the visitors? How are they described?**

We are told that 'the LORD' appeared to Abraham. He and his angels (the word means messenger) appear as three men but they do seem to present as important people.

Though it should be noted that hospitality to travelling strangers was the norm for people of that era.

**5. What is the 'news' they bring and what is Sarah's reaction?**

Their news of course is that Sarah will have a son within the year.

Sarah overhears and laughs – she has come to consider this impossible (hence her solution via Hagar).

She denies to the LORD that she laughed but is left with the rebuke – 'Yes you did!'

**Explore the Story.**

**1. What is the problem with Sarai's solution to the problem of 'no son yet'?**

Basically, it assumes that God can't do what he has said he will do. Sarai is both impatient and somewhat faithless.

It is interesting that in the first place she blames God for not giving her children (16:2) and then in 16:5 she blames Abram for Hagar's attitude.

Then of course in the chapter 18 episode she scoffs at God's ability to do as He says.

**2. How does Ishmael's arrival work with the promises God has made?**

There is an element here of God working to bless all the nations of the earth..

Note especially 21:17-21

**3. What do you think is the significance of the visit of the 'strangers'?**

As we will see in the next study, they are around for a double task but their visit to Abraham is yet another example of God reassuring Abraham that his promises are going forward.

**Live the Story.**

**1. What do we learn from Sarai/Sarah's actions in these passages?**

For discussion.

**2. Trusting God to do the things he has said he will do can be hard. Can you think of any examples in your life.?**

For discussion.

**For Next Week: Genesis 18:16-19:38.**

## GENESIS 12-23 - COVENANT

### Study 7: GENESIS 18:16-19:38.

### Sodom and Gomorrah

#### A Reading Guide:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Gen. 18:16-33	Gen. 19:1-14	Gen. 19:15-29	Gen 19:30-38	Luke 17:22-37

#### Listen to the Story.

Read Genesis 18:16-19:38

#### Explain the Story.

1. **Note the discussion between the LORD and Abraham in 18:16-33. What is its outcome? Is this boldness, presumptuousness or an expression of faith?**

The discussion regards the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. The outcome is negotiated - 10 righteous men will save Sodom.

Kidner (TOTC): *"The initiative in this great intercession was with God, in the sense that he broached the subject himself (17), waited for Abraham's plea (22), and chose the point at which the matter should end (33). Below the surface, too, Abraham's spirit of love and justice derived from God as surely as it strove with him. But it was his own: his resource and tenacity show that the gift had rooted and grown; he was no yes-man but a true partner."*

Note the reiteration of the nation and blessings part of the covenant, alongside the same assurances in the first 15 verses

2. **Note 19:1-14? Is there anything to learn from this appalling story?**

Yes! God will not leave wickedness unpunished.

Kidner (TOTC): *"In the development of the story two of the themes in counterpoint with Abraham and the Promise – the theme of Lot, the righteous man without the pilgrim spirit, and of Sodom, the standing example of worldly promise, insecurity (chapter 14) and decay – are now heard out to their conclusion. By a master-stroke of narrative, Abraham, who will outlive all such time-servers, is shown standing at his place of intercession (27), a silent witness of the catastrophe he has striven to avert. It is a superb study of the two aspects of judgment: the cataclysmic, as the cities disappear in brimstone and fire, and the gradual, as Lot and his family reach the last stages of disintegration, breaking up in the very hands of their rescuers."*

Walton (NIVAC): *"The text does not discuss what social norms are being broken. The sin of the Sodomites is self-evident and multileveled, blatant and unambiguous. The standard is not the later Mosaic law but civilized behavior regulated by laws in every city and country."*

I have appended at the end of these notes Walton's (NIVAC) discussion on Sodom and Homosexuality.

3. **How are Lot and his daughters rescued?**

First, they are warned, then they are pleaded with and then the Angels physically lead them out.

4. **Note 19:30-38. Are things getting better or worse?**

Sin has not been eliminated. Mankind is totally infected with it.

But remember Jesus is the universal vaccine for the problem and consequences of sin



## GENESIS 12-23 - COVENANT

### Explore the Story.

#### 1. So does Abraham's debate with God have any effect in the end?

Note v29

Well in the end 4 people are saved, 3 eventually. Though none of them is what we would call righteous.

Worth noting that Walton (NIVAC) characterises this as more a 'philosophical discussion' than a 'negotiation session'.

#### 2. What is Lot's wife's fate? What can we learn from this?

Curiosity, nostalgia, attachment seem to overcome obedience and she turns to salt (Note Waltke: *"In the biblical world, a site was strewn with salt to condemn it to perpetual barrenness and desolation (e.g., Deut. 29:23; Judg. 9:45; Ps. 107:34; Jer. 17:6)."*)

Kidner (+TOTC): *"The natural ingredients of the destruction (see on 14:3, 10) were abundant in this region of petroleum, bitumen, salt and sulphur; but its character was a judgment, not a random disaster. The overwhelming of Lot's wife as the molten materials of the explosion rained down on her is physically nothing remarkable; but in the context of judgment it captures in a single picture the fate of those who turn back (cf. Heb. 10:38, 39; Luke 17:31-33)."*

#### 3. What is the point of the discussion in v18-22?

Waltke: *"Lot's fear illustrates the irrationality of unbelief. God has sent his servants to rescue Lot, and Lot still fears he will not be protected. ... His selfish plea that God spare Zoar as a place for him to live without regard to righteousness functions as a foil to Abraham's plea for Sodom on the basis of God's compassion and righteousness."*

#### 4. Compare and contrast Abraham's (18:1-7) and Lot's (19:1-3) first encounters with the 'strangers'.

Waltke: *"Hospitality: Abraham solicitously entertains the Lord with a lavish nomad's banquet (18:1-7), and the Lord rewards his hospitality with a gift, the announcement of Sarah's imminent childbirth (18:9-10). Lot likewise retains the nomad's value of hospitality within the city, and the Lord rewards him by [p. 281] rescuing both him and his daughters. It is a high virtue to entertain pilgrims and strangers, and Abraham becomes the model of hospitality. The New Testament admonition to show hospitality (see Heb. 13:2) finds motivation in incidents such as these (see also Judg. 6; 13)."*

Longman: *"Levenson puts it well: Abraham runs; Lot only rises. Abraham offers water and food; Lot does not. And the food that Abraham actually provides — "a calf tender and choice . . . curds and milk" as well as the cakes that he bids Sarah to rush to bake — contrasts with Lot's "feast," of which the only item mentioned is "baked unleavened bread" (18:6-8; 19:3). . . the largest contrast lies in the initial purpose of the visitations of the two men. The one to Abraham is for the purpose of announcing a birth; the one to Lot, for the purpose of announcing impending death."*

Worth noting, Longman *"The anthropomorphic description of God as needing to actually go to the city to determine the extent of their wickedness serves the purpose of communicating that he is utterly just in his judgments since the Bible elsewhere teaches that God is omniscient (Psalm 139:1-6; 147:5)."*

### Live the Story.

#### 1. What do learn about relating to God in prayer from this passage?

For discussion!

## GENESIS 12-23 - COVENANT

Baldwin (BST): *"This episode in Abraham's walk with God has yet more to tell us about prayer. We see how frank he was in expressing his misgivings. Job was to be bolder still in his accusations against the ways of God, and even he was in the end commended for speaking what was right about God (Jb. 42:7). We cannot hide from him our true feelings, and Scripture encourages us to voice them, albeit humbly, to God himself. We see also that Abraham built his prayer upon what he knew of God's character, and argued on the basis of God's integrity. God cannot deny himself, and therefore to take him at his word and expect him to honour it is to corroborate his good name. Once our prayers are squarely based on God's word we can, like Abraham, be bold and persevering, and continue until we receive the Lord's reassurance. The Bible makes no promises that intellectual problems will be met by reasoned arguments; God does not defend himself to you and to me. Instead he reveals himself as the God who knows and cares, whose providential ordering of our lives shows beyond doubt that he is in control, and that 'he rewards those who seek him' (Heb. 11:6)."*

### **2. What does this passage tell us about God's attitude to our sins?**

For discussion.

Waltke on 18:33: *"It is now established that the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah, the paradigm for God's future judgments, is just. The Lord investigates the accusations thoroughly (18:22), ensures two objective witnesses, involves the faithful in his judgment, displays active compassion for the suffering, and prioritizes divine mercy over indignant wrath (i.e., not to be destroyed if even ten are righteous). The Lord himself will not appear again in this act; in the next scene he will rain down the judgment from heaven (see 19:24)."*

**For Next Week: Genesis 21:1-34.**

## GENESIS 12-23 - COVENANT

### Study 8: GENESIS 21:1-34

#### **A True Son**

##### *A Reading Guide:*

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Gen. 21:1-7	Gen. 21:8-16	Gen. 21:17-21	Gen. 21:22-34	Rom 9:1-9

##### **Listen to the Story.**

**Read Genesis 21:1-34**

##### **Explain the Story.**

**1. What finally happens in 21:1-7?**

Finally, the SON is born. Isaac, the next stage in God's plan is now reality.

**2. What are Abraham and Sarah's reactions?**

Abraham – Gave the name predicted and then performs the covenant sign at 8 days old as commanded.

Sarah – again has laughter and rejoices with incredulity.

Note her words v6: *"God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me."*

**3. Why are Hagar and Ishmael (21:8-21) 'sent away'? How does God involve himself in this?**

Sarah perceives that Ishmael is mocking Isaac and so demands that Hagar and Ishmael are sent away.

Abraham is told by the God that he should do as Sarah wishes but that God will also make a nation of Isaac's descendants.

God intervenes when Hagar and Ishmael are in distress in the desert and provides for them and makes promises to Hagar regarding her son.

**4. Note 21:22-34. For both sides what is the motivation for this treaty?**

A treaty between Jews and other peoples in the Middle East – who would have thought it? Again we meet Abimelech and the treaty between the still nomadic but wealthy and powerful Abraham and this 'city' dweller is to their mutual advantage.

The presenting issue is a well.

Longman: *"In the past, Abraham feared interaction with foreign kings and made self-protective moves out of his lack of confidence in God's ability to protect him. We see this most notably when he moves to Egypt (12:10 – 20) and when he initially moved into the region of Gerar, where Abimelech, also featured in this story, was king (v. 20). Both times he lied about his relationship with Sarah in order to lay low and avoid interaction. In our present story, however, Abraham speaks boldly and honestly with Abimelech. He enters into a treaty with this king and his military commander and even brings up a violation on the part of some of Abimelech's people who have stolen his well. His planting of the tamarisk tree is a gesture that indicates he will be in the area for a while and that he belongs there."*

##### **Explore the Story.**

**1. What is Abraham and Sarah's son named? Why?**

Isaac

## GENESIS 12-23 - COVENANT

Has connection with the idea of laughter.

And of course this was the name God gave to Abraham in 17:19.

Wenham (WBC) "Wherever the name Isaac is discussed, it is associated with the verb צחק "to laugh" or in the piel "make sport of" and reflects the skeptical laughter of his parents when told of his birth (v 17; 18:12–15) or Ishmael's mistreatment of him (21:9)."

2. **What is the connection of the Tamarisk tree with the treaty made with Abimelech?**

Waltke: "**tamarisk tree**. The planting of this small tree of the Negev probably serves as a landmark of God's grace, a pledge that Abraham will stay in the land, and perhaps as a symbol of God's shading presence (see note on 12:6 which says - **great tree**. This is probably an oak tree whose greater height makes it a preferred place of worship (see 13:18; 14:13; 18:1; 21:33). Pagans worshiped fertility deities under such trees. With its lofty top in the heavens, it could be considered an axis between heaven and earth and a place for revelation. Abraham's altar at this location may indicate his hope in God's promise of offspring and his hope that God will again speak to him. Although Abraham still worships according to the religious customs of his time, the content of his worship differs significantly. Abraham's faithful worship, longing for a heavenly city (Heb. 11:10), is dedicated to the one true God and will yet endure through long years of infertility. The seed he hopes for will be holy. He will instruct his seed in righteousness (Gen. 18; 19), and his seed will bring salvation to the nations.)."

3. **What is the status of the elements of the 12:1-3 promises at this stage of the story?**

At last we have a descendant – a legitimate one.

Abraham is in the land but does not own any of it.

Abraham has worldly blessings and seems to be blessing those around him.

### Live the Story.

1. **Note 21:17a. What does this tell us about our God? What does this mean for your relationship with Him?**

Is this not very powerful??

God hears the distress calls of people and he acts.

2. **Are you impatient with God?**

For discussion.

**For Next Week: Genesis 22-23.**

## GENESIS 12-23 - COVENANT

### Study 9: GENESIS 22-23.

### Abraham's Test

#### A Reading Guide:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Gen. 22:1-8	Gen. 22:9-14	Gen. 22:15-24	Gen 23:1-20	Heb. 11:17-19

#### Listen to the Story.

##### Read Genesis 22-23.

Wenham (WBC): "No other story in Genesis, indeed in the whole OT, can match the sacrifice of Isaac for its haunting beauty or its theological depth."

#### Explain the Story.

1. In 22:1-2 what task does God ask Abraham to undertake? How does God describe the boy?

Sacrifice Isaac. That is take him to a mountain and kill him.

God's words recognise the importance of this child. He is son (the promised one), your only son (there is no other to carry the promise forward), whom you love – it is not just an intellectual exercise.

Wenham (WBC): "The reader has been alerted by the verb "test" that something difficult is about to be asked of Abraham, while he, of course, is quite in the dark. The way the command is put here tries to soften the blow for Abraham while maximizing our realization of its enormity."

2. In 22:3-8 what is Abraham's response?

He makes the necessary preparations:

Journey, climb and construction.

3. What happens on top of the mountain? (22:9-14)

Abraham proceeds towards killing his son, Isaac.

The LORD intervenes at the last moment and provides a ram for the sacrifice.

4. What is the LORD's response to Abraham? (22:15-18)

A total reaffirmation of the promises.

#### Explore the Story.

1. 22:1 is essentially a spoiler. What does it mean that God 'tested' Abraham?

Abraham as we have seen has been quite capable of trying to find a work around towards the fulfilment of the promises.

Now God is testing the quality of his faith.

Testing builds faith.

Wenham (WBC): "God's command is introduced with unusual gentleness, "Please take," and fully acknowledges Abraham's paternal devotion to his son, "your son, your only child, whom you love," and the hopes he had placed in him, for his very name Isaac was a reminder that he was the child in whom and through whom the oft-repeated promises of land, nationhood, and blessing would be fulfilled. By beginning in this vein, God endorses the propriety of Abraham's love for Isaac and his faith in the promises; at the same time it reminds us of the costliness of the command about to be given."

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2. **What is the significance of this 'sacrifice' story?) Note 22:8,13,14.). Note also Hebrews 11:17-19.**

Faith, Substitution, Covenant renewal

Wenham (WBC): *"The NT writers develop this imagery in a very striking way. For them Abraham and Isaac are types of God the Father and Jesus. But whereas Abraham did not quite sacrifice Isaac, Jesus did actually die. So his death is a perfect and fully effective atoning sacrifice, whereas Isaac's near sacrifice merely prefigured our Lord's and could not redeem mankind. This typology is very widespread in the NT and therefore must be extremely early and probably reflects Jesus' own self-interpretation of his mission. When Paul says, "If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us" (Rom 8:31-32), the echoes of Gen 22:12, 16, "you have not withheld your son, your only child," are obvious. John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son," makes the same comparison. John the Baptist's cry, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" may well be making a similar connection, for whether the primary reference is to the lambs for the daily burnt offering or to the passover lamb, Gen 22 seems to associate both with the sacrifice of Isaac. The heavenly voice at Jesus' baptism and transfiguration says, "This is my beloved son.""*

3. **In 22:1-10 God is called God (Elohim) and in v11ff he is referred to as LORD (Yahweh). Can you see any significance in this?**

Interesting!!!

Elohim is the common word for God. – It is plural in form which is interesting....

LORD is the covenant name of God.

Thus up to the raising of the knife above Isaac the passages speaks the general name for God but from there on the name used is the covenant name, Yahweh. Perhaps to remind us that the LORD (Yahweh) is not about to break his covenant or go back on it.

4. **What things does 22:20-23:20 tell us about the progress of God's promises to Abraham (12:1-3)?**

The focus throughout chapters 12-22 has been on the provision of a son – a beginning for the promise of great nation.

Now we have a beginning, admittedly a very small one, in regard to the promise of 'a land'.

### Live the Story.

1. **What limits would you place on your obedience to God's requirements?**

For discussion

Note Hebrews 11:17-19.

Wenham (WBC): *"James and Hebrews thus use the account of Isaac's sacrifice not just to shed light on the atonement but on the kind of behavior the pious should imitate. Crises that test faith and obedience to the uttermost are still part of the disciple's lot. The disciple too must be ready to take up the cross and follow. And those who endure to the end may hope to hear the Lord's commendation: "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Lord.""*

2. **What have learned from Abram/Abraham about being a man or woman of God?**

For discussion.

**For Next Week: Genesis 24ff.** To see the end of the story or the end of the beginning of the story.



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### Appendix A: Melchizedek

David Peterson in Alexander, T.D. & Rosner B.S. (Editors) New Dictionary of Biblical Theology (Leicester, IVP, 2000): "Melchizedek"

*Although Melchizedek is mentioned only twice in the OT (Gen. 14:17–20; Ps. 110:4), this shadowy figure became the subject of much speculation in Jewish circles (cf. W. L. Lane, Hebrews 1–8, pp. 160–163). Given this background, the writer of Hebrews appears to be quite restrained and independent in his use of the texts. Melchizedek is an historical figure whose priesthood serves as a precedent for that of Jesus Christ. From a biblical-theological point of view it is important to note how Hebrews approaches the Genesis narrative typologically, guided by the perspective of the prophetic psalm text.*

#### **Melchizedek and Abram**

*Melchizedek is the first priest mentioned in Scripture. His origins are obscure, but as 'priest of God Most High' (Gen. 14:18, Heb. 'El 'elyôn) he serves the one whom Abram acknowledges as 'the LORD, God Most High, maker of heaven and earth' (cf. 14:22). In traditional Near-Eastern fashion, Melchizedek combines priesthood with kingship (Gen. 14:18; 'Salem' is probably to be identified with Jerusalem, cf. Ps. 76:2, the Genesis Apocryphon [22:13] and Josephus [Antiquities of the Jews 1.10.2]). His blessing (14:19–20) is a recognition of Abram's special relationship with God. It recalls the promise in Genesis 12:1–3 that the patriarch will be a blessing and that all the families of the earth will find blessing in him. Melchizedek is 'blessed' by Abram in the tithe that he pays him.*

#### **Melchizedek and the Messiah**

*Although Israelite kings sometimes exercised priestly functions, the distinction between the offices was much more definite in Israel than in neighbouring cultures. Psalm 110 therefore appears to be prophetic of a new situation in proclaiming that a Davidic king will be 'a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek' (v. 4). The implied background for this promise is the capture of Jerusalem, by which the house of David succeeded to the kingship and somehow also to the priesthood of Melchizedek. In the first oracle (v. 1) the Lord speaks as the true king of Israel, inviting his human representative to act as his co-regent. As the Qumran texts and the Gospels show (cf. Mark 12:35–37 par.), this verse was interpreted messianically in Jesus' time. The promise of an eternal priesthood in verse 4 matches the assurance in 2 Samuel 7:16 that God will establish David's house and his kingdom forever. Melchizedek appears in one Qumran text (Melchizedek) as an angelic figure who executes final judgment upon the powers of evil, but his priestly function is not mentioned. The writer of Hebrews appears to be the first to link the two oracles in Psalm 110, considering what it means for the Messiah who sits at God's right hand to be 'a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek'.*

#### **Melchizedek and Jesus**

*Jesus' use of Psalm 110:1 stimulated much theological reflection on the part of early Christian preachers and writers (cf. D. M. Hay, Glory at the Right Hand, pp. 34–129). But Hebrews is the only NT book to cite Psalm 110:4 and expound its significance (cf. Heb. 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:3, 8, 11, 15–17, 21, 24–25, 28; 8:1–2; 10:12–14).*

*Psalm 110:1 is first mentioned in Hebrews 1:3, and then cited in Hebrews 1:13, to show that the Messiah's heavenly enthronement (see Exaltation) and eternal rule is the focus of discussion. Hebrews is particularly concerned to establish Christ's superiority with regard to the angelic world (1:4–14) and so to highlight the significance of the salvation he has declared and made possible (2:1–4). Psalm 110:4 is first used in a passage which outlines certain qualifications for high-priesthood under the old covenant as a basis for explaining how Jesus can be the high priest of the new covenant (Heb. 5:1–10). Just as Aaron did not presume to take the honour of high-priesthood upon himself but*

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was called by God, so Christ 'did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest', but was appointed by the one who addressed him as 'Son' in Psalm 2:7 and as 'a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek' in Psalm 110:4 (NRSV). The messianic reference of both of these psalms is assumed. In Hebrews 1:5, Psalm 2:7 is one of the texts used in conjunction with Psalm 110:1 to affirm the heavenly rule of the Messiah. Jesus' priesthood is thus aligned with his ascension and enthronement (cf. also Heb. 6:19–20; 7:16, 26), as well as with his suffering and death (see Atonement; 5:7–10; cf. 2:17–18; 7:27). But just how Psalm 110:4 illuminates the nature of his priesthood is not fully disclosed until Hebrews 7.

Hebrews 7:1–10 reflects on the significance of Melchizedek and his encounter with Abraham in Genesis 14:17–20. True to the original text, the main emphasis in Hebrews is on the blessing of Abraham by Melchizedek [p. 660] and the paying of tithes to Melchizedek by the patriarch (7:1–2a, 4–10). The writer's aim is to establish the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood over that of Levi, to prepare for the argument that Christ's priesthood brings the perfection unattainable through the levitical priesthood (7:11–28). Melchizedek's name is interpreted to mean 'king of righteousness', and his title as king of Salem is taken to mean that he is 'king of peace' (7:2b), thus anticipating the Messiah's reign of righteousness and peace (cf. 1:8–9 and Psalm 110).

It is also noted that, unlike other significant figures in Genesis, Melchizedek is introduced without genealogy and without reference to his birth or death (7:3). Since the legitimacy of a man's priesthood in the ancient world depended on such factors, the silence of Scripture at this point is remarkable. The implication is that Melchizedek did not obtain his priesthood because of hereditary rights. In God's providence, Melchizedek was (lit.) 'made to resemble [Gk *aphōmōiōmenos*] the Son of God, in that he remains a priest forever'. Here the influence of Psalm 110:4 on the interpretation of the Genesis text is clear. This statement prepares for the argument in 7:15–16 that Christ's priesthood is 'not through a legal requirement concerning physical descent, but through the power of an indestructible life'. By means of his ascension and heavenly enthronement, Christ entered into the eternal priesthood of which Psalm 110:4 speaks (cf. Heb. 8:1–2; 9:11–12). This new order of priesthood was typified by Melchizedek as he is presented in Genesis. The writer does not mean that Melchizedek was an angelic figure or that he was a pre-incarnate manifestation of the Son of God.

As Psalm 110:4 is applied to Christ in Hebrews 7:11–28 it becomes clear that he holds his priesthood permanently because 'he continues for ever' and that this is confirmed by the divine oath in the psalm. His heavenly priesthood introduces 'a better hope through which we approach God' since 'he always lives to make intercession' for those who draw near to God through him."

David Peterson on Hebrews 6 and 7 ( "Hebrews" in Carson, D.A., France, R.T., Motyer, J.A., Wenham, G.J. (Eds) NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY : 21st Century Edition (Leicester, IVP, 1994)): "**19-20** These verses must be read in the light of Hebrews 7:20-22, where it is argued that God confirmed the high-priesthood of the Messiah in Ps. 110:4 with an oath similar to the one used in Gn. 22:16. Since Jesus is the promised high priest in the order of Melchizedek, he has become 'the guarantee' of the blessings of the new covenant (7:22). Those who rely on him can actually enter the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where he has gone before us and has entered on our behalf. Jesus is literally our 'forerunner', opening the way for us to follow!" "

**1-3** Ps. 110:4 is the key text in this chapter. To indicate what the psalm meant by a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek, Hebrews goes back to Gn. 14:18-20, highlighting only certain features of the Genesis narrative. Melchizedek's name means king of righteousness and the fact that he was king of Salem (derived from Heb. *šālôm*, 'peace') means that he was king of peace. In name, at least, he

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*anticipated the Messiah's reign of righteousness and peace (e.g. Is. 9:6-7; Heb. 1:8-9). Most importantly, he is identified as priest of God Most High, who blessed Abraham and received a tithe (a tenth of everything) from Abraham, the great forefather or patriarch of Israel. Moreover, in the record of Scripture, Melchizedek is without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life. He appears from nowhere and disappears without trace. He has no predecessors and no successors. Since the legitimacy of a man's priesthood in the ancient world depended on such things, the silence of Scripture at this point is unusual. Melchizedek is like the Son of God in the sense that he foreshadows his unique and never-ending priesthood. In technical terms, he is a 'type' or pattern of Christ."*

**13-17** *Only certain people were authorized to serve at the altar, according to the Mosaic law (e.g. Lv. 8-9; Nu. 1:47-54). Jesus our Lord belonged to the tribe of Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. So, if Jesus is a priest, he must belong to another order. In dealing with this objection, the writer notes again the prediction of Ps. 110:4 that the Messianic priesthood would be in the order of Melchizedek. A descendant of Levi became a priest on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry. Jesus became a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek, on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. This last expression is best understood as a reference to Jesus' resurrection and his heavenly exaltation. He clearly functioned as high priest of the new covenant on earth, when he offered himself as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. But he had to be brought to life again to function as a priest forever, serving in the heavenly sanctuary, at the right hand of God (cf. 8:1-2)."*

### Appendix B: SODOM AND HOMOSEXUALITY.

Almost a century ago, G. K. Chesterton wrote, "Men do not differ much about what things they will call evils; they differ enormously about what evils they will call excusable."<sup>14</sup> Though in many ways that remains true, in the issue of homosexuality it defines the controversy. Some today still consider homosexuality an evil, whether excusable or not. Others march for the rights of those they believe to be simply practicing an acceptable alternative lifestyle that expresses their sexual preferences.

Though Genesis 19 is not a story about the evils of homosexuality, the narrative has traditionally been a starting point for discussion of the biblical view of homosexuality. We include this discussion under Breakout Points because in it we are digressing from the purpose of the author. Nonetheless, given the prominence of the issue in contemporary society, a brief comment is in order.

The sin of Sodom. The first question to be asked is whether the text of Genesis 19 portrays homosexual behavior as the sin of Sodom. Modern interpreters inclined to come to the defense of the homosexual community have suggested that the offenses committed by the mob are best identified as threat of violence and neglect of hospitality norms. The former is an obvious element, and the latter is shown to be an issue both in the context of Lot's hospitality and in a parallel situation (Judg. 19:23), where the host specifically protests that he cannot accede to their request because the man is a guest. Proponents of this view also point out that when the rest of the Old Testament refers back to this incident, homosexuality is not the issue but various forms of injustice.<sup>15</sup> By the intertestamental period, however, it is undeniable that the offense is viewed in sexual terms. W. Fields summarized the evidence:

Sodomites "defile themselves and commit fornication with their bodies." They "practice uncleanness on the earth," giving rise to the expression "uncleanness of the Sodomites" (*Jub* 16.5, 6). The Sodomites commit "fornication, uncleanness," and "mutual corruption through

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fornication" (*Jub* 20.5). Phrases such as "sexual relations like those of Sodom and Gomorrah" (*T. Levi* 14.6) may be taken as a description of homosexual relations; equally so, the expression "departed from the order of nature" (*T. Naph* 3.4).<sup>16</sup>

Nonetheless, W. Brueggemann insists that the Bible gives "considerable evidence that the sin of Sodom was not specifically sexual" and will concede little ground. He concludes, "It may be that sexual disorder is one aspect of a general disorder. But that issue is presented in a way scarcely pertinent to contemporary discussion of homosexuality."<sup>17</sup> The claim is made that condemning homosexual violence is not the same as condemning a homosexual lifestyle.

Homosexuality and the Bible. The Holiness Code in Leviticus makes it clear that male homosexuality is detestable (*Lev.* 18:22) and punishable by death (20:13). In the former context it is grouped together with adultery, child sacrifice, and bestiality. In the New Testament the treatment is no less harsh. Homosexuality is clearly not one of the practices that Christian liberty or the age of grace made more acceptable. For Paul it represents the epitome of depraved conduct (*Rom.* 1:24–32). His inclusion of homosexuals in the list of the unrighteous who will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 *Cor.* 6:9), as well as in the list of those for whom the law serves a necessary and continuing function (1 *Tim.* 1:10), shows us that his disapproval cannot in any way be viewed as limited to his particular time, culture, or situation.

The Bible is clear that homosexual practice is wrong and sinful. It is not just wrong insofar as it is promiscuous. Rather, as with adultery, incest, and bestiality, it is wrong because of the nature of the sexual partner. An illicit sexual partner may be married to someone else (adultery), may be a close relative (incest), may be an animal (bestiality), and may be someone of the same gender (homosexuality). Monogamous homosexual relationships are no more acceptable than only committing adultery with one person.

This does not mean that a homosexual inclination is sinful, though it may be a reflection of the fallenness of the race. Sexual desires often provide an arena of temptation to sin, whatever one's sexual orientation may be. As believers, we are called upon to resist those temptations both in thought and in deed. In this sense, the plight of the homosexual is similar to that of the heterosexual. Sexual fantasizing only worsens the situation, makes resistance more difficult, and may lead to sin even though no sexual act is committed (*Matt.* 5:28). The only biblical solution to homosexual inclination is disciplined purity of thought and a celibate lifestyle. What is true for all Christians is also true for homosexuals—behavior must transcend feelings. What the Bible calls evil, the church must not deem excusable under the pressures of society.