

QUOTATIONS

“To borrow a not unfamiliar phrase from John’s Gospel: God so loved the world that he chose Israel” (Wright 1992: 39).

“The overwhelming impression . . . is God’s unwavering intention to bless” (Wright 1992: 101).

“If Israel, as Yahweh’s first-born son, would live by his standards and obey his laws, then God could pursue his goal of bringing blessing to the nations” (Wright 1992: 130).

GOING FURTHER

Think carefully about the relationship between faith and righteousness, including Gen 15:6. What role does works play? How are works appropriate or inappropriate? Don’t start with Romans 4, but don’t ignore it either. See also Galatians 4:21–5:15.

Do you think that Jesus understood the voice from heaven (Matt 3:17) as an echo of Genesis 22:2? What would this mean?

Abraham’s faith is commended in Hebrews 11. Trace Abraham’s faith through his life. What lessons can you learn?

Imagine how God could bless all the families of the earth through Abraham and his seed. How did Abraham/Israel succeed and fail? How will the Seed/Israel succeed (cf. Zech 14; Gal 3:8ff)?

PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY

Read Genesis 25–50. Keep an eye out for anything related to the covenant (land, seed, blessing). Pay extra attention to any conversation between God and man. Notice how God is sovereign in election. If you have extra time, trace the character development of two figures in particular: Jacob and Judah. Be prepared to be amazed at our awesome God and his wonderful revelation!

SOURCE CITED

Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament*, 2nd ed., 1992.

GENESIS 12-24: ABRAHAM’S FAITH AND GOD’S COVENANT

PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read Genesis 12–24. Pay careful attention to: (1) anything God says; (2) anything related to seed/offspring; (3) the promises and covenant that God makes with Abraham.

Note how Abraham repeatedly interferes with God’s work, placing the promise in jeopardy at some points.

GENESIS 12: A CRUCIAL PIVOT

Genesis 12 is a *pivot*, connecting chapters 1–11 with everything to follow. This chapter looks *backwards* and *forwards* in crucial ways.

Abraham is the seed of the woman, Seth, Noah, and Shem; he is of the blessed line that will crush the serpent.

In contrast to the men of Babel who wished to make a name for themselves (11:4), God promises to make Abraham’s name great (12:2).

Though mankind is against God, God has a plan to bless man through (a) man.

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

Seed: God will give Abraham seed and make him into a great nation.

Land: The seed needs a land. Indeed, God made man to rule over the land (Gen 1). The chosen seed, as it submits to God, will do just that. God has chosen a particular land for his people (and it fulfills a prophecy made in judgment of Canaan in ch. 9).

Blessing: This has two parts: (1) God will bless Abraham; (2) God will bless all families on earth through Abraham. The greatest blessing that man needs is the crushing of the serpent and deliverance from sin. This will come through Abraham and his seed.

SEED, LAND, AND BLESSING THROUGH ABRAHAM'S LIFE

Abram in Egypt (12): Abram's fear (=opposite of faith) brings a threat to the seed. The one who dishonors Abram is cursed.

Abram and Lot (13): Lot removes himself from the promised land; the promise of land is developed (all that you see, forever); the promise of seed is developed (like dust, uncountable).

Invasion of the kings (14): God gives Abram victory in the land; Abram submits to a greater priest; Abram will not prosper from the riches of sin (Sodom).

God's covenant (15): The seed will come from Abram's body (not adopted), will be numerous, will be enslaved and delivered to this land, the borders of which are now given. The vision signifies God's unbreakable promise to do what he said (cf. Jer 34:18). Abram is declared righteous because of his faith, not his works.

Hagar (16): The insemination of Sarai's servant is an attempt to help God to fulfill his promise to provide a seed. Such action is the opposite of faith, and its results will long haunt the seed.

Circumcision (17): God repeats and expands his promises: Abraham will be father of nations and kings; the covenant will be everlasting; all of the land of Canaan will belong to the seed; Sarah will be the mother of nations and kings. Isaac is distinguished from Ishmael; the latter is blessed but only Isaac receives the covenant promises. Circumcision is the sign of those belonging to the covenant. No circumcision = outside the covenant.

Angelic visit (18): Sarah personally hears that she will have a son. At the root of faith is this question: "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" For the first time, a timeline is given: a son within a year.

Sodom (18-19): As God's image (representative) on earth, ready to exercise dominion righteously as God intended, God brings Abraham in on his plans to judge Sodom. Abraham intercedes with God for man, balancing righteousness with mercy, and modeling

for his seed the work of a faithful king-priest. Lot is permanently separated from the land promised to Abraham.

Abimelech (20): Abraham's faith again wavers and the seed is threatened (again, by a foreign king). Again, God intercedes and protects. Because Abimelech blesses Abraham, he is blessed.

Birth of Isaac (21): God fulfills the promise of a seed at just the right time. The seed is marked with the sign of the covenant (circumcision). The laughter of disbelief is now the laughter of joy.

Ishmael exiled (21): The mocking son of the slave is a threat to the seed and is sent out of the promised land. God promises to protect Ishmael but makes it clear that Isaac is the seed of the promise who will receive the promises of the covenant. (Abraham has something of the "Midas touch": whatever he touches [or fathers] is blessed.)

Treaty at Beersheba (21): A foreign king recognizes that God is blessing Abraham and he seeks to receive that blessing. Abimelech models the way that foreigners should relate to Abraham and his seed.

Abraham's sacrifice (22): Abraham's faith has been tested ever since he was called to leave his family and land; now he faces the ultimate test when God commands him to sacrifice his seed, thus putting in jeopardy God's own promises. Abraham proves that God is absolutely trustworthy and a greater treasure than his promises.

Sarah's burial (23): The first piece of land that Abraham owns in Canaan is a tomb for his wife. One day, it will all be his.

Isaac's wife (24): There is still a threat to the perpetuation of the seed as long as Isaac does not have a wife. This is Abraham's last mission, and it is imperative that the wife of the seed be of a godly line (of Seth, not of Canaan; ch. 9). Abraham, "blessed in every way," is given an ideal wife for Isaac.