

GENESIS

RockPointe Church Small Groups

Patriarchs of Scripture • Abraham • Genesis 12:1-3, 10-20; 15:1-8, 13-16 • Fall 2018

Main Point

The Lord is faithful to keep His promises to His children, even amidst their stumbling.

Background

Video: <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/VideoElement/182887>

Video: <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/VideoElement/182904>

Video: <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/illustration/98026>

Video: <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/Series/1131?episode=1>

Video: <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/Series/1131?episode=2>

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Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Who were some of your favorite superheroes growing up? What were the qualities that you liked about them?

What were some of the weaknesses of your favorite superheroes?

It's fun to read comics or watch a good superhero movie. We love Superman because he always does the right thing. We love Batman because he always goes after the villain to keep Gotham safe. Spiderman is witty, and he catches bad guys with flair. But superheroes all have their weaknesses. Superman has kryptonite. Batman is just a plain human being. Spiderman's powers often serve to alienate him from others because of his secret identity.

Our heroes in the Bible are much the same. We admire them because of their faith and commitment to God. We tend to put them on pedestals and feel like we can never attain the level of godliness they reach. However, every hero of the Bible, except Jesus, sins. If it weren't for the faithfulness of God, every last hero of the Bible would have failed. God is faithful, and He shows unconditional grace and kindness to His people. Today we will see how that is true in the life of one of the greatest Bible characters: Abraham.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| have a volunteer read genesis 12:1-3.

Why do you think that God chose Abraham? Does the Bible give us any reason for his selection over others?

What are the promises that God made to Abraham?

The Bible never tells us why God chose Abraham. We know that Abraham was a sinner like everyone else, and that he needed grace just like everyone else. For reasons known only to God Himself, God not only extended grace to Abraham, but decided to make him and his family a people through whom grace would come to the entire world. The beauty of this mystery is that we see that grace is not dependent upon Abraham's personal worthiness. If God had given Abraham this gift based on Abraham's performance, attitude, or faithfulness, then Abraham could have lost this gift when he didn't continue to perform.

This serves as an example for us to delight in. God's grace to us is not given because of how well we perform or how faithful we are. God's grace is given to us because he loves us and is determined to bless us despite our own sinfulness and the times where we fall short.

| have a volunteer read Genesis 12:10-20.

Why do you think this story of Abraham's deception follows the section where God makes Abraham such a great promise?

What do you think about Abraham's scheme to stay alive? How can he do this and be a "hero of the faith"?

Right after Abraham's great call to leave his home and everything familiar, right after we see him begin his great journey of faith, we see him fail miserably. Abraham schemes with Sarah to save his own neck in case anyone should notice how beautiful Sarah is. Not only does Abraham fear for his life, he is willing to forfeit his marriage and allow Sarah to endure this shame just to save himself. Not a very righteous or bold move to say the least!

You might expect Abraham, as a hero, to have a change of heart and rescue his wife. But he doesn't. The reason he doesn't is because Abraham isn't actually the hero of faithfulness in this story; God is. God rescues Sarah. The promise that God made to Abraham was not based on Abraham's boldness, faithfulness, or heroism. The promise was by grace. God rescued Abraham. God rescued Sarah. God gives us this example so that we can be confident that He has always, and will always, rescue His children.

| have a volunteer read genesis 15:1-8, 13-16.

What do you think of Abraham's faith in this passage? How might you relate to his complaint?

What are the conditions Abraham has to meet for the Lord to fulfill His promises?

By this chapter, Abraham has been on his sojourn for many years. He was probably in his 80's by this point,

and Sarah was at least in her 70's. Abraham had begun to despair of the promise that God had given him for children. He thought a servant born in his house was going to inherit all that he had. Most people can probably relate to the despair Abraham felt when prayers and hopes go unfulfilled for years and years.

Abraham is in a situation where God has to come to the rescue. For no reason other than grace, God re-iterates His promise to Abraham. God guarantees that He will fulfill His promise to Abraham, no strings attached. Never once does God say, "Abraham, you must do this, and then I will bless you." In fact, in Genesis 20:1-13, Abraham gives Sarah away again to a King named Abimelech! God rescues Sarah and Abraham yet again because of His great mercy and grace.

Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. This means that Abraham trusted God to fulfill all that God promised to do. We know that God did fulfill His promise, and through Abraham and Sarah, God eventually brought His own Son Jesus Christ into the world. When we hear the gospel and believe that God will save us through the Lord Jesus Christ, we become sons and daughters of Abraham (Gal. 3:7). As God's children by faith in Christ, we can be confident that God will rescue us just as He did our forefather Abraham.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How might we gain confidence in our faith through God's faithfulness to Abraham?

How could we use God's faithfulness to Abraham as a source of comfort for brothers and sisters who are struggling with unanswered prayers or personal failings?

How can Abraham's failures encourage us when we fall short of what God would have us do?

Pray

In a time of group prayer, thank the Father for His abundant grace to us. Ask the Father to forgive us of our sins and pray that He will help us to live lives pleasing to Him because of the great love He has shown us. Finally, ask the Lord to encourage those who are struggling with sin and unanswered prayers.

Commentary

| genesis 12:1-7

12:1-3. According to Acts 7:2, The Lord spoke to Abram while he was still in Mesopotamia (Gen. 11:31). God gave Abram a one-verb command with four aspects to it. Abram was to go out from (1) his land, (2) his relatives, and (3) his father's house, (4) to a land chosen by God. Obedience to God often means leaving one thing in order to receive something else even better.

12:4. Having migrated with his father's household from Ur (11:31), Abram stayed an uncertain amount of

time in Haran. Since Terah lived 145 years after the birth of Abram (11:26,32) and Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran, Abram literally fulfilled the command to leave his father's house (v. 1).

12:5. Abram was apparently his nephew Lot's protector since Lot's father had died in Ur (11:28). The group's journey to Canaan was about 450 miles.

12:6. Shechem is in north central Israel on the slope of Mount Ebal. Abram's grandson Jacob would live for a time in this region as well (33:18-19). Later, Abram's great grandson Joseph would be buried there (Josh. 24:32). The Canaanites were a distinct cultural group (Gen. 15:21), but the term "Canaanite" is also an umbrella term for many different people groups who were living in the region, including the Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Hivites, and Jebusites.

12:7. This is the first of three times Scripture indicates that the Lord physically appeared to Abram (cp. 17:1; 18:1). The Lord's promise to give the land of Canaan to Abram's offspring is the single most repeated affirmation in the Torah. At least 37 references are made to it in the books of Moses. The altar Abram built at Shechem is the first of four he is said to have built; others were set up between Bethel and Ai (v. 8), at Hebron (13:18), and at Mt. Moriah (22:9).

GENESIS 15:1-21

15:1. Abram's role as a prophet is shown here. Visions were one of two standard means (the other was dreams) by which the Lord revealed His word to people. The only other patriarch who is said to have received a vision was Jacob. The vision's content included a command (Do not be afraid), an assurance (I am your shield), and a promise (your very great reward). The Lord would reward him richly.

15:2-3. Neither God's protection nor His reward seemed important to elderly Abram since all his goods would go to Eliezer of Damascus, a slave born in his house. Engaging in something of a pity party, Abram made seven references to himself (in the Hebrew) in the space of twenty-two Hebrew words and twice utters the complaint that he was childless.

15:4-6. Ignoring Abram's apparent lack of gratitude, the Lord gave Abram one of the great promises of the Bible; the elderly patriarch would produce an heir from his own body. God then made the breathtaking promise that Abram's offspring would be as numerous as the stars. Old and childless, Abram believed the Lord, that is, he affirmed that God is dependable. God credited it to him as righteousness, that is, He judged or accounted that Abram measured up to the standard, conformed to the norm. Abram's faith and God's gracious response to it served as a paradigm of the Christian experience in three different New Testament books (Rm 4:3; Gal 3:6; Jms 2:23).

15:8-9. Abram, the shrewd businessman who had once dealt with earth's mightiest human—the pharaoh of Egypt (12:14-19)—now negotiated with the Lord God. How can he be assured of God's promise? Verse 9 provides the answer. God provided assurance in the form of a solemn commitment ceremony. The cow,

female goat, and ram were mammals later authorized for sacrifice in the Law of Moses; however, this is the only time that three-year-olds—specimens in the prime of their lives—were used. Turtledoves and young pigeons were permitted for certain Israelite sacrifices (Lv 5:7). The ceremony here differs from other sacred rituals in the Old Testament involving animals in that no animal parts were burned.

15:13-16. Here the Lord revealed to Abram the prophet an outline of the events of Genesis 46 through Exodus 13. Like Abram himself, his promised offspring would live as foreigners. The land that did not belong to them was Egypt, where they would be enslaved and oppressed (Ex 1:11-14) for approximately 400 years (more precisely, 430 years; Ex 12:40). God would judge the nation they served through a series of ten miraculous plagues (Ex 7:14-12:30), after which they would go out with many possessions (Ex 12:35-36). Though Abram would not live to see these events, he would go to [his] fathers in peace—die a peaceful death—and be buried at the ripe old age of 175 (25:7). Abram's descendants would return to the land in the fourth generation, that is, after four hundred years in Egypt; in this case, each generation seems to be one hundred years, Abram's age when Isaac was born (21:5). The Lord also hinted regarding the purpose of the return of Abram's descendants to the promised land. In large part Israel's return to Canaan would bring God's judgment on the iniquity of the Amorites.

15:17. When the sun had set, the Lord caused a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch to appear and pass between the divided animals. Both elements symbolized essential aspects of God; the smoke perhaps representing divine inscrutability, and the flame God's power. By going between the divided carcasses, the Lord was solemnly obligating Himself to fulfill the terms of the covenant—symbolically indicating that He would Himself be split asunder if He failed to carry out His promises.

15:18-21. The second explicit covenant in the Bible between God and a person (9:9-17) is established here with Abram, obliging God to provide the patriarch with offspring and a geographic inheritance for them that began in the south with the brook of Egypt (either the Wadi El-Arish or the Shihor River—the easternmost branch of the Nile in Egypt's delta region) and extended as far north as the Euphrates River. The list of ten different people groups here is the longest list of Canaan's inhabitants in the Torah. This is the only list to include the Kenites, Kenizzites, and Kadmonites; the Kenites and Kenizzites were probably groups living in the Negev that coexisted peacefully with the Israelites. Perhaps the Kadmonites were the same as the Qedemites, a desert-dwelling enemy of Israel.