



### #3: *Abraham & Sarah: Covenant and Promise*

**Bible Readings:** [Genesis 12, 15, & 17](#)

**by Revd Andy Murphy**

Series editor: Andy Murphy

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#### **INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES: *Faithful God, Covenant People***

This series takes us on a journey through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, looking at God's purposes in calling human beings into a **covenant relationship**. We are exploring different covenants and perspectives as we think about our relationships with God, consider what God is calling us to be, and how we should live as Covenant people. It is best used in small groups, but can also be helpful for personal study.

#### **PREPARATION FOR GROUP LEADERS**

As you prepare to lead this session, pray for your group and reflect on your discussions from last time. Were there any difficult questions you might like to return to, to help the group further? Our focus this time is **God's promises to Abraham**, and it would be very useful to read [Genesis chapters 11-18](#) to remind you of the context of the passages we'll be thinking about. As an aid for the prayers, you might want to print out a list of some of **God's promises in the Bible**. You could do your own search for verses, or use [this link](#).

#### **PREPARATION FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS – before the session**

**Abraham** is a famous and complicated character. His wife **Sarah** is also an important example of faith, faithfulness, and trust in God. Both remind us that God has purposes for us beyond our imagining, even in old age. Bible scholar John Goldingay says "...there are few people better known in world history than Abraham. He is the person who demonstrates the basic nature of the relationship with God that God invites us into." [from: *Genesis for Everyone, Part 1*, SPCK, 2010, p.137]. The story of Abraham is found in **Genesis chapters 11 to 25**, but we will be looking particularly at **chapters 12, 15 & 17**, about God's promise and covenant with Abraham and his family. You might like to read these beforehand.

#### **STARTING THE SESSION: A PRAYER**

Eternal God,  
bless all who look to Abraham as the father of the faith.  
Set us free from prejudice, blindness, and hardness of heart,  
that in accordance with you will and guided by your truth  
our life together may be for the glory of your name;  
we ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

[A collect for Good Friday from *The Methodist Worship Book*, TMCP 1999, p.539]

#### **FINDING OUR ROOTS – questions to start off with, in small groups...**

*What did you know beforehand about the story of Abraham and Sarah? In reading through some of the Abraham chapters, did anything strike you in a new way? What questions do you bring to this session? Have you ever had an unlikely promise fulfilled? Or have you received a surprise calling to a new place or vocation? How do you think Abraham felt about the instructions and promises God gave him?*

## READING THE SCRIPTURES – with background information

### Read together the first Bible passage: **Genesis 12: 1-9**

By **Genesis 11** (with humanity confused and scattered), there could be a sense that God's 'Plan A' and 'Plan B' have not been successful. Choosing Abraham (or Abram) and his relocation to the region of Canaan might be seen as 'Plan C': God wants to influence and bless the world through **a family of faith** – starting small and in unlikely circumstances, having to rely on God for their very existence. It has already been revealed that Sarah (then called Sarai) is childless and unable to conceive naturally (**11:30**). In these chapters we will see the promise to Abraham repeated and developed in different ways. This first account of the promise is that **from Abraham will come a great nation; that he will be blessed and be a blessing to the world**. Abraham's part in the agreement is that he will move to the place God has appointed for him.

### Now read the second passage: **Genesis chapter 15:1-6**

Years have passed, and much has occurred in between these chapters: including a famine, a trip to Egypt, an awkward encounter with a Pharaoh, and a war between various rulers and cities. But still Abraham and Sarah are childless, and the promise 'to be a great nation' seems as far away as ever. In this passage, God tries to encourage Abraham, but he questions God about the reality of the promise. *Who will be his heir? Who will continue the blessing?* God's answer is to point Abraham to the millions of stars in the sky: **'So shall your descendants be!'** (**15:5**). Abraham believes God's promise. He trusts on the basis of God's word. Then, in **chapter 16**, Sarah has a suggestion of how they can take matters into their own hands.

### Now read together: **Genesis chapter 17:1-22**

Abraham now has a son, Ishmael, born to Sarah's slave-girl, Hagar. This has put a strain on family relationships and emotions. God will show love and care for Ishmael and his mother (**Gen 21:8-21**), but it is not through them that the promised family will come about. In chapter 17, thirteen years after Ishmael's birth, with Abraham and Sarah advancing in years, God speaks again to reiterate and emphasise the promise, and to give them new names. The word **covenant** is used several times; expressing God's solemn commitment. Abraham's part in the agreement is that every male in the family will be circumcised as a sign of belonging to God, including every baby boy born. One year later, Isaac was born to Sarah (**ch. 21**).

## DIGGING DEEPER – some questions for you to consider in your group:

*Could there be a geographical significance or benefit for the chosen family to be in Canaan (Palestine)? What was Sarah's role in the story? What characteristics does she show? What sacrifices does she make? Why is circumcision important to the Jewish people? What signs or symbols do Christians have of our covenant relationship with God? How do we welcome others into the 'family'?*

God wants to bless the whole world through Abraham's family (**Gen 12:2-3**). This is expressed in the New Testament, which sees God reach out to the non-Jewish nations through the gospel of Christ and the Holy Spirit (e.g. **Galatians 3**). *Why is it unhelpful to cling on to blessing or privilege at the exclusion of others? Is this what God intends? What is good or commendable about Abraham's relationship with God?*

Abraham's story is rarely straightforward, but it shows God's faithfulness to God's purposes, despite the complexities of this world and the imperfections of people of faith. *What is faith for you? Is it a religion that produces perfection? Or is it perhaps more a trusting perseverance, relying on grace and forgiveness, in a community trying to live God's purposes? Can we find encouragement in God's people in the Bible who often make mistakes but are held in God's faithful love? How would you describe your faith in God?*

## PRAYING TOGETHER

In a time of prayer, remind one another of some of the **promises of God**, and pray for the faith to believe and trust more in God's word. Pray for greater unity between people of the Abrahamic faiths (Jewish-Christian-Muslim), that we may be a blessing to the world. Finish by saying **The Lord's Prayer** together.

## COVENANT LIVING: PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE – to think about afterwards

Abraham and Sarah were blessed so that through their family all the families on earth should be blessed. **How can you be more mindful of God's blessings to you? How can you then be a blessing to others?**

## Junior Good Soil, issue #3

### ABRAHAM AND SARAH: Starting a Family of Faith

Written by Andy Murphy.

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Junior Good Soil is for children's and young people's groups in churches. It can be easily adapted and you can add your own ideas! Please do contact Andy at [geordie\\_smurf@hotmail.com](mailto:geordie_smurf@hotmail.com) with comments.



#### PLANTING THE SEED – what are we thinking about today?

We are looking at the story of **Abraham and Sarah**. God asked Abraham to move to a different country (hundreds of miles away). When they got to the Promised Land of Canaan (later known as Palestine), they lived as wandering strangers, but over the years became richer and had a large group of helpers and animals with them. Although they were very old and had no children of their own, God always promised that they would have a son, and this would lead to a very big family, which would be a blessing to the whole world. Eventually, Sarah's son Isaac was born, and God's plan could come true.

#### QUIET TIME – a prayer

Dear God, thank you for being with us today, and for your goodness and faithfulness to us. Sometimes we don't know how things will turn out, and we worry about things in the future, but you ask us to have faith in you, because you love us and want the best for us. Help us to listen to your story, and to trust in your promises, through Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

#### TELLING THE STORY – reading the Bible... Genesis chapters 12, 15 and 17

For older children, you can read the important verses from an appropriate Bible:

**Genesis 12:1-5, Genesis 15:1-6, Genesis 17:1-8** (these links are from the *International Children's Bible*)

Or for younger children, try the **Usborne Children's Bible** (2009, pages 17-19).

You can also watch a fun animated version of Genesis 18: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=DksL29yKo8E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DksL29yKo8E)

#### WATERING AND GERMINATING – what can we learn? / what does it tell us?

Abraham and Sarah were the start of a **family of faith** that would try to get to know God, worship God, and trust in God's promises. They didn't always get everything right, but God showed them forgiveness and faithfulness. From their family came Isaac, Jacob and his sons, then Moses, King David, and Jesus. When Jesus came, he made God's blessing available to EVERYONE. When we start a relationship with Jesus and know his forgiving love, the Holy Spirit welcomes us into God's family (no matter where we come from). Today, Christians, Jews and Muslims all have Abraham near the start of their 'Faith Family Tree'.

#### LETTING IT GROW – ideas for activities and discussion

Invite the children to draw their own **Family Tree** – going as far back as they can, making it as colourful and decorative as they wish. Then invite them to add to the picture names of people who are part of their '**Faith Family**' – people who have encouraged them in faith, or taught them about God.

Discuss with them: what are the **promises of God** in the Bible that they can remember? Make a list...

#### PRAISE AND WORSHIP – hymns and songs (can be used at the start or end, or whenever!)

**You Say** (Lauren Daigle) [www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8WK9HmF53w](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8WK9HmF53w)

**Your Promises** (Elevation Worship) [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rr3o6M0\\_lxs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rr3o6M0_lxs)

**He has always been Faithful** (Sara Groves) [www.youtube.com/watch?v=CpniPE62III](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CpniPE62III)

**Promises** (Maverick City Worship) [www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhFwh\\_59H2c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhFwh_59H2c)

Or why not try the old song: "**Father Abraham had many sons**" – fun with actions and movement!