

Chapter 1

ABRAHAM: CHARACTER QUALITIES OF A MAN OF GOD

THE COVENANT MAN

Genesis 12-25

- I. In Term 1 of this course we learned that God is a covenant-making and covenant keeping God. God initiated covenants with Adam and with Noah. Now God initiates a covenant with Abraham. In making covenant with Abraham God required a response of obedient faith from Abraham and God made a promise of blessings and grace to Abraham. The essence of God's covenant promise to Abraham is found in Genesis 12:1-3 *"I will bless you...you will be a blessing."*
 - A. Historical background: It was now about 600 years after the flood. The attempt to build the Tower of Babel had led to a scattering of people by language and various cultures had begun to form. Society had begun to develop cities and city-states. Religion had become largely polytheistic with worship directed at the sun and moon and other created things. There was little knowledge of the true God.
 - B. God was ready to take the next step in His redemptive plan for man and He was looking for someone who could hear Him, believe Him and obey Him. God chose to initiate contact and propose a covenant with Abraham, who was living in the city of Ur, in Mesopotamia. Ur was socially and economically advanced, with a religion built around worship of a moon goddess.
 - C. In Genesis 12:1-3 we find the account of God initiating a covenant with Abraham. This covenant has promises and requirements. Abraham responds in obedient faith and Genesis chapters 12-18 and 20-22 tells of Abraham's pilgrimage of faith. Because of Abraham's faith and obedience, God reaffirms His covenant with Abraham and makes it an Everlasting Covenant to include all of Abraham's descendants. It is at this point that God changes the name of Abram (*exalted father*) to Abraham (*father of many or father of nations*). (Genesis 17:4-7)
 - D. Because God's covenant with Abraham is an everlasting covenant, the descendants of Abraham are heirs of the Covenant Promise. Paul explains in his letter to the Galatian churches how this covenant and its promises relate to Christian believers and especially to non-Jewish believers. (Galatians 3:6-9, 26-29; Ephesians 2:12-13)
 1. Paul's emphasis is that one is a true descendant of Abraham not merely by natural birth, but through faith in God, in God's covenant promise, and in God's covenant sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ.
 2. The letters to Galatians and Ephesians also emphasize that the same covenant promises that God made to Abraham are to be believed and received by New Covenant believers in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Abraham's Blessings Are Mine!
 - E. We must never forget that God's promise to Abraham was, *"I will bless you... and you will*

Foundation for Christian Service – Term 3 – Chapter 1 – Abraham

be a blessing." God did not intend Abraham's blessing to be self-contained. It was not a blessing for Abraham only, but that others would be blessed through God's blessing on him. When we enter into God's covenant of blessing, God blesses us so that we can be a blessing to the world we live in. God will bless you... so that you will be a blessing!

II. The Bible account does not present Abraham as a perfect man who always did just the right thing and never made a mistake or never sinned. Abraham is shown as a very real man with strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures, courage and fear, faith and doubt. But through it all, God's Word shows Abraham a man who believed God. (Genesis 15:6) God's grace and Abraham's faith working together made it possible for God to make a Covenant of Promise with Abraham. In this study we will look at some of the qualities that made it possible that God could make such a Covenant of Promise. We want to look at our own lives and ensure that we are developing these same qualities and characteristics.

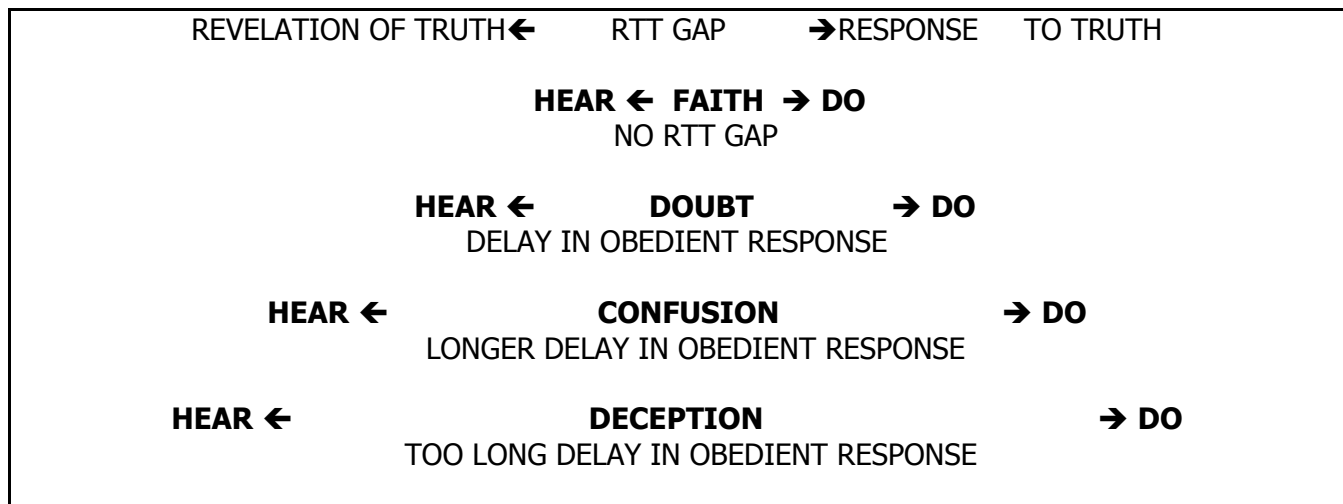
A. Abraham was willing to leave his "Comfort Zone." He was told to *"Leave his country, his people, and his father's household..."* He had to let go of the security of familiar surroundings, a culture he understood and was comfortable with, and the support of his social environment. He had to *"Leave... and go to a land I will show you."* God required Abraham to leave his place of security before He showed him where he was going. He would have never seen "the land" if he hadn't been willing to "leave and go." (Genesis 12:1)

1. Everyone has a "Comfort Zone" in which we are able to think, speak, and act quite comfortably. We have a financial Comfort Zone, a social Comfort Zone, a work Comfort Zone. We tend to want to stay with what we know, what we have experienced, and what requires the least effort and change.
2. Faith only operates when you step outside your Comfort Zone. As long as you are in your Comfort Zone you are operating on knowledge and experience. For faith to operate, you must believe what God has said and then take a step of obedient faith that takes you outside your Comfort Zone.
3. Keep pressing the boundaries of your Comfort Zone. The potential for the blessing of God in your life and through you to others is as big as your faith makes it.

B. Abraham was simply obedient. When God told him to "leave and go" he went. He didn't propose a list of changes to God's plans or timetable, he didn't argue that there was a better way or that it was too big a challenge, he simply *"...left as the Lord had told him."* (Genesis 12:4)

1. To begin to inherit the covenant blessing you must hear and do. Jesus said we don't lay a solid foundation by merely hearing His words, but by hearing and doing them. It's not what you know; it's what you do with what you know.
2. If you delay, you doubt. The time between knowing what God wants you to do and actually doing it could be called a Response To Truth Gap. Your Response To Truth Gap begins at the moment God reveals a truth to you which requires response. If you respond quickly and simply, you move forward in faith. If you delay the Response To Truth Gap lengthens and this invariably leads to confusion and ultimately to deception.

3. This is how the Response To Truth Gap works:



4. When God makes something real to you or gives you direction, "Just Do It!" Don't hesitate. Don't fight the truth. Don't delay. Respond in obedient faith. Be quick to hear and quick to obey.
- C. Abraham pitched a tent and built an altar. These two objects, the tent and the altar, become symbolic of Abraham's value system. Abraham understood the difference in value between the temporal and the eternal. (Genesis 12:8)
1. Abraham pitched a tent. After he left Ur and began his walk of faith with God, he always lived in a tent. A tent is temporary. A tent is portable. Abraham always remained ready to move forward when God led him further. All our material possessions are temporary and we must learn to regard them as such. They should be used, enjoyed, and cared for, but should not become too important to us and cause us to lose sight of true values. *"For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."* (Hebrews 11:8-10)
 2. Abraham built an altar. He built a stone altar that he was to return to later in his life to meet with God. The altar was permanent, outlasting his tent and even his own life. His grandson Jacob met with God many years later at the same place Abraham had built an altar to worship God. Spiritual things are of lasting value. Spiritual things are eternal and we must learn to value them more than that which is temporal and will pass away.
- D. There was a famine in the land and Abraham went down to Egypt. Even though Abraham was walking by faith, living in the place where God wanted him to be, and had his values right, he experienced a famine.
1. When the famine came, Abraham went down to Egypt because he feared his needs would not be met during the famine. While in Egypt the fear that drove him from the land also caused him to lie about his wife and claim that she was his

Foundation for Christian Service – Term 3 – Chapter 1 – Abraham

sister. When the famine ended, he returned from Egypt to the Negev where God had intended for him to be.

2. "Down to Egypt" is symbolic of a lower standard of life and quality of faith. Egypt pictures reliance on man's system rather than on God's ways and provision. Trusting God is a higher way of living than trusting in man's system. (See Deuteronomy 11:10-11 – God's watering system)
 3. After he went down to Egypt, he wandered from place to place. He was back in the place God wanted him to be, but he had lost sense of direction. Then he went back to the First Altar he had built in the land and called on the Lord. He repented of his wandering from God's best plan. He returned to his first love. The first altar is a place of renewed relationship, renewed commitment to the purposes of God, and renewed blessing. (Genesis 12:10; Genesis 13:1-4)
 4. Like Abraham, we may experience "famine in the land." When the famine comes, hold steady. Don't panic, don't run away. In Genesis 26:1-6 and 12 we find the account of another "famine in the land" in Isaac's time. God told Isaac to stay in the land and he sowed seed and reaped a hundred-fold harvest. God renewed the covenant He had made with Abraham to Isaac when Isaac held steady and "stayed in the land" during the famine.
- E. Abraham was willing to place the needs and desires of others before his own. When the flocks and herds of Abraham and Lot became so great that the land could not support them both in one place, Abraham took the initiative to preserve peace. Abraham gave Lot the opportunity to choose where he would go and Abraham would go the other way (Genesis 13:8-9, 11)
1. Abraham took the initiative to resolve the conflict and bring peace in the situation. He was a peacemaker.
 2. Abraham did not fear to let Lot choose the best looking land because he had learned to truly trust God for his provision. He now knew that God would fulfill His covenant promises wherever He led Abraham.
 3. *Lot chose for himself.* Lot did not care for the covenant or for Abraham, only for the blessing. He was selfish and chose for himself that which looked good at the moment but was destined for destruction.
 4. Lot's selfishness and short-sighted choice set a destructive sequence of events in motion:
 - a. Lot chose for himself. (Genesis 13:11)
 - b. Lot pitched his tent near Sodom. (Genesis 13:12)
 - c. Lot was caught up in the raid on Sodom. (Genesis 14:12)
 - d. Lot's house was on Sodom's town square. (Genesis 19:2-3)

Foundation for Christian Service – Term 3 – Chapter 1 – Abraham

- e. Lot offered his daughters to evil men. (Genesis 19:8)
 - f. Lot lost his home and wealth in the destruction of Sodom. (Genesis 19:16)
 - g. Lot lost his wife. (Genesis 19:26)
 - h. Lot's daughters had no godly morality because of the environment he had raised them in. (Genesis 19:36-38)
- F. Abraham was loyal to relationships. He was willing to put himself at risk to fight for his friends, even those who had done him wrong. Relationship involves risk. (Genesis 14:14-16)
- 1. Even though Sodom was repugnant to Abraham and Lot had selfishly tried to take advantage of him, he was willing to use his own resources to rescue Lot and the other inhabitants of Sodom from the northern kings.
 - 2. When others live in ways we strongly disapprove, do we say, "Serves them right! Let them have what they deserve!" or do we use our resources to reach out to them in their need?
 - 3. When someone has taken advantage of our kindness and peaceableness as Lot had to Abraham, do we reject them and cut them off, or do we offer our resources to help them when things go wrong?
- G. Abraham believed in the El Elyon Revelation. As Abraham was returning from the battle to rescue Lot, he was met by two kings; the king of Sodom and Melchizedek, king of Salem. Melchizedek was priest of El Elyon, the creator or possessor of heaven and earth. (Genesis 14:18-23)
- 1. When Abraham received the revelation that God was El Elyon, the creator or possessor of heaven and earth, he honored God as his source. This is the El Elyon principle - we honor God by giving a portion of what He has provided for us. We acknowledge that he is the true owner and we are stewards of what He has provided.
 - 2. Abraham worshiped God with his possessions by giving a tenth to God's priest or representative. Giving God the first tenth helps us to put God first in all areas of our lives. Giving helps break the bondage of materialism. Giving is a way of blessing others with the blessing God has given us.
 - 3. Abraham wisely chose between the King of Salem and the King of Sodom. The King of Sodom offered Abraham all the spoils of war, but he wisely rejected the offer so that the King of Sodom could not claim that Abraham's prosperity was due to him. Abraham truly saw God alone as his source.
- H. Abraham believed God even when circumstances said "Impossible." The greatest desire of his heart was to receive the son God had promised him. Even though he wavered for a time and produced Ishmael through his own strength and scheme, he continued to trust God to fulfill the promise. He was 100 and Sarah was 90 years old when Isaac was born.

Foundation for Christian Service – Term 3 – Chapter 1 – Abraham

(Genesis 17:1-8, 17-27)

1. Abraham was too old to expect the fulfillment of the promise by any natural means. He was too old to have a son. Sarah was too old to have a son. He had tried to do it his own way and had produced Ishmael. God had told him that Ishmael was not the one to bring the fulfillment of the covenant promise. There was no way it could work. (Except God!)
 2. Even though the evidence was against the fulfillment of the promise, Abraham continued to believe. He no longer believed in his own ability to find a way. He simply believed in God to fulfill the promise.
 3. Abraham and Sarah did produce a child together just as God had said. But it was faith that enabled them to see the fulfillment. (Hebrews 11:11-12)
- I. God chose Abraham as the man with whom he would make covenant because He knew that Abraham would train and direct his children and his household in the ways of the Lord. (Genesis 18:18-19; II Timothy 2:2)
1. This covenant was to be an everlasting covenant. It was to carry on after Abraham through his son Isaac, his son Jacob, and his sons who became the fathers of the tribes of the nation of Israel.
 2. If God was to carry on this covenant He needed people who were taught and trained in God's ways and who would continue to hear and obey Him and walk in His ways.
 3. For Abraham, as for us, it was essential that he not only be a man of faith, but that he teach and train his children and live out that faith in a way that it would carry on to the next generation. It has been said that God has no grandchildren. If any generation fails to bring its children into relationship with God, the blessing stops there.
- J. Abraham was a man of intercession who would contend with God for others. We have already seen that Abraham was not concerned only for himself and his blessing, but was willing to give first choice of the land to Lot and was willing to rescue Lot from his abductors. (Genesis 18:20-33)
1. Abraham was a man of faith and a man of action. He was also a man of prayer. He interceded with God for his nephew Lot and for the people of the wicked city of Sodom.
 2. Abraham did not only pray for his own needs but he prayed earnestly for the needs of others. He prayed for the wicked that they might be spared judgement and destruction.
 3. You only learn the value of prayer and the power of prayer by praying. What is the potential for us in intercession?
- K. He was willing to sacrifice the thing he cared about most (the promised blessing) if it

would please God. Can you put the blessing on the altar? (Genesis 22:1-12; Hebrews 11:17-19)

1. Abraham was filled with joy when God fulfilled the promise by giving him a miracle son in his old age. He now had in his grasp everything he had ever desired. He felt satisfied and complete. His faith had proven valid and God had proven faithful.
2. Then God required him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. This went against everything that Abraham knew and believed. God was a good God, but now He required a sacrifice. God had given the promised son, but now He demanded he be killed.
3. This was, in God's own words, a test. It was a test of Abraham's faith. It was a test of Abraham's willingness to put everything he valued most in God's hands and trust God to be able to fulfill His covenant promise.
4. When Abraham demonstrated his willingness to give God the very thing that mattered most to him, God gave him another demonstration of His faithfulness and power.

SUMMARY:

This is the man God could trust with the promises of an unconditional, everlasting covenant. He was a man of human frailties, but also a man of faith and obedience. It was his faith in God and in God's covenant promises that counted for righteousness in Abraham's life. (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23)

Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6)

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

Chapter 1 Abraham: Character Qualities of a Man of God

1. What do you think it means that "*Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,*" {Gen. 15:6} and he was called God's friend (James 2:23). Does this mean that it is only important to believe God and His Word or is there more to it than that?
2. We saw in the story of Abraham that his faith was tested in many different ways; by delay, by famine, by sacrifice, even by old age. Do you think God allows our faith to be tested? What are some of the ways faith is tested in our lives?