

The Promise to Abraham
Genesis 12-15
Small Group Guide

Opening Icebreaker and Background Quiz (see attachment):

- For our icebreaker and background reading, let's take the quiz in the attachment. If you want to make a game of it and divide up into two or three teams, feel free.

We're beginning a new section of the Big Story, called "Promises." We encourage you to read all of Genesis 12-27 on your own, but for this study take turns **READING Genesis 12:1-7 and 15:1-21.¹**

1. What are all the aspects of God's promise to Abraham that you find in vv1-7?
2. Without going into detail², we know that this promise is a continuation of God's promise in Gen 3:15 to crush evil and restore humanity to himself. What are the implications that God decided to do it via a family structure versus any other way he could have done it?
3. However, we learn from Chapter 12 (v1) that for Abraham to realize God's promise, he had to leave his own country, people group, and "father's household" and go to an unfamiliar land. This takes trust in God.
 - a. When was a time that you let go of some source of comfort or security to follow God's call?
 - b. Are there any comfort zones or sources of security that God might be asking you to leave behind currently? How are you dealing with this?
 - c. In Gen 15:1, God says, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." Why was this encouragement especially needed for Abram at the moment? Do you believe this for yourself? If not, what might be getting in the way?
4. After God repeats and expands his promise to Abraham, we read in Gen 15:6 that "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness."
 - a. Why was this "crediting" significant, based on what you know of Abraham's subsequent mistakes?

¹ Regarding the setting, Abraham's life is the first point of scripture where we can date with some accuracy. Most commentators date Abraham's entry into Canaan (modern day Israel) around 1800 to 2000 B.C., and the subsequent Exodus from Egypt 1250-1450 B.C., and King David's reign (which has precision to within a few years) from 1010-970 B.C.).

² We know that God's promise in Gen 3:15 is connected to the Abrahamic promise in two ways: 1) The author of Genesis takes us through the family trees of Noah's 3 sons, and focuses in on one in particular, the line of Shem. He takes us all the way down to one descendant of Noah named Abram. If we understand what's happening in the broader context of the book, the author wants us to keep in mind God's promise to restore people and the earth in Gen. 3, and it seems at this moment that humanity's hopes of being restored rest on one family in the line of Shem; 2) In Gen 22:18 ("through your offspring/seed all nations on earth will be blessed"), God reminds Abraham of the promise using that same singular word "seed," which refers to Christ, that was used in Gen 3:15.

- b. Read Paul's comments on this verse, in Galatians 3:6-14. What does it mean that God gives you "credit" for righteousness, through faith? What encouragement does this idea give you?
5. Abraham asks, in 15:8: "What if *I* can't take possession of the land that you want to give me?" How does this reflect his doubt in his ability to take hold of God's promises? Do you ever feel that although God wants to bless you, you will not be able to live faithfully enough to take hold of his gifts? May there be an unspoken belief that your ability to sin is bigger than God's ability to override your actions? Discuss.
6. Later in Genesis 15, we see God ritually acting out his covenant by walking through the pieces of animals.
 - a. Read Jeremiah 34:18-20. What do these verses—in a totally different context—tell us about this ritual custom involving animal halves?
 - b. What does it mean that God himself (in the form of the smoking firepot) walks between the pieces, instead of Abraham? What is your emotional response to hearing that God will take full responsibility for Abraham's and thus your failures to keep the covenant with Him?
 - c. How does this ritual put Abraham's fears and doubts to rest? Why does this experience give him faith in God's promise of a son?
 - d. How does this ritual point forward to the necessity of Jesus going to the cross?
 - e. We often put our emotional hope in other people or things to give us a sense of security. How should this picture—in the context of the Big Story—give us a greater object for our faith? How does it put to rest our fears and doubts? How does it enable us to step out in bold faith?
7. Paul tells us in Gal. 3:29, "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." As a Christian, do you feel like an heir? Do you feel like you're receiving God's promises? Or, are you fighting off that foundational lie of Satan that God cannot be trusted? Discuss.
8. Remember the story in Josh's sermon of the auction of the painting of the son? Josh was arguing that faith in Jesus, God's Promised Son, is the access point for all that we long for. Are you trying to get God's promises outside of His Son or is His Son central to your life? Discuss.
9. Prayer: Among our usual prayer requests, let's pray that we identify where we are putting our security and identity in something other than God and relinquish them to Him.

ATTACHMENT – Quiz on “Beginnings” Section

Formation (Genesis 1:1-2:3)

1. True or False: When God originally created the earth, it was flawed, and inherently inferior to our true, heavenly home.
2. Fill in the blanks from our study of creation: Pastor Josh says that Genesis 1 shows three themes and the first one is that **God created the earth to be our** _____ .
3. Based on Gen. 1:26-31, what was the pinnacle of God’s creation?
4. What is the Bible, if it is not primarily a science or theology text book?
5. True or False: work was not part of life prior to sin.

Fall (Gen 2:15-17, Gen 3)

6. In Chapter 3 of Genesis we find “The Fall” of Humankind from perfect relationship with God. Which of the following experiences had God previously forbidden Adam and Eve from having? A) Eating from the Tree of Life. B) Eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. C) Eating from the Tree of Pleasure.
7. Josh described the Source of Sin as a lie, first put forward by the serpent, and now underlying all sin. What is the Big Lie?
8. What is one name for the doctrine built on the effects of sin in Genesis 3?
9. What area of life has not been touched by the effects of sin?
10. Name at least two effects of the first sin that are highlighted in Genesis 3 (vv 7-19).
11. The “end of sin” can be seen in God’s promise in Genesis 3:15. What is the theological term for this promise?
12. The joke goes that “Jesus” is the right answer to every Sunday School quiz. However, in Genesis 3:15, what is the literal translation of the word “offspring” that makes a reference to Jesus?

Flood (Gen 6-9):

13. Aside from Noah’s own immediate family and the animals, what additional families does God allow to escape on the Ark?
14. In explaining the difficulty of God not saving everyone, Lou made use of a modern quote. Finish this quote: “Hell is not a chamber God locks from the outside, it’s a _____.”³
15. What visual depiction does God give Noah of his promise after the flood, and what is the significance of its direction?
16. Finish this statement: “The Big Story is not about a God who sits on his throne choosing who comes in and who’s cast out. It’s a story about a God who left his throne to _____ those who have pushed him out.”

³ From *The Skeleton in God's Closet*.