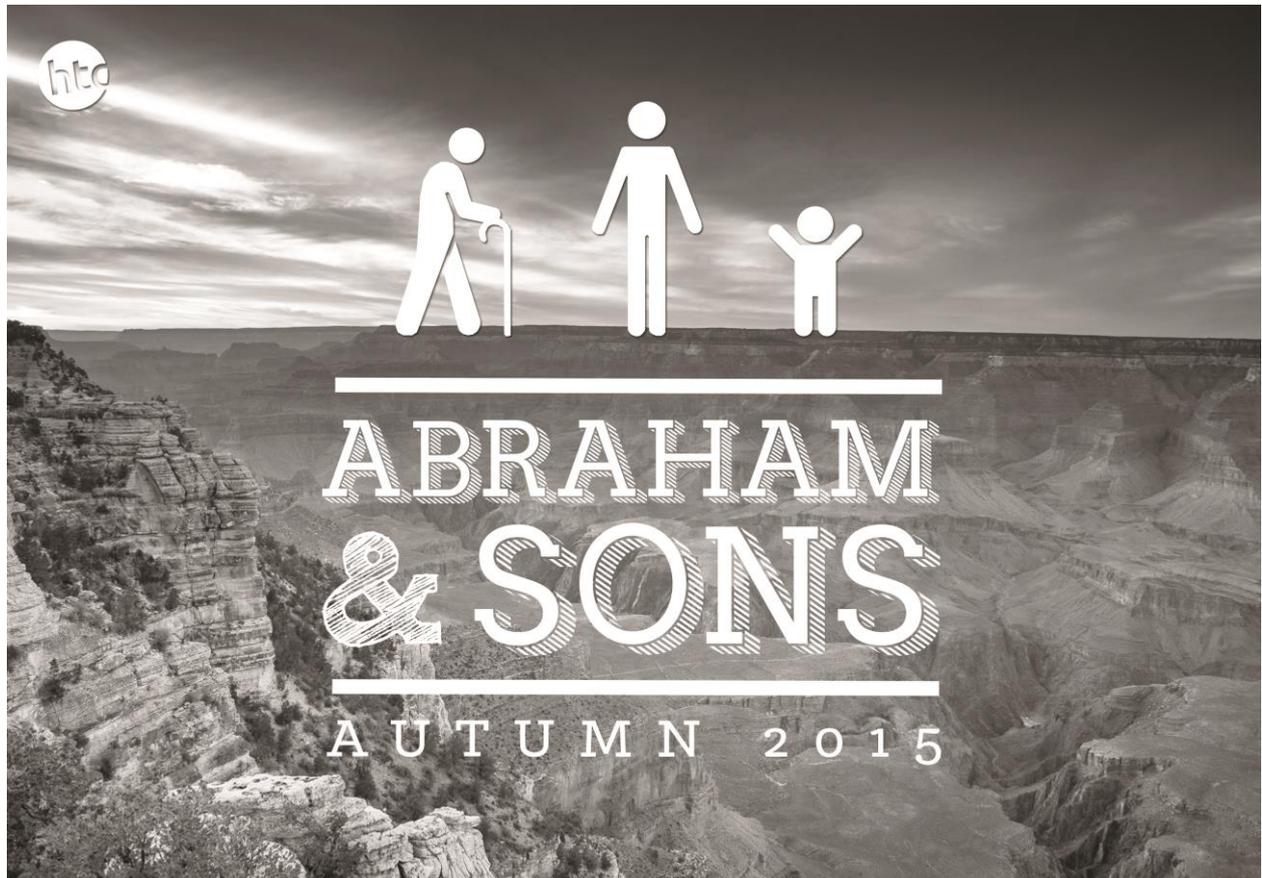


Holy Trinity Claygate



Abraham and Sons

Small Groups Study Material
Autumn 2015

Study 1: A unique call - Genesis 12:1-9

Introduction

- think of a hard task you have had to do (grotty summer job, hard project). What made it hard and what helped you do it?

In this first study we look at a big call that God gave Abram, but with it came the promise of a huge blessing for Abram and through him for the world.

Reading the Story

Read Genesis 12:1-9

- what is God asking Abram to give up?
- what are the promised blessings:
 - for Abram and his family?
 - for the wider world?
- how does Abram respond?

Hearing the Message

The revelation of God

- what does this passage tell us about God's plan for the world, and Abram's / Israel's part in it? What is the significance of this statement so early in the Old Testament?
- 'God in the Old Testament was only interested in Israel'. How does this passage challenge this view?

The life of faith

- what do you think fired Abram's faith to do as God commanded him?
- what do we admire about this? What do we think we would have done?

The promise of Christ

- 'All peoples on earth will be blessed through you'. How is this statement true of Jesus' life, death and resurrection?

Living it Out

- think of a time when you felt called to do something for God that cost you something but which blessed others? How did it feel to sense that call and then step out in faith to do it? What was the result for you and others?

Study 2: Circumcision and commitment - Genesis 17:1-27

Introduction

- think of a group that you (or someone you know) is part of, where there is a visible sign of belonging (eg uniform, badge etc). Why is this sign important, and where did it originate from?

In this study we see God reaffirming his covenant with Abraham, and instituting the sign of circumcision as a symbol of covenant membership.

Reading the Story

Read Genesis 17:1-27

- what additional details does God include in his promises to Abraham in this chapter that were not included in 12:1-9? (vv 5-8, 15-16, 19-21)
- what part is Abraham to play in the covenant? (vv9-14)
- how does Abraham respond:
 - in vv17-18?
 - in vv23-27?

Hearing the Message

The revelation of God

- what does this passage reveal about the character of God?
- in what way does the idea of circumcision relate to our relationship with God today? (see Romans 2:28-29)

The life of faith

- circumcision was only introduced *after* God has already made his promises to Abram in Genesis 12 and reaffirmed the covenant in chapter 15. Why is this significant? What does it tell us about the basis on which Abraham was able to be in relationship with God? (cf Romans 4:9-12)
- many years have passed since God's initial promise to Abram (compare Genesis 12:4 with 17:1). How would this passage have strengthened his faith in God's promises?

The promise of Christ

- in what ways is Christ the ultimate fulfilment of the promises in this chapter?

Living it Out

- how does this passage help us to hold onto the promises of God in the Bible, even when circumstances cause us to doubt?
- what role - if any - do visible signs of belonging (eg baptism) play in our faith today?

Study 3: Three guests - Genesis 18:1-15

Introduction

- can you share a story of surprise guests – either for a dinner party or to stay? What was the occasion and what happened?

In this study we look at three guests who appeared to Abraham – and through them Abraham encountered God afresh.

Reading the Story

Read Genesis 18:1-15

- how would you characterise Abraham's hospitality?
- what is the first sign that these were no ordinary guests?
- why did their promise seem extraordinary?
- what overall message did God want Abraham to hear through this encounter?

Hearing the Message

The revelation of God

- in what way did this visible revelation of God complement the prior verbal promises of God to Abraham? How do you think this helped Abraham?

The life of faith

- in what ways was holding onto the promises of God hard for Abraham? How do you think this encounter helped him to live the life of faith?

The promise of Christ

- in what ways did God visit the world in Jesus? How was this visit different to the three guests at Mamre?

Living it Out

- in what ways do you find holding onto the promises of God hard? What helps you do this?
- how does the fact that God took flesh in Jesus Christ, and comes alongside now with the Holy Spirit, help you live a life of faith even when circumstances are turning against you?

Study 4: Two sons - Genesis 21:1-21

Introduction

- think of some siblings where both are famous. What do you know of their backgrounds and relationships?

In this study we look at two sons who had the same father, but very different futures; and yet in them both God's grace could be seen.

Reading the Story

Read Genesis 21:1-21

- what is the narrator trying to bring out about God's timings in vv1-2?
- how would you characterise Abraham's reaction in vv3-4 and Sarah's reaction in vv6-7?
- what is the back story of Hagar and her son (Ishmael)? (see 16:1-16)
- how do Abraham and Sarah treat Hagar and her son?
- what does God do to protect Hagar and Ishmael?

Hearing the Message

The revelation of God

- what does this passage reveal about God keeping his promises?
- what does this passage reveal about God's care for the outsider?

The life of faith

- how are Abraham and Sarah role-models of faith? In what ways do they fall short? Why do you think this happened?

The promise of Christ

- in what ways did the birth of Jesus show the fulfilment of God's promises? How did Mary's joy echo that of Sarah's? (see Luke 1:46-55) How was Jesus an even better gift than Isaac?

Living it Out

- how does God see the people we might turn into our enemies? How should this affect our behaviour towards them? (see Luke 6:27-36)
- how does the gift of Jesus act as a comfort to us all?

Study 5: The greatest sacrifice - Genesis 22:1-14

Introduction

- think of a time when you were asked to give up something precious to you. What was the reason? How did it feel? How did you respond?

In this study we see God testing Abraham, as he is called to sacrifice his son Isaac, the focus of all his hopes for the fulfilment of God's promises.

Reading the Story

Read Genesis 22:1-14

- remind yourself of the events leading up to the birth of Isaac and departure of Ishmael (Genesis 21). How do you think Abraham would have felt on receiving the command in 22:2?
- how does he respond? How do you think he would have felt at each stage of the story?
- what is God's response to Abraham's obedience?

Hearing the Message

The revelation of God

- in what way did God reveal more of himself to Abraham through this passage? How do you think these events would have strengthened Abraham's relationship with God?

The life of faith

- how do we see Abraham's faith in this passage? (cf Hebrews 11:17-19). In what ways does this challenge, or stretch, our own faith?

The promise of Christ

- in what ways does this passage foreshadow the death of Jesus (cf Romans 8:32)?

Living it Out

- how does this passage fire our praise of God who sacrificed his own Son for us?
- how does this passage speak to us when we are called to give things up in order to follow Jesus? (cf Luke 14:26-27)

Study 6: A dysfunctional family - Genesis 27:1-46

Introduction

- think of a time when you have had a disagreement with a brother / sister, or another member of your family. How was it resolved?

In this study we look at a family full of dysfunctional relationships - yet in which God's purposes continue to be fulfilled.

Reading the Story

Read Genesis 27:1-46

- what is the context for this story? (v1) What is the back story of Esau and Jacob? (25:21-34)
- what part in the deception of Isaac is played by:
 - Rebekah?
 - Jacob?
- what convinces Isaac of Jacob's (false) identity? How does Isaac respond?
- what is Esau's reaction when he realises he has been tricked? How does this contrast with his previous behaviour (25:29-34)?

Hearing the Message

The revelation of God

- although God is not explicitly mentioned in this passage, in what ways do we see him at work? (look back to God's promise to Rebekah in 25:23)

The life of faith

- how would you describe the faith of the various characters in the story? How does this contrast with the faith shown by Abraham and Sarah in earlier passages in this series?

The promise of Christ

- Jacob deceives Isaac and does not 'deserve' the blessing that he receives. How does this point forward to the blessings of salvation that are ours in Christ? How does this encourage us when we sin?

Living it Out

- in what ways have you personally been challenged by this passage to live with integrity? Are there things that you need to change in order to live this out?

Study 7: A godly dream - Genesis 28:10-22

Introduction

- what did you dream about last night? (if you can remember!) Share any dreams that have made a long-term difference to your life.

In this study we see Jacob encounter God in a dream, which kick starts his own journey of faith and commitment.

Reading the Story

Read Genesis 28:10-22

- what is the purpose of the journey Jacob is on? (see 28:1-2)
- what does Jacob see in his dream?
- what does God promise Jacob here? How does this echo previous promises to Abraham (12:1-9) and Isaac (26:1-5)? Why would these promises have seemed particularly apt to Jacob at this point of his life?
- how does Jacob respond to this encounter with God? How wholehearted do you think his commitment to God is at this stage? (vv20-22)

Hearing the Message

The revelation of God

- how do we see the grace of God in this story? (cf Jacob's behaviour in Genesis 27)
- how does God show similar grace to us?

The life of faith

- track Jacob's journey of faith from 27:20, through this passage, and on to 32:22-32. What caused his faith to grow?

- how would you describe where you are in your own journey of faith? What things help us to grow in our own faith?

The promise of Christ

- in what ways does this passage point forward to Jesus? (cf John 1:51 and 14:6, 1 Timothy 2:5)

Living it Out

- how does Jacob's response to God in this passage compare to Thomas' response after the resurrection? (John 20:25) In what ways does this challenge us about our own response to God's promises to us?

Study 8: Reconciled at last - Genesis 33:1-17

Introduction

- think of an occasion when you made up with someone, following a disagreement. What made it hard and what made it possible? What was the result?

In this final study we look at the reconciliation between Jacob and Esau – a picture of grace from which we can be inspired today.

Reading the Story

Read Genesis 33:1-17

- what is the back story of Jacob and Esau? (see Genesis 25:24-34; 27:1-41; 32:1-21)
- what does Jacob seem to expect from Esau (vv1-3)?
- how in fact does Esau respond? How would you characterise his response generally?
- in what ways does Jacob try to earn his brother's forgiveness? (vv8-9)

Hearing the Message

The revelation of God

- if this is a picture of God bringing two alienated parties together, how does this find echoes elsewhere in the purposes of God? (cf Ephesians 2:1-22; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21)
- how has God revealed similar grace to us as Esau showed to Jacob?

The life of faith

- Jacob had to face up to his previous mistakes - what did this demand of his own faith?

- what are the signs that Jacob still struggled to live by faith alone? In what ways is this still true of us?

The promise of Christ

- in what ways is Esau running out to meet Jacob a foretelling of the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-31) In what ways do you think Jesus had this story in mind when he told his parable?

Living it Out

- given the steps God took to be reconciled with us, what incentive does this give us to be reconciled with others? What steps might we need to take to make this happen?
- what have been the key stories and lessons you have taken away from this series on Abraham & Sons?