

### Genesis, Part 3: Abraham

**Galatians 3:1 ESV (Pg. 566)** *O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. 2 Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? 4 Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? 5 Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith— 6 just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”? 7 Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” 9 So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. 10 For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” 11 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” 12 But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— 14 so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.*

- I. We are looking at the 6 key figures in the book of Genesis. We’ve looked at Adam and Noah so far, Today we are going to consider Abraham, who’s story spans all the way from Genesis chapters 11 through 25.
  - A. A lot has happened in the Bible’s story since Noah, his wife, sons and daughters-in-law stepped out of the Ark. Approximately 400 years have passed.
    1. After the flood, Noah spoke prophecies over his sons that determined where they would live and what kind of peoples they would propagate.
    2. In the centuries since the flood, Noah’s descendants have increased to a significant number. Ancient men of renown have come from their family line<sup>1</sup>.
  - B. For a time, all the world dwelt together in the plain of Shinar (in present day Iraq). They had the same language and dialect. There, working with one mind, they built an impressive society and subsequently became very proud.
    1. In their arrogance, they began a grand building project. In a fit of self-sufficiency coupled with creativity and ingenuity, they would attempt to construct a tower to heaven as a lasting monument to their greatness<sup>2</sup>.
    2. But God was unwilling for them to live under the delusion that they could ever climb their way into equality with him through their works; so in an act of mercy, he confused their language, dispersing them throughout the world.
  - C. Shortly after this point, in Genesis 11, we are introduced to a man named Terah, and his son Abram and his wife, Sarai. At some point, Terah decides to leave his home in Ur of the Chaldees (Iraq) and intends to move to Canaan (modern Israel), a land that would play an important role in their unfolding story. They make it as far as Haran (in modern-day Turkey), where Terah eventually dies, approximately 350 miles northeast of the place where he had planned to go.
- II. **Genesis 12:1 ESV** Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of

you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. **3** I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” **4** So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

- A. Abram is 75 years old. He is living in Haran where he has just buried his father. We are not told what his plans for his own future were. It doesn't matter because God gloriously overruled them. Look at the three things God does:
1. First, God chooses him. Please understand that we are not told that Abraham was seeking God's direction, help, blessing or glory.
    - a) If you want scriptural evidence that Abram wasn't seeking God: **Joshua 24:2 ESV** And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and **they served other gods.**”
    - b) We don't find him seeking, worshipping or even speaking to God. Instead we read, “**the Lord said to Abram**”. God initiated contact, just like he does for you and me when he intends for us to know and experience him.
  2. Next, God tells him what to do next with his life.
    - a) He had seen his father set out with his own strength to move his family to a better place, only to die far from where he had planned to go. But now God promises to lead him by the hand to a land already chosen for him.
    - b) One of the most beautiful aspects of following Christ is being able to trust him with our future. We don't have to worry about what to eat, drink, wear, where to work, about our own health, or even our eternal security, because Jesus has promised to care for us since we belong to him.
  3. Lastly, God promises to bless him and to make him a blessing. One word you may have noticed was missing from this passage is the word “**if**”. God didn't say “**if** you will do X, I will bless you”. God intends to bless this man , and God always does what he intends!
  4. God chose him, led him and blessed him as an act of grace. God has chosen you, he is leading you, and promises to bless you too, only by grace.
- B. As we go on further in Genesis, we see God's promise to bless Abram restated and reinforced in Genesis 12 and 13<sup>3</sup>, but God expands the blessing to Abraham's family this time, saying, “To **your offspring** I will give this land.”
1. There was one huge problem. Abraham had no heir and was married to an elderly woman who incidentally had been infertile her entire life. So when God restates the promise one more time in Genesis 15, Abraham reminds God of the difficulty that apparently God had overlooked.
    - a) **Genesis 15:1 ESV** But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” **3** And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.”
    - b) This “member of his household” named Eliezer was most likely Abram's chief servant. Abraham was trying to assist the Almighty by putting him forward as a “substitute heir” so that God's promise could be fulfilled. But

thankfully, God isn't interested in second-string heirs. His purpose is to raise up sons for himself by his glorious grace<sup>4</sup> through Jesus.

2. **Genesis 15:4 ESV** And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." **5** And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."
- III. What follows is the most important verse in Abraham's story. It is also one of the most significant verses that both prefigures the gospel in the the Old testament, and that helps us understand the gospel in the New Testament. Paul cited this verse in Romans 4 and Galatians 3 (which we read) to help new believers get a grip on what the gospel was all about; how it was different from the religions they knew.
- A. So God has chosen, led, and blessed Abram, now he tells him that he will be given a natural born son so that these promises can be fulfilled, and the Bible tells us **Genesis 15:6 ESV** "And he (Abram) believed the Lord, and he (the Lord) counted it to him as righteousness." Simple, yet incredibly profound!
    1. God made promises, he believed them (without wavering), and because of his dependence on nothing but the trustworthiness of God's word, God credited him with having righteousness that he could in no other way attain.
    2. Abram didn't sacrifice his way in to God's righteousness. He didn't pray his way in. He didn't moralize his way in. He didn't pay his way in. He believed.
  - B. Even though before and after this point in the story, Abram made some major, sinful blunders, God was not regarding him according a law kept or a law broken, but was regarding him according to his belief, his trust, his faith.
    1. **Hebrews 11: 8 ESV** *By faith* Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. **9** *By faith* he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. **10** For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. **11** *By faith* Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since **she considered him faithful who had promised**. **12** Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.
    2. Abram and Sarai maintained their faith only because they considered God to be faithful. The King James says they "judged him" to be faithful. Acknowledging God's faithfulness and goodness is an act of worship. To fail to acknowledge it is a grossly sinful act of unbelief.
  - C. Hebrews 11:6 says that whoever comes to God must not only believe that he exists (we probably all believe that), but that he is a rewarder of anyone you desperately seeks him. It also says without faith we cannot be pleasing to God.
    1. This is Paul's point in Galatians 3. He points out how Abram believed God even before the Law was given. That wouldn't happen for another 400 years. There's was no work for him to do to appease God...just believe him completely, put his trust in him implicitly, and have faith in him unwaveringly.

- a) Paul asks the “foolish” Galatians if they received the Spirit by working according to the law, or by faith in what they heard. He asks if God does miracles among them through strict observance of the law, or by faith. The Jews taught that it was through law-keeping that God responds.
  - b) But because it is by faith that God is pleased, as Abram shows us, Paul says “**Know then that it is *those of faith* who are the sons of Abraham.**” It is not law-keepers that please God, but trusting, faithful believers.
2. That is not to say that the Law doesn’t matter. If that were true, God would never have given it to us. Breaking the Law is serious business! “**all who rely on works of the law are *under a curse*; for it is written, ‘*Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.*’**”
    - a) If you try to approach God by morality, by trying to be a better you, it may surprise you to know that you are under a curse! Like Abram’s dad Terah, you’re just trying to get to the promised land in your own strength and you’re doomed to drop dead in the sand, far from your destination.
    - b) Unfortunately because of our fallen nature, none of us can keep the law until we are made alive by Christ; even then we only keep it imperfectly because we are still trapped in bodies of flesh with fleshly desires.
  3. But when we believe in Christ, that belief is counted to us as righteousness; as though we’ve never broken a single one of God’s laws - from telling “white lies” to capital murder! Better yet, when we believe, the Spirit is given, and we’re free to begin to obey God’s law out of love and not fear.
- D. This idea is the essence of the Gospel! **Galatians 3:8 ESV** And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles *by faith*, preached *the gospel* beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” **9** So then, *those who are of faith are blessed* along with Abraham, the man of faith.
1. Abraham believed God. He was regarded as righteous because of his faith. We have believed in Christ. We are regarded as righteous because of faith.
  2. What have we believed about Christ? That he did what we could never do in both obeying the law, and suffering the penalty of our disobedience. **Galatians 3:12 ESV** But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” **13** Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by *becoming a curse for us*—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— **14** so that *in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles*, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.
- IV. I have used the names Abram and Abraham interchangeably. But we read in Genesis 17 that God changed his name. Names were considered much more important and meaningful in Abraham’s time than they are in ours.
- A. The name Abram meant “Exalted Father”. But the name Abraham meant “Father of a Multitude”.
1. When Terah named Abram, it was hoped that someday he would be an exalted father. In that culture, sons born to a man meant favor, blessing,

- success and prosperity. But he married a barren woman and grew to be an old man with no child, the meaning behind his name just unfulfilled dreams.
2. But when God became his Father and named him Abraham, he was blessing him with a constant reminder of his sure, unfulfilled promise.
    - a) He would not only be a father, but the father of a mighty nation called Israel, and then, through the work of Jesus, of an immeasurable multitude of those, who, like himself believe and are counted righteous by God.
    - b) This name would not be a wish or a pipe dream. Abraham's status as the Father of a multitude would be guaranteed on the integrity of God himself. **Numbers 23:19 ESV** God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?
- V. So let's get real. Do you believe God this morning? Every sin that a man commits is rooted in ugly unbelief. When I lie, it's because I don't believe that it is only in the truth is where I am set free<sup>5</sup>. When I give in to my addictions it's because I don't believe that God alone is the source of all pleasure and comfort<sup>6</sup>. When I give vent to the full force of my anger, it's because I believe that God is unwilling or unable to vindicate me, and I must do it myself<sup>7</sup>. Worst of all, when I try to build a tower to heaven, or chart a course for the promised land through my good works and religious observances, I deny both the goodness of the Savior and the effectiveness of his sacrifice for me. Do you believe God or yourself this morning?
- A. As we approach the Lord's table where we will celebrate his triumph over sin and death, I think repentance would look like taking a fresh look at some scriptures, meditating on them for a moment, and asking God to help us believe them; some us to believe them again, others to believe them for the first time.
  - B. As the music plays, I will read you these passages and they will be on the screen. Do three things:
    1. First, ask yourself, "Do I believe these truths **so much** that my life, my attitudes, and my habits reflect it, or am I struggling to live like it's true?"
    2. Next, If you know you're not living convinced of the truth of God's promises, correct course and repent of your unbelief.
    3. Last, don't make a vow that you won't keep; "all who rely on works of the law are under a curse". Instead, ask Jesus to keep you reminded of his promise by giving you his name to bear as your own. Let's begin...
  - C. **Romans 8:38 ESV** For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, **39** nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
  - D. **Isaiah 49:15 ESV** Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. **16** Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.
  - E. **Philippians 4:19 ESV** But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

- F. **Jude 1:24 ESV** Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, **25** to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.
- G. **Psalms 18:28 ESV** For it is you who light my lamp; the Lord my God lightens my darkness. **29** For by you I can run against a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall. **30** This God—his way is perfect; he word of the Lord proves true; the is a shield for all those who take refuge in him. **31** For who is God, but the Lord? And who is a rock, except our God?—**32** the God who equipped me with strength and made my way blameless. **33** He made my feet like the feet of a deer and set me secure on the heights. **34** He trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze. **35** You have given me the shield of your salvation, and your right hand supported me, and your gentleness made me great. **36** You gave a wide place for my steps under me, and my feet did not slip.
- H. **Romans 8:1 ESV** There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
- I. **Psalms 103:11 ESV** For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; **12** as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.
- J. **Romans 16:20 ESV** The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.
- K. **Hebrews 13:5 ESV** Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” **6** So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”
- L. **Luke 13:11 ESV** What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; **12** or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? **13** If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”
- VI. Communion: **1 Corinthians 11:23 ESV** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

VII.

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 10:8-9

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 11:1-9

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 12:7; 13:15-16

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 1:3-10

<sup>5</sup> John 8:32

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 16:11; 2 Corinthians 1:3

<sup>7</sup> Romans 12:14-21