

## For GC Discussion

- What steps of faith might God call us to make in our lives, and how can we prepare to respond as Abram did?
- Can you think of times in your life when it might have been appropriate to build an altar as Abram did? Have you clung on to these moments as you should have done as time goes on?
- How does the big picture promise of God to Abram affect us and the way we live?

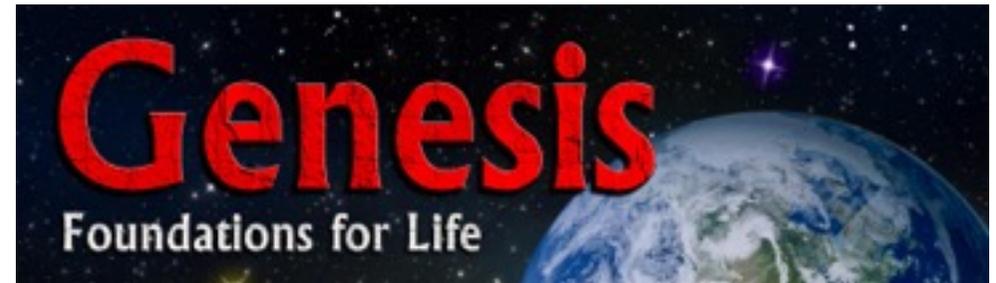
## For the Kids

Jesus sometimes calls us to give up a lot to follow Him - how can you be ready to do that?

**Next Week:** we continue to look at the life of Abraham and his own attempts to fulfil the promise of God (Chs 15-16).

### **Notes and Questions**

**For Worship:** Listen to **'I will Follow'** by Chris Tomlin. You can find it on YouTube, or on the Hill City Church blog on the website.



## Week 7: Abraham Pt 1: The Promise - Chs 13-14

### **This Weeks Summary**

This week we begin our journey with Abram as he responds in faith to God's staggering promise to literally change the whole world for all of time through his descendants.

### **For Study:**

- Read **Hebrews 11:8-10** and ask yourself what it was like for Abram to be obedient to the call of God.
- Read **Luke 9:23-26** and **14:26-33** which reflect something more of the attitude Abram must have had in response to God's call.
- Read **Romans 1:5, John 14:23-24, Deuteronomy 28:1-14** speaking of the character and results of obedience.
- If you're able, do a Bible word study on the phrases *'all nations'* and *'ends of the earth'* - what does it reveal about the heart of God for the whole world?

This week we have focussed our attention on the great promise that God gave to Abram that will now begin to shape everything we look at in the book of Genesis, and on into the rest of the Scriptures. Here are a few more areas that these 2 chapters cover:

### **1. A promise of grace**

As we recognised a few weeks ago as we looked at the story of Noah, sometimes it is very easy for us to translate the blessing of God into something that is earned by a person's righteousness. We reminded ourselves that with Noah that wasn't the case - he found **grace** in the eyes of the Lord, and the 2nd half of Genesis 12 makes it pretty clear that this also isn't the case with Abram. Some people will cast doubt over Abram's decision to bring Lot along on his journey when God told him to leave his family, and also question his decision to leave Canaan when the famine came and go down to Egypt. Both of these are valid questions, but neither are explicitly condemned by the Scriptures so we have to be careful - what is absolutely clear though is that what Abram did when he got to Egypt was unwise at best, and at worst it was a pretty evil thing to do to his wife. Not willing to be completely honest he subjected his wife to a potentially physical relationship with a foreign king, for the purpose that he would be treated better (13:13). His plan worked, but it certainly won't make it into the top 10 ways to be a great husband!

What this episode should do is to bring into clearer focus exactly what is going on here - God has called a man who isn't in church every Sunday, serving on the worship team and laying his life down for his family, friends and colleagues - God has called a man who's a pagan idol worshipper, who probably doesn't even have the first clue who this God who has called him is, and certainly doesn't really know how he's supposed to behave while following this God. The situation magnifies the enormity of the step of faith Abram had to take - he truly was stepping out into the unknown - but it also magnifies the grace of God. What had Abram done to deserve being called as the father of faith? Absolutely nothing - but he, just as Noah did found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Some of us have been in church our whole lives or at least for many years, and fall into the trap of thinking this makes us somehow more worthy of receiving the grace of God, when that couldn't be further from the truth. Wouldn't it be great if we could recapture the knowledge that all that God has given us is completely undeserved - it's humbling, freeing, thrilling and challenging all at the same time. Wouldn't it also be great if we could see more 'Abrams' come off the streets with no knowledge of the God we worship, and yet called by the grace of God to step out on an amazing journey of faith with Jesus - this is what Hill City Church should be all about.

### **2. Building an Altar to the Lord**

Time and time again in the book of Genesis we see people building an altar to God - we have 3 examples in our 2 chapters this week. So what can we learn from this custom that the patriarchs had? An altar is clearly in the Scriptures a place of worship, and a place of sacrifice - it's a place where God is honoured and men and women submit themselves to Him, and all of these things must have some part in why Abram built these 3 altars in today's passage. There is one respect in which our whole lives should be lived 'on an altar' (Romans 12:1-2) - we should live in that place of worship and sacrifice where everything we are is laid before God and surrendered to Him. However, there is something very particular about the altars built in the book of Genesis - each one of them is built after a particular time when God met with His servants, or when a particular stage in their journey with Him was reached. These are altars to represent specific interaction with God that these people had - they were times, places and messages from God that would influence the whole of the rest of their lives. From the beginning of Genesis 12 onwards, Abram's life would never be the same - he would need to go back to that place time and time again when doubts arose, and fear of the future fell upon him. An altar, unless it was torn down would stand as a permanent reminder of what God had said or done, there to make sure the path God had set them on was never deviated from. We too, though we don't build altars of stone so much should have similar times in our lives when God has met with us - life-defining moments when the direction for our life has been set, and God's plan for our lives is made clear. When those times come we would do well, however we do it, to make sure we remember them - determined not to let the impact of them fade, and committed to following through on the purpose and vision that God has given to us.

### **3. A selfless (and possibly faith-filled) decision**

Whether it was right or wrong for Abram to bring Lot with him is up for debate, but what is sure is that in chapter 13 circumstances deal with the potential problem and Lot is removed from Abram's travelling party. We'll return to Lot and the consequences of his actions later in the series, but for now we can see Abram making a selfless offer to his nephew - allowing him to choose the land he wanted. It's not explicit in the text, but maybe this is a further indication that Abram is on board with the promise of God - he knows that God is preparing a land for him, and so he has no need of grasping after the best land for himself. This is what faith does for us - it lifts our eyes off the things that everyone else around us is striving for, and makes us content to wait for God, and trust that His promises are greater by far than anything this world can give us.