

For GC Discussion

- What is the life of Abraham teaching us about the place of faith and doubt in the life of a believer?
- What kinds of things can we do to stir up faithful obedience in our lives even when it doesn't make sense?
- What can we learn and apply to our own lives from the sign of circumcision?

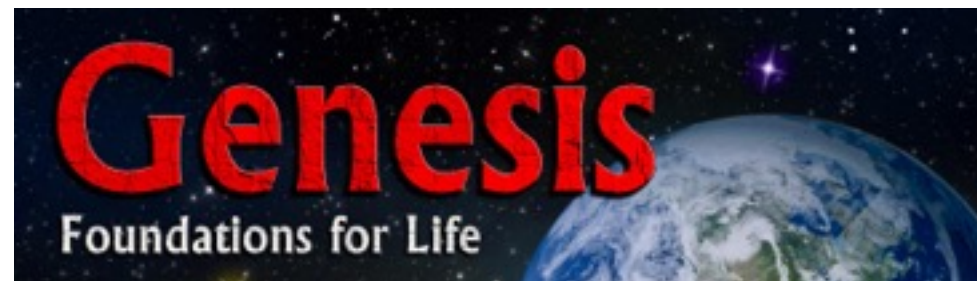
For the Kids

Do you always find it easy to believe what the Bible says? How does God help us believe?

Next Week: we continue our study of Abraham as we look at his intercession for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Notes and Questions

For Worship: Listen to '*I know who I am*' by Chris Tomlin & Israel Houghton. You can find it on YouTube, or on the Hill City Church blog on the website.



Week 9: Abraham Pt3: Circumcision - Chs 17-18

This Weeks Summary

This week we see God giving Abraham the sign of circumcision as a sign of the covenant He has made with him. Abraham demonstrates his faith by obeying despite doubts still being clearly present in his mind.

For Study:

- Read **Exodus 3:1-4:17** how does God deal with Moses' doubts and try to stir faith in his heart?
- Read **Luke 1:5-38** and see how differently God deals with the questions of Zechariah and Mary.
- Read the following verses on circumcision and its place in both Old and New testaments:
 - **Exodus 6:10-12**
 - **Jeremiah 6:10**
 - **Jeremiah 9:25-26**
 - **Acts 15:5-11**
 - **Romans 2:25-29**
 - **Romans 4:1-12**
 - **1 Cor 7:17-19**
 - **Galatians 5:2-11**
 - **Galatians 6:11-15**
 - **Colossians 2:11-12**

This week we have seen the next step in Abraham's journey of faith in the promise of God. Here are a few more things to pick out of this weeks text:

1. The Patience of God

In today's passage we see at different points both Abraham and Sarah laughing as God reiterates the promise that He has already made to them. Firstly we see Abraham laughing to himself as God assures him that it is Sarah who will bear him the son who will turn Abraham's family line into a 'great nation'. We see a real mixture in Abraham's responsiveness to God. He does fall down on his face towards God - an outward sign at least of the reverence he has for the God who called him out of Ur and has promised him a new land, but inwardly Abraham clearly isn't convinced that this can really happen. His inward doubt is shown forth as he pleads with God to recognise Ishmael as the son of the promise - Abraham still has this part of him that really believes that the plan he hatched with Sarah is much better than waiting for God to do something that Abraham's not even sure He is able to do.

In much the same way Sarah laughs to herself as Abraham talks to the three strange visitors that come to their tent in chapter 18. Whoever these divine messengers were, they once again reiterate the promise of Sarah having a son, but Sarah is seeing things much the same as Abraham - there is no way that her 'worn out' body will be able to bear a child. She laughs to herself, obviously forgetting that nothing is hidden from God, and then flatly denies that she laughed at all when confronted with it by one of the three messengers.

What we see here is two of God's chosen people struggling to believe in His word, struggling to trust that He's got it all under control, and struggling not to think they know a better way. It should encourage us to know that we're not alone in these kinds of struggles, and it should also encourage us that God is patient with them - not dumping Abraham and finding a better 'father of faith' when they don't totally believe Him. For us too, we don't want to be people who disbelieve the promises of God, and we need to do all we can to stir up faith in our hearts, but it's great to know that when we find that we waver in our weakness, God is willing to be patient, leading us on slowly if necessary towards that place of faith.

2. The Obedience of Faith

What I find remarkable about this passage is the place this sits in the whole storyline. God commands Abraham to initiate a sign amongst his family that certainly for Abraham and the grown men in his household would have

been painful, and He asks him to do it before He has fulfilled His promise of a son to Abraham and Sarah. If it would have come a couple of chapters later it would seem so much easier for Abraham, but yet again God calls him to trust Him - to go ahead and perform his part of the covenant before God has upheld His.

This is what faith is all about, and will continue to be the way God deals with His people - not that God will never prove Himself to His people (remember the burning torch and smoke in chapter 15) - but He wants us to trust Him and step out in obedience even when we can't see anything of the substance of God's promises being fulfilled. This is another test of Abraham's faith, and thankfully, despite his obvious wavering at the promise of God that we've already looked at, his implicit obedience demonstrates that there's still a part of Abraham that believes God will come through for him.

3. The Symbolism of Circumcision

It's an obvious question to ask in response to today's passage - why was circumcision the sign God chose for His people? It was a very practical step of obedience that God called His people to, and was a tangible sign of belonging to the covenant people of God, but was there any more to it than that? The New Testament makes it clear for us that there is no longer any significance to the act of circumcision for the people of God (Gal 5:2-3, Romans 2:25-29), and even in the Old Testament there are indicators that the symbolism of circumcision is of something far more than just an outward act, as it is applied to numerous areas of people's lives (Ex 6:12, Deut 10:16, Jer 6:10) - the idea being of cutting away a barrier between a person and the hearing and obeying of the voice of God.

Then in the New Testament we are told the big picture symbolism of circumcision in Colossians 2:11 where circumcision is likened to the 'putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh'. All of us are born with an old sinful nature which is enslaved in its evil desires and habits, and that must be cut away for new life to be planted in us. Just as an 8 year old baby had no part in being circumcised, so we too need this to be done for us by the Holy Spirit uniting us together with Christ in His death, burying our old man together with Him in the tomb so we are no longer bound to our old lives (Col 2:12), and then raising us from the dead with a new life which is free to live in righteousness (Col 2:12-13). The presence of the new life of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us then becomes the seal of our salvation - the inward sign declaring that we belong to God, and will one day receive that perfect inheritance waiting for us in heaven (Eph 1:13-14).