

The Gospel Preached to Abraham

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[0 : 0 0] Well, brothers and sisters, it really is fantastic to be here with you this morning. I much prefer the Brisbane weather, and it's so nice looking at all these familiar faces and to get to spend some time in God's Word together this morning.

I found the mishap with the Bible readings a bit funny because I heard that we'd all moved from Galatians into Genesis, and I thought, for this morning, why don't we move from Galatians into Genesis? So in your Bibles, can we open up Galatians now and head to chapter 3?

You see, in verse 8 of chapter 3, we get a few clues for reading Genesis 12, and as people on this side of the resurrection, we don't need to pretend we don't know the story in order to listen to it. So I figured we'll start here to begin with. Chapter 3, verse 8, says, The key part I want to look at is there where it says, and the Scripture preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham.

What do we think or make of that? I mean, earlier on when I was talking about forums, I simplified the gospel as Jesus is Lord. We often like to overcomplicate things, and it's nice to have something so simple and so precious. Jesus is Lord. Jesus is the risen King. But what do we make of Paul saying that the gospel that was preached to Abraham was, in you, all the nations shall be blessed? I mean, are they the same gospel? Was the gospel preached to Abraham the same one that we preach today? Well, we're going to continue to ponder that question through our passage this morning, and let me encourage you to keep pondering it over the next few weeks as we look at Abraham's story and what God has in store for him. However, flipping back to Genesis 11 now, we're going to be spending most of our time here in Genesis 11 and 12. And here we don't meet Abraham, we meet Abram, you know, before he becomes Abraham, and I'm hoping I'm going to get that right this morning and stick to Abram.

But actually, we don't meet Abram first up either. We meet Terah. So starting in verse 27, now these are the generations of Terah. So if you look up at the screen, you'll see that Genesis breaks down into about 10 sections, and they all start with this phrase, these are the generations of.

[2 : 5 7] These are called the Toledots, after the original Hebrew word that was used. And on top of being a helpful way to follow through Genesis, they actually have a strong theological tie back to Genesis 3.

See, after creating the world and creating man and woman, God blessed them and placed them in the Garden of Eden with the charge to subdue the earth and be fruitful and multiply.

But instead of faithful obedience and listening to God, man instead rebels and seeks to decide good and evil for himself. As a result, God promises judgment and a curse on the serpent and the land.

It's a very bleak moment in the Bible and comes so early on. But in the midst of all this, there's a small ray of hope. A son born of a woman will crush the serpent's head, defeating sin and death.

So naturally, from chapter 4 onwards, the great search begins. I mean, imagine a crime drama, right? But you've got the detective. And he gets that one bit of information, that one bit of evidence that sets ablaze their search for the subject.

[4 : 19] The one you're looking for is a boy born of a woman. Well, hop to it. I want this boy found. Find all the child-bearing women.

Find all their sons. Investigate each one of them. If he dies or if he sins, cross him off. There's no way he can defeat sin and death. But look to the one who will defeat it.

It will be a boy born of a woman. We need this boy if we have any hope. And then in response to God's promise, at the end of chapter 4, the people also begin to call upon the name of the Lord to fulfill that promise.

And so naturally, they start the great search and they speed down these genealogies. Sometimes they whiz by. Hundreds of years are covered in just a few verses.

And sometimes they slow to a crawl. Ah, this could be a possible lead. Let's have a look at the generations of Noah, starting in chapter 6.

[5 : 22] We get a man who walks with the Lord. Maybe this is our guy. God uses him to restart humanity. Surely, this is the man God will use to defeat sin and death.

But alas, no. Noah has his own fall and dies. And we keep looking. The search continues, starting with his sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

But Noah's final words are pretty interesting. Because Ham is also caught up in sin when Noah was. As such, Noah pronounces this judgment on him.

Or more specifically, his son Canaan. In chapter 9, verses 25 to 28. Which read. And he said, After the flood, Noah lived 350 years.

All the days of Noah were 950 years. And he died. Noah humbles Ham through Canaan to be the servant of his brother.

[6 : 45] He blesses Japheth and he exalts Shem over them both. And from these brothers, we now have an expectation about their futures. One of exaltation and one of service.

But then we get to chapters 10 and 11 and we whiz through generations and generations again. And we see them grow into the nations that then spread all over the land.

And Noah's blessing makes it natural to hone in on Shem's line, which we see there in the grave. And the quest continues. And now today, in chapter 11, verse 27, we get to the generations of Terah.

Now, like Noah, Terah also has three sons. Abram, Nahor, and Haran. And once again, we slow down. Surely, this means we have a potential lead.

We have a candidate. But this family has so many problems. Did you notice them? Have a look. Twice it mentions that they are from Ur of the Chaldeans.

[7 : 52] These are the predecessors of the Babylonians. They're related to Babel, as in the Tower of Babel. And throughout the Old Testament, they're continually seen as the enemies of God.

Unlike their forefather, Noah, these men didn't walk righteously with the Lord. Instead, they are entrenched in pagan worship and wickedness. And if we keep looking, instead of an offspring that'll defeat death, we have a lineage that's riddled with it.

Haran dies, verse 28. Terah dies, verse 32. And tragically, in verse 30, we see Sarai is barren. Abram's line doesn't even get a chance to begin.

To highlight this tragedy, Sarai is the first woman we see in the Bible who is barren. Now, barrenness is a bitter and difficult thing for any woman to go through.

But it is made even more so if we think back to Genesis, verses 1 to 3. God's good design had the woman helping the man be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth as they subdue it together.

[9 : 05] Not to mention God's plan for defeating death is by the offspring of a woman. Here, in Genesis, to be barren was its own kind of death.

And as far as Toledots go, there won't be any these other generations of Abraham. Thanks, Simon, for the sight.

But don't worry, because look, there in verse 27, there is hope for Terah's line. You see, Haran fathered Lot.

Moving into chapters 12, we have this shell of a family of pagans made up of an old man, his son and barren daughter-in-law, and one grandson, to continue the line.

How good. But actually, Lot wasn't the one God had his sights on. Neither was Nahor. We don't even hear from him again for many chapters.

[10 : 05] But it was Abraham. This seemingly dead end, out of nowhere, God takes the initiative. The Lord, written in capital letters, is the way that we represent God's personal name, Yahweh, in English.

And we see that it is he who speaks into the hopelessness. First with an imperative, that he then backs up with promises. First he tells Abraham, go.

Go from your country, from your kindred, from your father's house. Progressively, the consequences of this simple command get harder and harder.

And Abraham is being called to leave all safety, all security that this world could offer him and go to a new land of uncertainty.

In some ways, that isn't too different from Jesus' call on us now, is it? To leave behind a world that promises security and promises safety and pleasure, in order to follow him into the unknown realm of cross-bearing.

[11 : 18] But as we'll see for Abraham, and it's true for us, the requirements of God's imperative pale in comparison to his promises. In verses 2 and 3, we see seven promises that start with Abraham and radiate outwards.

The first three all directly concern Abraham. I will make you a great nation. I will bless you. And I will make your name great.

But none of them seem feasible, do they? So far in Genesis, we've seen the rise of many great nations. But they happen over generations and generations, through the expansion of families.

And Sarai's barrenness, as we will see in coming weeks, will be a continual cloud over their head. A burden and a barrier to any possible prosperity for Abraham and his family.

Because prosperity, in the form of family and wealth, were the signs of God's blessing and favor in the Old Testament. Going back to his blessing to Adam in Genesis 1, God ties his blessing to the command of being fruitful and multiply, and subduing the creation.

[12 : 37] Any material blessing, be it gold, wealth, land, possessions, it will all ultimately just be half a blessing if there's no heir to continue the line.

And it is this sort of blessing that leads to lasting glory. When God promises to make Abram's name great, it follows on the back of the previous two promises.

And if we glance back to chapter 11, verse 4, God is promising Abram the very thing that man tried to grasp for with the Tower of Babel.

They tried to take a great name for themselves. And here, God is promising to give it to this one man. And ultimately, this great name is the beginning of the outward-looking promises.

It is a name, a reputation, and a power that will be acknowledged and marveled at by others. And so the next three promises are concerned with Abram's influence on those around him.

[13 : 42] Overall, the first one, Abram will be a blessing. Through his prosperity and God's blessing on him, he will be a blessing to others. But this isn't like the Midas touch.

If anyone knows the Greek mythology, King Midas was a king where anything and everything he touched turned to gold. But unlike him, not everyone Abram comes in contact with will be blessed.

See, the next two promises show how Abram's influence will work on others. It will depend on how they respond to him. Those who bless him, God will bless.

But those who dishonor him, God will curse. God is making his claim upon Abram. And all people around him will be liable for how they treat him.

And as we see the promises expand out from Abram to those around him, we see that in Abram, all the families of the earth will be blessed.

[14 : 49] Now, that's not to say that every single individual family ever, or to say that the blessing will come irrespective of their reaction to Abram, as we've already seen.

But Abram's influence won't be confined to his family, or even just the surrounding tribes and clans. His influence and his blessing will touch and bless people from every tribe, nation, and tongue.

And this is also the phrase that we read earlier in Galatians 3, right? In you shall the nations be blessed. God promises, yeah, God's promises have built up to this one.

This is the one that Paul quotes as the gospel preached to Abram. I mean, and isn't it good news? God, in his kindness and in his generosity, is lavishing these promises upon an undeserving and unlikely man that are really just out of this world.

A great nation out of a barren old couple, right? Blessing when they're going into a foreign land. And not only are these promises out of this world, but they encompass the whole world.

[16 : 09] And so just think of it. Oh, to be Abram. To look to the promises God made me. Or to be one of his offspring, part of that great nation. To know that God would bless our family, right?

And that every other person would have to look to my family for the blessing from God. In his mercy, God has taken this sinful man and promised him such greatness.

But notice that even when the promise encompasses the whole world, who is it that receives the promise? It isn't the whole world.

It's Abram. His family will stand on the sure foundation of a promise from the Lord's mouth. They can respond to God saying, you said they can call upon his name and what he promised them.

Meanwhile, even when the nations desire the blessing promised to Abram, the best they can do is, you told Abram, right?

[17 : 15] And looking around here this morning at all the nations we have gathered here, unless you happen to be a Jew or know that your family goes back to Abram, are we just here on the off chance that God might give us some of the scraps while Abram's family gets the full meal?

I mean, the promise was to Abram. Is the good news that was preached to Abram really the good news that was preached to us?

Is it a good news that we can take hold of for ourselves? Well, we'll continue to ask this question, but for now let's see that as God's command honed in from Abram's country to his family, God's phenomenal promises start with Abram, and extend out to the whole world.

And as simple as God's command, go, that simple was Abram's response there in verse 4. So Abram went, as the Lord told him.

We're told Abram leaves Haran at 75 years old with a barren wife and a nephew. He took all his possessions that they'd acquired and all the people they'd acquired and leaves behind his father's land to do as the Lord had commanded him.

[18 : 39] Now, you'd think upon getting to the land, he's done it, right? And now everything should fall into place. You know, time to get the checklist out. Okay. Number one, a great nation.

No, sadly not. Not even a medium or mediocre nation, right? Instead, we are just faced with more problems.

The land God takes him to is the land of Canaan, and unsurprisingly, it's full of Canaanites. But this isn't some uninhabited paradise oasis ready for the plucking.

It's full of other pagans, and not just any pagans, because remember, there's an awkward family history between them. Here we have one lone descendant of Shem surrounded by a multitude of descendants of Canaan.

Readers of Genesis, like us, are still waiting to see what is going to happen about that blessing and that curse that Noah bestowed upon his sons. Because right now, it looks like the odds aren't in Abram's favor.

[19 : 51] But instead of action, instead of conquest or exaltation and submission, God speaks again. Well, actually, in verse 7, he appears for the first time.

Do you notice that? Then the Lord appeared to Abram. This is the first time the Lord has appeared to anyone. And this sets up a major theme of sight that will really pop up in the next few weeks.

But to focus on God's words, he makes another promise to Abram. To your offspring, I will give this land. So here we have a development in God's plan and promises.

Firstly, he intends for Abram's line to continue, for him to have a child of his own. The great nation, the blessing and the great name will come about and continue by this child.

Secondly, God's plans aren't just for Abram. He told Abram to go to the land he would show him, but it's to the offspring that the land will be given.

[20 : 56] And all God's promises will have their fruition. And so we see in verses 6, 8, and 9, Abram just continues to move around, pitching his tent.

Shechem, Bethel, towards the Negev. There's no settling down for Abram like there was for his father, Terah. But there were promises. And in response to God's promise, we see Abram's faith and patience.

Against all odds, his age, his wife's barrenness, and being nomads in a foreign country, surrounded by enemies, Abram has faith.

That is, he trusts God. While he never builds a house for himself, he does build an altar to the Lord and calls upon his name.

Now, we've seen that phrase before in Genesis. Remember back to the start of the great search. The right response to God's promises are to obey him and to call upon his name.

[22 : 00] See, he's the one who will bring them about. Abram doesn't buy, force, steal, or capture what God has promised him. Instead, he merely calls upon the name of the Lord to give what he promised to give.

This is the plan that we will see God bring about over the decades of Abram's life and over the centuries of Israel's history. See, to Israel, God did eventually give the land and they did subdue the Canaanites.

But what Abram has here, right now in Genesis 12, is not a nation. It's not a blessing and it's not a great name. What he has here is a promise.

But it is a promise of momentous news. One that finds its climax in the overwhelming statement, in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

But this takes us back to our first question. Was the gospel preached to Abraham the same as the one preached to us? Well, let's flick back to Galatians 3 and see what Paul has to say.

[23 : 19] See, and if we go to verse 16, we see a further development in understanding the promises. Now, the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring.

It does not say, and to offsprings, referring to many, but referring to one, and to your offspring, who is Christ. When God was developing his plan through Abram's offspring, the one he had in mind was Jesus, who became the Christ.

The gospel preached to Abraham was not made up of empty words, but it was fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus, the true offspring of Abraham, received and brought about the fulfillment of God's promises.

With Jesus' death and resurrection, he defeated sin and death. The great search is over, friends. The kingdom of God, the greatest nation, that first promise of God, has begun.

And God has blessed Jesus and made his name great, so that now it is the name above every name.

[24 : 35] God has exalted him and blessed him so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth. And every tongue will confess that mighty gospel, Jesus Christ is Lord.

This is the gospel that has gone and continues to go all over the world to bless people of every tribe and nation and tongue.

But just as the blessing came to the nations by their response to Abram, like we saw in promises five and six, so it still flows depending on our response to his true offspring.

Will we bless or dishonor Abram and his offspring? Will we submit to Jesus as the risen king and trust that his death dealt with sin and death?

And, as it says in Galatians 3, verse 9, which, why I closed my Bible, I don't know. We should really keep it open at Galatians. In Galatians 3, verse 9, so then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

[25 : 51] So actually, it is by trusting that we are blessed as Abraham is. Or, will we scorn his name and face God's curse?

When we preach the gospel of Jesus is Lord, we are proclaiming the fulfillment of God's promises to Abram. When Abram received the gospel, it was just a seed.

It was the true gospel, but just as an acorn, just as the acorn becomes the mighty oak that God intends for it, the gospel starts off as a seed and we've now seen it come, seen it grow and come to fruition.

See, Abram received the true gospel, the gospel of Christ, but in God's wisdom, he revealed only in part what we've now received in full.

And by having faith like Abram in the true son of Abraham, we become the sons of Abraham. Let me read chapter 3, verse 7.

[26 : 58] Now then, know then, sorry, know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. We don't need to approach God asking for the scraps of Abraham, but by faith we are offered the full meal as his sons who are in his true son.

And so God has worked throughout history to bring about the fulfillment of his unbreakable promises. Let's pray. loving Father, we thank you and praise you that you are a God who speaks and for whom nothing is hopeless or impossible.

We praise you that through this man you made such great promises and that though he didn't deserve them, you had mercy and kindness on him to promise him such great things.

We praise you most of all and thank you for the Lord Jesus that you didn't leave your promises hanging, but that you are faithful to fulfill them. And we ask that you would help us to hold on to him to trust in his death and resurrection until his kingdom is finally fulfilled and here.

Amen.