

Genesis 12–25: The Gospel according to Abraham

The importance of Abraham as a historical figure is highlighted by the fact that three major world religions (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) all see themselves as children of Abraham. Abraham is described in Hebrews 11 as a hero of the faith yet in Genesis 12–25 we see a deeply flawed character that engages in some distinctly unethical behavior. The life of Abraham teaches us that the Bible is not primarily a book of morals but a book of gospel. It is the record of God's intervening grace in the lives of people who did not deserve it, who did not seek it, who often resisted it, and who even failed to appreciate it after they had received it.

Each week we will focus upon a different story in the life of Abraham with particular attention given to how it points us to Jesus and the gospel. The culture and worldview of the Ancient Near East will also be emphasized to help us better understand the text and its relevance to us today.

Week 1. Gen 11:27-33

3 ways of looking at a text:

- Theocentric – God centered
- Anthropocentric – Man centered
- Christocentric – Christ centered
 - Luke 24:13-27
 - 2 Cor 1:20
 - John 8:56
 - We have to interpret the OT in light of the NT and the gospel – Scripture provides a unified revelation and the thematic unity is found in Christ

Context of Genesis 3-11. The fall and the subsequent consequences. Gen 4-11 paints a picture of life lived outside the garden away from the presence of God.

The important thing to note as we begin is that the life of Abraham and the other patriarchs is to be read as solution to the problem of Gen 3.

- Genealogies – 10th name carries significance (10 is the number of completeness, e.g., 10 plagues, 10 commandments, etc). Noah is 10th in line from Adam & Abraham was the 10th patriarch in the line of Shem. This highlights that something important is about to happen.

Gen 11:27-33 set the scene for what is to follow. Here we see the 3 main characters – Abraham, Sarah and Lot.

27 Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. 28 Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his kindred, in Ur of the Chaldeans. 29 And Abram and Nahor took wives. The name of Abram's

wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah.

- Toledot formula - "these are the generations of ..." This formula functions as title for a new unit (there are 10 of these formulas in Genesis). This section is the beginning of Patriarchal history that provides an answer to the problems of Gen 3.
- Names provide insight into religious world of Ancient Near East (ANE)
 - Terah – yareah = moon, yarah = lunar month (Ugarit)
 - Sarai – sarratu = Queen (Akkadian) – female partner of the moon god Sin
 - Milcah = daughter of moon god Sin
 - Laban (Milcah's grandson) (Gen 24) = white

Take home point is that Abraham's family and ancestors were moon worshippers. This was the prevailing culture in that part of the ANE

Building on this...

31 Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan, but when they came to Haran, they settled there. 32 The days of Terah were 205 years, and Terah died in Haran.

Here we see Abraham and his family leaving Ur headed for Canaan but they stop in Haran. There is abundant archaeological evidence that Ur and Haran were thriving centers of moon worship.

Further support can be found in Joshua 24:2. *"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.'"*

So the background to the story of Abraham is one of:

- 1) idolatry and pagan worship
- 2) Sarah's barrenness - *30 Now Sarai was barren; she had no child.*

Broader context to the theme of barrenness is the promised seed. Gen 3:15 is known as the protoevangelion (first presentation of the gospel). God promises that one (the seed) would come who would do battle with the serpent. This is why Luke's genealogy goes all the way back to Adam - to show that Christ is the promised seed. God is going to preserve a godly line from which the promised seed would come

But here in Gen 11, the question is raised: how can the godly line continue when the chosen family is worshipping other gods and Sarah cannot have children?

Together these two factors present a picture of hopelessness. There is a threat to the promise of Gen 3:15 and whenever we see a threat we can expect God to act, which is exactly what he does through the life of Abraham.