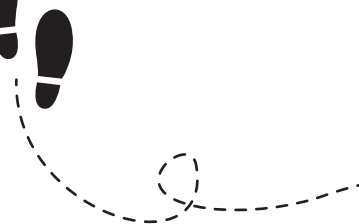


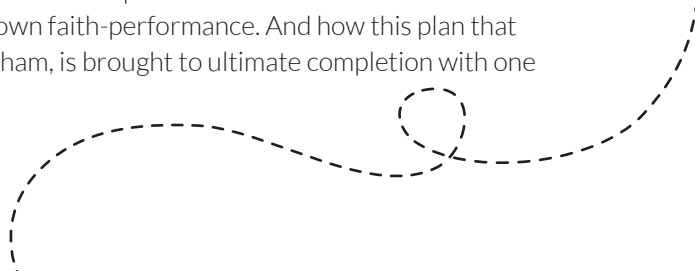
THE JOURNEY OF FAITH!



Welcome to Term 2 of Growth Groups! Last term, we looked at *The Course of Your Life* and discovered that our lives ought to orbit around God's plans and purposes for the world centered on Christ. This term, we're going back to the beginning of that plan to look at Genesis 12-25. This section of the Bible documents how God plans to redeem the world by making grand promises to one man, Abraham, and the journey of faith that follows from that encounter. Like any journey, it has its twists and turns and the hero is far from perfect.

Indeed, Abraham's journey highlights the fact that the real hero of the story is God. Abraham's role is to trust God and to go along for the journey. It is his faith that is the remarkable thing about his life, even though it is an imperfect faith. Nevertheless Abraham's faith is used as an example in the rest of the Bible and we will learn much about the nature of faith through Abraham's story.

We hope that by going on this journey of faith with Abraham, we'll understand better how our faith is dependent on God's faithfulness to his own promises, not on our own faith-performance. And how this plan that begins with one man, Abraham, is brought to ultimate completion with one man, Jesus Christ.



Study 1

THE PROMISE TO FIX THE WORLD!

Genesis 11:27-12:9

Bible Talk Discussion






What insights or observations from Sunday's talk did you find helpful, interesting or confusing? Note down any questions and see if you can answer them along the way.

Growth Group Discussion

The book of Genesis, is a story about beginnings, journeys and promises. As we begin this journey with Abraham (or Abram, as he is called at first), we need to realise that his story follows a series of episodes that finish on disastrous notes.

Look at the picture opposite at some of the events of Genesis 1-11. Then break into small groups and look at a few of those episodes each. Note down any instances of blessings, judgements or curses.



Episode	Notes of blessing, judgement or curse
 <p>Creation Gen 1:26-31</p>	
 <p>Fall Gen 3:22-24</p>	
 <p>Cain & Abel Gen 4:8-12</p>	
 <p>Noah Gen 6:5-8 Gen 8:20-9:1</p>	
 <p>Tower of Babel Gen 11:4-9</p>	

Meet the Family

The backdrop of Genesis 1-11 shows a world in peril because of sin and judgement. But Genesis 11 introduces a new family that would bring hope into our broken and despairing world.

Read Genesis 11:27-32

1. Where does Terah intend to take his family and where do they end up instead?

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2. Who is Abram? Do we learn of anything remarkable or special about him at all?

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3. What problem is foreshadowed in Genesis 11:30?

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If there is time, read the page opposite that gives a bit more background to Abram and the times he lives in. The bottom line is that there is nothing special about Abram. No royal family line, no special powers or special religious standing with God.

Abraham and His World

Abram (or Abraham) is undoubtedly one of the most important characters in the Bible, not least of all because of the promises made to him in Genesis 12:1-3. These promises shape the course of the Bible's plotline. But what do we know of Abraham's background?

Abram's family left Ur of the Chaldeans and became pastoral nomads, keeping their flocks and moving from place to place. Little more is said about their background, probably because there was very little of note. No royal lineage, no special religious vocation and no notable wisdom or skill to distinguish Abram. In fact, Abram's family were polytheists and worshipped pagan gods. As Joshua records,

"This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your ancestors, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods. (Joshua 24:2)

Furthermore, Sarai's barrenness in Genesis 11:30 spelt disaster for a family in the ancient world. This is further amplified by the fact that Abraham chooses to leave his family, giving up any possibility of an inheritance. Yet in spite of this God chooses to use Abram as a show of his sovereign grace. It is not based on anything Abraham had done. Yet Abraham's decision to obey God meant

leaving his family and the gods they worshipped in order to follow the call of God. It is this faith that makes him the father of all those who have faith (Romans 4:16).



The Great Promises

Read Genesis 12:1-9

Take a look at the promises below and circle or highlight repeated words and ideas.

The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

*"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you;
I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*

4. How would you summarise what God is promising to Abram here?

These few verses set the tone for the rest of the Old Testament as we see the emergence of the nation of Israel, their struggle to take hold of the land and be a blessing to the world. Thus, they are of massive significance in the Bible's storyline.

We will keep coming back to these promises as we journey through Genesis. When you see these symbols (land, people, blessing), it'll serve as a reminder of the promises given to Abram.



5. Put yourself in Abram's shoes for a moment. Having been asked to leave his family and his home, how do you think he would feel about his prospects?

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6. Can you think of a situation when obeying God meant doing something drastic in the eyes of the world?

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Take a look at the map over the page, showing Abram's travels.



7. When Abram travels to the land that is promised (in v6), what does he see? Is it a straightforward acquisition of the land?

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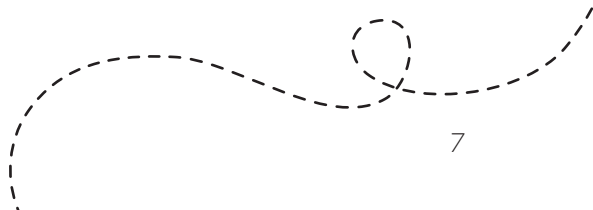
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8. What does God reiterate to him in v6?

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THE JOURNEY OF ABRAHAM

There are many hints that link this story and the promises to the earlier episodes in Genesis.

9. How do the promises relate to the backdrop of Genesis 1-11

- a. In terms of blessing?
- b. In terms of curses?
- c. In terms of greatness?

As we mentioned earlier, this is simply the beginning of God’s great redemption plan for the world. Though humanity is intent on ‘making a name for themselves’ and is judged for their rebellion, God is promising to bring back the original blessing through Abram and his offspring. It must have seemed unlikely to Abram and yet the Bible records his simple, unquestioning obedience.



Yet the journey is not without threats and dangers. We’ve seen already that the land is occupied by other people groups. Abram is old and Sarai is barren. There is a famine that forces Abram to Egypt where Abram passes off his wife as his sister to protect his own skin. Sarai is taken to join Pharaoh’s harem putting the promise for offspring at risk. Yet it is clear that God is the one who is watching over his promises. God saves Abram and Sarai from the clutches of Pharaoh. As we follow Abram’s journey, we’ll see this DANGER sign every time there is a threat to the promises and how God deals with those threats.

At Journey’s End



We will continue to follow Abram’s journey throughout this series, but looking into the distance, we will see that the journey finds its completion far into the future. Indeed, the New Testament picks up on Abram as an example

of faith and the promises made to him are related to redemption in Christ. The book of Galatians relates one of those promises to the salvation of the gentiles. Jesus comes not only for the nation of Israel but the nations of the world. Note that Abram is later renamed Abraham by God.

Read Galatians 3:8

Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. 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." So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

10. In what way are the promises to Abraham 'the gospel preached beforehand'?

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11. How is God's blessing realized?

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God's Worldwide Redemption Plan

As we've seen in this passage, Abram's journey in receiving these great promises are the start of God's redemption plan. The entire world is cast into darkness and judgement because of humanity's rebellion, which we saw in chapters 1-11. And these promises to Abram are the beginning of the quest to bring redemption to the whole world.

12. What would you say to someone who asks whether God cares about the state of our world?

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13. We've seen that our faith ultimately depends on God's promises, not on us. How does this help us in the midst of our own flaws, failings and circumstances?

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Pray

In light of the worldwide nature of God's salvation plan, pray for the world to know salvation by faith in Christ. Here's a few things to pray for:

- Tribes and people groups who are yet to hear the good news (6738 groups according to the Joshua project)
- Countries that outlaw or restrict Christianity and gospel work (e.g. North Korea, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan and others)
- Countries who are moving away from their Christian heritage and marginalizing Christians (many parts of Europe, as well as in Australia, to an extent!)
- Also, pray for us as a church and for our role in God's redemption mission here on the Northside of Brisbane.

Pray that God would work in us through this series to grow in our trust in God's promises.