

Sunday Update
28th February 2021

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-17

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. 2 Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.' 3 Abram fell face down, and God said to him, 4 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: you will be the father of many nations. 5 No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. 7 I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

15 God also said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. 16 I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.' 17 Abraham fell face down; he laughed and said to himself, 'Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?'

What's in a name? I remember, years ago, finding the pages at the back of my dictionary which listed most of the common forenames given to people and giving me the derivation of these names. I was really quite taken with that; these pages led to at least a couple of all-age talks in church, leading to the names and titles given to Jesus and what these names and titles mean. If you have children, how did you decide on their names? For many people, there are family traditions to follow, naming children after their grandfathers or grandmothers, or keeping names that have been used for generations. Other people think they will wait for a little while before naming their children to try to see what qualities their young children have and letting their names reflect these qualities! Some of you may have named your children after your favourite pop-star or footballer – we can maybe tell! As for your name, do you live up to your name? Or in some cases, do you live down to it?

Names for us are more or less tags by which we talk to one another. We don't look at what names mean and by and large, we don't give them to our children because we hope they will be that kind of person. Names in the Bible, on the other hand, do exactly that; they tell us something about the person, either because of a promise that God has, or an aspiration of what this person will become. In the story of Abraham today, both he and his wife go through a name-change because God has a new way of describing His plan for this rather elderly couple. Abram ("exalted father") becomes the more familiar Abraham ("father of many") and Sarai becomes Sarah (though both seem to mean "Princess"). For Abraham, that name-change reflects a redefined promise from God; Sarah stands alongside her husband in these promises, together being heirs of that promise.

God's promise to Abraham is not entirely new but is more focussed than it was before. We are back in the language of covenant; God says, *"this is my covenant with you: you will be the father of many nations."* (verse 4) and God goes on to reinforce this promise again when He says, *"I have made you the father of many nations... I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you."* (verses 5, 6) Abraham's new name ("the father of many nations") reflects this new promise, that Abraham will be the father of nations and of kings. There is a real sense of privilege here for Abraham, and Sarah stands alongside him as the mother of nations and kings. Abraham was 99 years old when God made this promise to him, Sarah 10 years younger. They laughed because it seemed so unlikely, yet it was also such an honour and privilege.

There was a problem. Being a father of many nations means being a father! Abraham and Sarah had no children at the point when this promise was made. Abraham did have a son, Ishmael, but Ishmael's mother was one of Sarah's servants, Hagar. Would Ishmael be the son of the promise? Would he be the one through whom this promise will begin to be fulfilled? Abraham asked God that question and the answer came back clearly, that Ishmael would be blessed, but he was not the son of the promise. The son of the promise would be a child born to Abraham and Sarah together; he will be Isaac, and he will be the one to inherit this promise. Through Isaac, Abraham would become the father of many nations. Within three generations, Abraham's family had grown from one son to a family of 70 and then after 400 years in Egypt a people "exceedingly numerous". Today, there are three of the world's great faiths that trace their origin back to Abraham: the Jews claim him as their father, Islam will trace its roots back to Abraham through Ishmael, and for Christians Abraham is the father of our faith. God's promise has come true in ways that Abraham could never have seen.

God makes promises to us. Our faith is based on God's promises. Yet, we find this such a hard idea to understand or accept. Christian faith is not first and foremost a code of living, or a set of rules for attending services in church, but Christian faith is believing God. *"I will be with you always..."; "I will not leave you helpless..." "Your sins are forgiven!"* These are three promises that Jesus made to His followers, promises that still stand for us. God's promises are the foundation of the gospel, and faith is the key to opening these promises for us. We are challenged to believe these promises, and that faith becomes the way by which we enrich our lives from the promises that God makes. In Romans chapter 4, verses 13-25 Paul reflects on the life of Abraham and how his life impacts on ours. In verse 16 he says *"the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace..."*

The Christian gospel is simple. God makes promises to us; we believe these promises; God saves by His grace; we come to enjoy that salvation by faith. There is no more to it than that! God does all of the work and we receive all of the benefits and blessings. Don't add any conditions or qualifications. In two and a half lines, I have described the gospel, the good news that Jesus came to bring to the world. The gospel is not something for us to do, or to achieve, but something to receive and believe. Yet there is something about this gospel that we find hard to accept. Maybe we think it is too simple, or too good to be true; "there must be more to it than this!" All we are asked to do is believe the promises; faith is the key to our salvation – *"the promise comes by faith"* – and God will give us everything that He has promised.

The best promise to Abraham comes right at the beginning of this chapter in the story. *"I am God Almighty"*. God is the all-powerful one, the mighty God! This mighty God promises to be Abraham's God and ours! If nothing else, God the mighty One, is able to keep His promises; He won't let us down, nor forget us, but will always be able to save us and keep His promises. Not even a global pandemic will change that! Jesus is with us always; He does not leave us helpless; He does forgive our sins. There are other challenges that we face about the way in which we live and these come in response to this gospel, but the promises are ours and the salvation is ours simply for faith, for trusting God and believing His promises. What's not to like about that?

Prayer: Father, we thank You for Your promises to Abraham, that he would be the father of many nations with Sarah by his side; we thank you for the promises that you make to us, to be with us always, to strengthen and help us, to forgive us our sins; as Abraham believed Your promises, so help us to believe; make faith the foundation of our lives; let faith be the key for us to enjoy the blessings of salvation; forgive us when pride stops us from faith. Give us courage to share that faith with others.

*Day by day, dear Lord of you
Three things I pray:
To see you more clearly,
To love you more dearly,
To follow you more nearly,
Day by day.*

Please take time during the week to pray for the people referred to in these topics:

- For people who find it hard to trust, their trust dented by people who have let them down; help them discover that You are worthy of trust, that You keep Your promises and that You will never let them down, no matter what!
- For people who are struggling with rejection, that they are not loved, or are forgotten by family, or friends, or the world; they consider themselves forgotten by God; help them to see, even in bleak times, that Your love goes on and on and that You are able to help them.
- For people who have contracted Covid and are in hospital, that they make a good recovery; those NHS staff who are caring for them, under pressure by the numbers of people in hospital and trying to manage the care they provide.
- For people who mourn because a loved one has died; help them to find comfort and peace.
- For the roll-out of the vaccine to be efficient and effective, reaching the people who need it most; for those waiting for the letter; for the vaccine to make people safe, as promised.
- For people who are isolated again by lockdown, spending time on their own again and feeling lonely; for people in care homes, again cut off from family and friends, and the staff who care for them.
- For schools: pupils at home and some in schools; for families trying to manage their children and helping them to take part in learning however it is delivered; for teachers working in new ways and finding that very demanding.
- For businesses that are shut: the pubs and hotels, hairdressers, and others; for those who own these businesses and it is their livelihood; for those who work and are again on furlough; for the gaps left in the social interaction of many people, adding to their sense of isolation.
- For Churches, with buildings again closed; help them to care for all of their people; may the technology be a lifeline for lots of people; help churches across Scotland to be a light in their community and share the light of Jesus with others.
- For people we know...
- This week, take time to think about these words and pray them into your own heart: *“The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)*

Here are some links to hymns you might know and love.

Blessed Assurance	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuyf1YQvcwY
The God of Abraham praise	The God of Abraham Praise - YouTube
To be in your presence	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=typ7cueKdT4
There is a redeemer	There Is A Redeemer - Keith Green - YouTube
By faith we see the hand of God	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXB8ihpUpE

Remember the prayer e-mail line at prayerigpc@gmail.com

Some other resources:

- Each Sunday at 10.30am, we will have a short time together using Zoom; a link has been sent out in the e-mail with this update which should enable you to join in.

- This reflection is available on our own church website under the “sermons” tab and there is an archive of sermon material there for you to read and links to the video reflections – www.jgpc.org.uk
- If you have a smartphone, a tablet or an i-pad, the Bible2020 app will give you a short bible reading each day (from the Scottish Bible Society)
- Scripture Union daily bible readings can be found at <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive>
- The Church of Scotland website has prayers and reflections from the Moderator and details of lots of on-line streamed church services - <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>
- Claremont Church in East Kilbride are making services available over a phone line: here are the contact details which you can share with people who are not on line: **Sunday Services @ 10:30 - same details every week** 020 3937 2973; PIN: 352 598 857#

DAILY BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS - New issues of “**Word For Today**” and “**Word For You Today**” Booklets for February, March and April are now available. Please contact Michael Merriman who will be delighted to arrange copies. Other Bible Study materials are also available with Ian Aitken. **Let the Bible feed you.**

Abram to Abraham

These resources are designed to help you explore the Bible as a family together at home while we can't go to church. Be as creative as you want to be and enjoy spending time with each other and with God.

Prepare yourself...

Holy God, we come from our busy lives.
We often forget that you walk with us.
As we gather now, help us to be more
aware of who you are.

Thank you for caring about our every
moment.

Help us to trust you, to follow you and to
rely on you every day.

Amen.



Question...

What good news have you heard this
week?

Did you hear any bad news?

Challenge...

Write the letters A-Z on a piece of
paper. See if you can write a girls name
and a boys name for every letter of the
alphabet!



Read the Bible...

Today's verses are found in Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16. You can read them in a Bible or find them [here](#).

You could try reading the verses in different versions to see if it adds to your understanding of the passage.

Talk together...



- People usually get given their names by their parents, sometimes by grandparents or siblings. Sometimes they are named after someone else. What do you know about your name? Do you know what it means? Do you know anyone else with the same name as you?
- If you could change your name, what would you change it to and why?
- In today's story God changes Abraham and Sarah's names. Can you think of anyone else in the Bible who's name changed?
- Abraham had first been given the promise of a child and descendants when he was 75, why do you think God was waiting so long to fulfil his promise?
- Think about people God chose to follow him and be leaders, were they special or important before God chose them? Why do you think God chooses ordinary people?
- I wonder what the story of Abraham and Sarah teach us about being followers of God?
- God calls all of us to care for each other and the world he's given us, what could you do this week to make a positive difference?

Play together...

Name hangman: Play a game of hangman but use names of people in your family, friends, Bible characters.

Make something...

Get creative and use whatever art and craft materials you have to make a poster of your name. Maybe you want to include what your name means or a picture of who you're named after (if you are named after someone!).
God knows your name, he knows everything about you and you are special to Him. Look up Psalm 139:13-18 and spend some time talking to God, thanking him for knowing all about you and loving you no matter what.

Pray together...

*God of strength and love, we are sorry when we worry so much about what others think of us. Help us to be brave and to help each other through challenging moments. We bring to you those who have been rejected for their faith, for being different, for telling the truth, for standing up for those who are vulnerable. Give them, and us, the courage to do the right thing.
Amen.*

Do something...

Watch this video of the marshmallow challenge:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QX_oy9614HQ
How well do you think you would do? How long do you think you could wait before eating it?
Challenge: set a timer for how long you think you can go then do the challenge! How do you think it felt for Abraham and Sarah to wait for God's promises to be fulfilled?

Praise together...



[Psalm 139](#) (You have searched me)

[Who you say I am](#)

[Everybody's welcome](#)

