

St. Nicholas Orthodox Church - Monongahela, Pa.
Bible Study – Old Testament Heroes of Faith
Session 1 – Abraham

O Master who loves mankind, illuminate our hearts with the pure light of Your divine knowledge and open the eyes of our mind to understand the teachings of Your Gospel. Instill in us also the fear of Your blessed commandments, that we may overcome all carnal desires, entering upon a spiritual life and understanding and doing all things to please You. For You are the enlightenment of our souls and bodies, O Christ God, and to You we give glory, together with Your eternal Father and You all-holy, gracious, and life-giving Spirit, now and ever and forever. Amen.

I. INTRODUCTION TO THIS SERIES

The Holy Bible is God’s word, through it He speaks directly to us. Its pages are full of His teachings on how we are to live our lives and how to be in a loving relationship with Him. The problem, (which goes without saying), is that His instructions are sometimes “easier said than done”. How does a person live out His instructions? The challenges that people faced 2,000 or even 100 years ago are much different from today’s circumstances. We need practical, real examples to show us how to put His words into action. For this reason God raises up holy men and women in every culture and generation to show us how it can be done. As the Bible says:

*Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you,
consider the outcome of their lives and imitate their faith. (Hebrews 13:7)*

This study will examine the lives of leaders in the Old Testament who spoke the word of God to us and are examples of how to put His words into action. Despite the fact that thousands of years separate us from them there is much we can learn from the example of their lives.

II. ABRAHAM: BACKGROUND

The story of Abraham in Genesis 12 is an abrupt break from the preceding chapters. Up till now the book was preoccupied with global issues: God made the world very good but violence and evil take over. God’s responses are mostly to punish: a flood... a breakdown in language... There seems to be no hope of redeeming His beautiful creation. But with the story of Abraham, God focuses His attention on one single person...and begins the redemption of His creation.

Abram (as he was first known) was from the city Ur of the Chaldeans: a wealthy, populated, sophisticated pagan city in southern Mesopotamia (about 220 miles southeast of Baghdad). From Joshua 24:2 we know that his father and grandfathers were pagan worshippers. Abraham was a wealthy man with many servants and owned large herds.

III. THE CALL OF ABRAHAM

1. What command and promise does God give to Abram in Genesis 12:1-4?
2. What would have been difficult for Abram? What would have been attractive?
3. “*Talk is cheap*” and “*actions reveal character*”. How is Abram a model of faith for us?
4. What does Abram do when he arrives in this land of Canaan?
5. When Abram comes to this promised land, he finds a famine (see 12:10). How might he feel about God’s promise to him?

For reflection: Which of God’s promises to me “don’t make sense”?

6. What does Abram fear in 15:1-3 and 15:8?
7. Abram continues to question God despite God repeating His promise to him in 12:2-3 & 13:14-17..... but then..... 15:6.

For reflection: Where in my life do I need to be sure and certain of God’s promises?

From the Fathers: “The right thing to do is to believe God before He pays up anything, because just as He cannot possibly lie, so He cannot deceive. For He is God. That is how our ancestors believed Him. That’s how Abraham believed Him. There is a faith for you that really deserves to be admired and made widely known. Abraham received nothing from Him, and he believed His promise. We do not yet believe Him, though we have already received so much. Was Abraham ever in a position to say to Him: ‘I will believe you, because You promised me that and paid up?’ No, he believed from the very first command given, without having received anything else at all. ‘*Go out from your country,*’ he was told ‘*and from your kindred, and go into a country which I will give you.*’ And he believed immediately, and God did not give him that country but kept it for his descendants.”

IV. THE SIGN OF THE COVENANT – Chapter 17

A. What is the “sign” of God’s covenant with Abraham?

Why do you think God chose this as a symbol?

B. What is Abraham’s part of the covenant? God’s part?

C. What is the “sign” of the new covenant God established through Jesus?

D. Under God’s new covenant, circumcision is no longer required. But what is required?

See Galatians 5:6 (p. 1595)

For reflection: How can we keep our faith active as an inward expression of love rather than only an external religion

E. What is the ritual to mark a person as included in this new covenant?

See Colossians 2:11-12 (p. 1620)

F. What does it mean to have your heart circumcised?

G. Why do you think God changed His name from Abram to Abraham?

V. ABRAHAM IS TESTED – Chapter 22

A. After Abraham & Sarah waited years for God to fulfill His promise, a son Isaac is born.
See chapter 21:1-5

B. What does God command Abraham to do in 22:1-2?

C. In v. 2, what is God emphasizing as He describes Abraham’s relationship with Isaac?

D. How does Abraham react?

E. Why do you think he so readily obeyed?

F. For whose benefit does God wait to see how far Abraham will go? His own? Abraham's? Isaac's? The readers?

G. How is this story a preview of Jesus?

How is He like the lamb substitute?

H. What promise does God hold for me if I obey Him? a. happiness b. His presence c. eternal life d. a family e. success

I. I see from the Abraham and Isaac's experience that: a. God is to be taken seriously b. obedience is difficult c. God requires all I have d. God is faithful

For reflection: Ho can we say "yes" to God when everything else inside of us says "no"?

From the Fathers: That Isaac carries on himself the wood for the burnt offering is a figure (symbol), because Christ also Himself carried His own cross, and yet to carry the wood for the burnt offering is the duty of a priest. He therefore becomes victim and priest.

But these things are written on account of you, because you too indeed have believed in Gd. But unless you fulfill "*the works of faith*" (2 Thessalonians 1:11), unless you are obedient to all the commands, even the more difficult ones, unless you offer sacrifice and show that you place neither father nor mother nor sons before God, you will now know that you fear God.

Origin – 3rd century A.D.
Homilies on Genesis 8

