

Gleaners Bible Studies B 9

THE FOUNDATIONS OF A CHOSEN RACE

Study 1

Abram – Faith's Call



Genesis chapter 12

The call of Abram is one of the most important events in Bible history. It is the commencement of something entirely new. The consequences of Abram's obedient response were to spread like ripples on a pond. As a direct result, a new nation was born. And in course of time the whole world would reap the benefits!

The opening chapters of Genesis gradually present to us the development of the early world. From the creation of the first man and woman, the story of the growth of population in the earth is developed until the time of the flood: **Genesis chapters 1 – 6** make it very clear that sin also multiplied and the resulting flood was God's judgment on that sin. Yet God chose Noah and his family and saved them, through the provision of the Ark. After the flood subsided the history of mankind continued, and **Genesis chapters 7 – 11** tell us all there is to be known about this period which ended with the Tower of Babel and the dispersion of the people throughout the known world. The dispersion was the result of man trying to exalt himself to heights that were not intended for him. God stepped in – the people were divided by language and scattered throughout the world.

It is worth noting here that quite a high standard of civilisation had been reached at this time. Men were certainly not primitive, living in caves under crude conditions and talking in grunts! Archaeologists, in their excavations, have discovered evidence to show the high standard of living experienced in the days of Abram. Sir Leonard Woolley, in his book 'Ur of the Chaldees', describes the type of houses that were the dwelling places of these people. They were often designed for comfort and give evidence of a society where people were affluent and lived well. So when we think of the times of Abram it is well to bear this in mind. The life of the Semites in Ur of the Chaldees, where Abram was brought up, was certainly worth living. Of course they were idolaters who worshipped their own gods, but family life was strong and the head of the family was the priest of his own household.

CALL

The call of God to Abram came in the midst of his normal everyday life. Think about his CALL. Abram became aware that he was being called to leave the way of life he had become used to. In **Acts 7: 2** we read that **"The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham"**. **Genesis 12: 1** tells us that the Lord had said to Abram, **"Get out of your country ..."** It was a new voice making new demands upon him; although Abram had no idea at that time that he was to be the FOUNDER of a nation. Yet he OBEYED the call. This is often the way God works to fulfil His plans. He calls and we must obey. Think about this carefully. **Romans 1: 5** uses the term **'OBEDIENCE TO THE FAITH'** This clearly describes Abram's response to God's call.

This intervention by God into Abram's life doubtless caused him to compare the past and the present with the uncertainties

of the future. What had he in Ur of the Chaldees? His family, his friends, his possessions and occupations, even his gods – his very roots were there! What was he promised? A land that he had never seen! (**verse 1**) A promise from God that He would bless him and make him a blessing, so that every family and nation would be blessed through him. (**verses 2 & 3**) The comparison was between what he already had and what he was being promised. In Ur there were all those things that he could see and hold and enjoy. God's promises related to unseen things. An entirely new principle of life was now being offered to Abram. FAITH was being demanded – a new principle altogether. Try to imagine yourself in Abram's situation. How would you have felt and reacted? Would you have stayed with those things that made life materially secure – the tangible things? Or would you have launched out on the promises of God? **Hebrews 11: 8** tells us that Abram **"went out not knowing where he was going."** Comparison led him to leave Ur of the Chaldees and strike out in faith – trusting God alone.

CHALLENGE

It is good to think of the CHALLENGE that God's call brings. I always like the way in which Stephen says in **Acts 7 – "the God of Glory appeared to ... Abraham."** Every value that he held dear was challenged. Was it right or good enough? Was it the best things he could find or enjoy? What about his gods? Were they real and worth worshipping? We can only feel that the call of GOD was so definite and the revelation given to Abram so bright and clear that all that he possessed seemed to lose its charm. He responded to the challenge and went out. We can pause just here and learn that God's call to US involves a challenge to our way of life. 'LET GO and LET GOD' is a great motto for true Christian obedience and dedication to Christ.

COMMITMENT

We close this lesson with the thought of Abram's commitment. **"So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken unto him."** (**verse 4**) He left all the problems and issues of the future to the God who called him. He became a true pilgrim. Notice that soon the Lord appears to him to strengthen his faith. The land would be his. (**verse 7**) Abram becomes the man of the TENT and the ALTAR. (**verses 8-9**) Read **Hebrews 11: 8-9** in this connection. He became a man wholly COMMITTED to God. We often speak of the pilgrim character of Abram's life. Again **Hebrews 11: 10** tells us that **"he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."**

The nation of Israel really began on that day. Many years were to roll by and much was to happen before Israel took her place among the nations of the world. Yet on the day when Abram stepped out in faith with God – willing to go wherever He led him – he laid the foundation stone of a chosen race, through which God was to bless every nation of the world.

We can learn this lesson above everything else. We need to OBEY God's voice. Obedience for us, as with Abram, will bring us into the pathway of God's will and blessing.

Though Abram often failed **Genesis 12: 6-20** yet he fulfilled God's plan through first of all obeying His call.

Study 2

Abram – Faith’s Choice

Read Genesis chapter 13

If we look more closely at the record of Abram’s life, it seems that he moved away from his native land in stages. **Chapter 11: 31** says that it was Terah, his father, who moved out of Ur with the family, going as far as Haran. Here Terah died. This represents the first stage and you will notice that nothing about God’s call is said here. **Chapter 12: 1** begins by telling us about God’s message to Abram and the further move out into a life of dependence upon God. Lot, his nephew, accompanies Abram and his wife on their journey that eventually brings them to Shechem (**12: 6**) then Bethel and Ai. His movements were southward towards the Negev, the southern desert tract of Judah.

Chapter 12: 10-20 tells us that because of famine, Abram went down to Egypt. This was Abram’s first great mistake, as events soon proved. God did not ask him to go to Egypt. He had promised to keep him *“in the land”*. It was a very bad testimony to Pharaoh and his court when Abram’s lie concerning Sarai was discovered. Much could have happened which would have spoilt the whole venture of faith, and put God’s whole plan at risk. God had to intervene with plagues and Abram was ignominiously deported. You will notice that Abram went right back to the place from where he went down to Egypt, (**13: 4**) and back to the place where he went wrong. At that spot his communion with God is restored and renewed.

As Christians, we can learn the lesson here that once we move out of the line of God’s will by our waywardness, we never make progress in the pathway of faith, and we certainly put ourselves in the way of danger. **Proverbs 3: 5-6** tells us, when trusting in God, not to lean towards our own understanding of things. It would have been better for Abram to trust God in the famine, than to try and escape from it! No doubt events in Egypt taught Abram a vital lesson for in **chapter 13** he seems a different man. It could well have been that events concerning Lot and his possessions were becoming more critical. A crisis was imminent. But Abram came out of it a better man. Four words serve to outline the story of Abram’s CHOICE.

1. STRIFE

Two wealthy men were travelling together. Their flocks and herds filled the land so much that there was not enough pasture for them. Each day tension rose and strife increased, until the inevitable quarrels arose. Eventually Abram spoke to his nephew about it. *“Let there be no strife”* (**13: 8**), says Abram. It is sad how often, material prosperity brings strife between people, especially families. I believe that material possessions were of secondary importance to Abram. His faith in God enabled him to view riches in the right perspective. This is illustrated in his gracious dealing with Lot, as we shall see. Remember this fact as you study Abram’s life. *“For one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses”*. (**Luke 12: 15**)

2. SCOPE

We must now notice the scope of the choice in these two men’s lives – Abram and Lot. Notice **verse 9** - *“Is not the whole land before you? ...if you take the left then I will go to the right.”* As the older man, Abram had the right to priority of choice. Lot should have been ready to give Abram this, but he did not. Before him stretched the well-watered plains of the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. (**verses 10-13**) The scope of Lot’s life and his choices, were limited by earthly, visible things. No thought of God governed his life. His choice ultimately proved to be disastrous and led to unhappy consequences for himself and

his family. Consider Lot’s choice and the results of it carefully. In contrast, the scope of Abram’s life was much wider. He stood back and waited, leaving the choice with the God in whom he trusted. It is obvious that God was becoming more and more real to him every day. So he could leave even this decision to Him. Life is always happier when God chooses our pathway.

3. SEPARATION

Abram was more committed to God after this vital choice than he had ever been before. Note how pleased God was. (**verses 14-15**) He shows Abram possibilities of his possession, such as had never entered into Lot’s wildest dreams! A vision of the land – how vast it was! God again confirmed His promise to Abram, and showed him that the land was to be his, and the nations after him. *“All the land which you see, I give to you and your descendants.”* (**verse 15**) Separation for Abram involved a vital choice. The last family ties were broken – he chose to go God’s way! Often, if we have to make this choice, it means leaving behind our friends and relatives, just as Abram did. But Abram was willing to go on with God, and therefore God was able to reveal to him the secret of His purpose. Look at **1 Corinthians 2: 9-10** in comparison.

4. SATISFACTION

This incident ends so happily for Abram. Look at **verse 17**. He is told to walk about and enjoy the land that is given to him. God really meant him to enjoy it! It was there for his possession. It has been said that God gives the very best to those who leave the CHOICE WITH HIM. How true this is! As Christians, day-by-day, in our prayer life, we can do just what Abram did. All the choices that we are asked to make – and life is made up of decisions – we can quietly commend to God. If you do this, you will be amazed how wonderfully life opens up before you. And eventually you will find great satisfaction in proving that God’s choice is the very best that life can offer. Is your life controlled by FEAR...FEVER...FRUSTRATION... or by FAITH IN GOD?

Study 3

Abram – Faith’s Course

Read Genesis 15: 1-7, 17: 1-8, 18: 16-19 and 21: 1-7

There are many incidents in Abram’s life that we must leave untouched in our studies. Not because they are unimportant – far from it! I hope that in your private reading of these chapters you will be able to enjoy them. They certainly have much to teach us! For instance, I hope you will look at **chapter 14** and read of Abram’s exploits in regard to the battle of the kings. Notice especially his answer to the King of Sodom – it shows how far he had progressed in trusting God. Then look at **chapters 18 and 19** – the story of Abram’s encounter with the Angel of the Lord, and the eventual destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. There can hardly be a scene more touching in the whole of the Bible than the picture of Abraham pleading with God for the salvation of Sodom. (**chapter 18**) It always makes me feel how little I know about pleading with God for the lives and souls of people who are not saved. Abraham was indeed the friend of God. **Chapter 18: 16-19** shows us just how close was the relationship that Abraham enjoyed with God.

We must look at the course of Abram’s life of faith in connection with the formation of the nation of Israel. Abram and Sarai had no son and yet God had promised Abram that in him and his SEED after him, all families of the earth would be blessed. (**12: 1-3**) This really forms the crux of the matter as far as the strength of Abram’s faith was concerned. With regard to the PATHWAY he trod, he very definitely learnt to

trust in the God who had called him. But when it came to the PROMISE of God, he was to find it so difficult at times to see any possibility of its fulfilment. He had to WAIT a long time for the actuality of its fulfilment. God was asking him to WATCH with Him while His WORK in his life was being developed. **Chapter 21: 5** tells us that Abraham was 100 years old when his son was born.

In this connection, I frequently say that WAITING and WATCHING while God is WORKING will always lead to WONDERING at God's great faithfulness. This was true with Abraham and it can be true with us. We can look at four main areas in relation to the COURSE of this man's life.

1. FAITH

We are beginning to find out what faith really means. **Chapter 15: 1 – 6** is interesting in providing for us a definition of Abram's trust in God. Where is the promised son and heir? God was pleased with Abram's attitude to the King of Sodom – it reflects growth in dependence upon God. But 'I have no son', says Abram. He was right! But God's answer was to show him the STARS. Not just one son, but in the future a multitude as numerous as the stars. This is the way God works – He enlarges our vision by showing us the stars – the greatest things that He has made. ABRAM BELIEVED – notice this carefully. It forms a great pivot for teaching in the New Testament. God counted Abram righteous because he believed. (**verse 6**) If you look at **Romans 4**, you will read something of what faith means with regard to salvation. The example used is Abraham, and in **verse 20** we read that he was **"STRENGTHENED in faith, giving glory to God."**

2. FAILURE

Chapter 16 is a chapter that always leaves me feeling rather sad. I like the way Abram accepted God's promise in **chapter 15: 6** and the way in which God responds by telling him just where the boundaries of the Kingdom of Israel would be. (**verse 15-21**) You would think Abram could never go back now, wouldn't you? But how wrong we can be! Abram got tired of waiting, and through a maid-servant of Sarai's, Ishmael was born. From the day he was born, unhappiness entered that home. God was displeased – Sarah was dissatisfied – Abram realised that he had done wrong, and Ishmael could not fulfil the promise. Let us learn this lesson here, that to step outside of the way of trust in God, only produces sadness and sorrow. What a pity that Abram did not wait!

3. FAITHFULNESS

Through all Abram's failure – God did not change. The course of life that he followed was guided and guarded by God's faithfulness. Eventually Abram grew to faithfulness. **Romans chapter 4** tells us that as time went on and maybe hope began to fade, that **"contrary to hope, Abraham in hope believed"**. (**verse 18**) Even in the darkest moments of despair, when tempted to give up, he held on to the faithfulness of God. How very important this is! **Chapter 17: 1-8** gives a picture of an appearance to Abram in his 99th year. Just one year to go! Yet God is there, ready to encourage and inspire, confirming His promise to His friend for the fifth time, by changing his name 'ABRAM' to 'ABRAHAM' meaning 'Father of a great multitude', and changing Sarai's name to 'Sarah' meaning 'Princess'. It is at this point too that God introduces the rite of circumcision as an outward physical sign of the nation's special relationship to God. It was a mark of ownership and a reminder of the covenant **"between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant."** (**17: 7 and 10-13**)

It does us well to remember here that progress and success in Christian experience does not depend upon our faith, but upon God's faithfulness. Look at three New Testament passages which tell us God is faithful – **1 Corinthians 1: 9; 1 Corinthians 10: 13 and 1 Thessalonians 5: 24.**

3. FULFILMENT

Chapter 21: 1 – 7 relates the climax of Abraham's course of faith. The promise of the heir is fulfilled and Isaac is born! The years of waiting were over and Abraham was now convinced that God fulfilled His promises. Notice that this was contrary to nature. God did that which was seemingly impossible. **Hebrews 11: 11-12** puts it very well. It gives Sarah's side of the covenant, and tells us something that Genesis does not. **"She judged Him faithful who had promised"** This is wonderful! Out of impossible situations God works to build His designs.

This then was the way in which the foundation of the great Nation of Israel was laid. One man dared to trust God and claim His promise. It has been truly said, and we can apply it to ourselves if we will, that it yet remains to be seen what can be done through one man or woman who will wholly trust in God!

Study 4

Abraham – Faith's Cost

Read Genesis 22

We have gone quite a long way in our studies in the life of Abraham. I hope you have found them interesting and helpful. The whole atmosphere of his life is presented to us as one of dependence upon God. He lived and walked by faith. We have studied his CALL – a challenge to him to leave all and trust God for everything. We looked at his CHOICE – his willingness to allow God's will to govern the way he is going to take. This was a choice of faith in God. Then we studied a little of the nature of his COURSE – a way of life in which he proved that the God whom he trusted was able to fulfil His promise and literally do the impossible. Let us note here that each ACT of trust brought home to Abraham the FACT that God could be trusted. Yet each FAILURE to trust only proved more clearly that God was FAITHFUL and did not FAIL. Each landmark of experience in proving God prepared the way for a greater experience of God's love and loyalty to Abraham, His friend. Consider these points carefully.

It could be, that as you read **chapter 22**, you will say, 'Why did God leave such a terrible trial until the end of Abraham's life?' 'If He was going to test his faith, why did He not do it earlier?' Let us consider what it involved for Abraham. He had waited for so many years for the fulfilment of his desires. Isaac must have filled the hearts and home of Abraham and Sarah with unspeakable joy. At last the future for them seemed bright with hope! But just as they were settling down, the blow fell. God asked for Isaac! For this is what it amounted to – and if you read **verses 1 and 2** carefully, you will realise this. To Abraham, Isaac was everything – his only son whom he loved. Now God was demanding that he should be given back as a sacrifice upon the altar. You will feel, I am sure, that this made a tremendous demand on Abraham's loyalty. It is therefore at this stage that we ask ourselves, 'What did faith COST Abraham?'

We can look at several points that show the movements in this tremendous story.

1. GOD'S REQUEST

"God tempted (tested) Abraham" (**verse 1**) It is important to understand here that God was not toying with His servant's faith. Neither was He just seeing how far Abraham would go with Him. God knew Abraham through and through. I am sure that is why this supreme test was left to the end of his life. Maybe the inexperience of his younger days would have led to failure. But now there existed a heart-to-heart closeness between God and this great man. It cost Abraham so much – in fact all that was dear to him. Humanly speaking, Abraham

would have been justified, you may feel, in arguing with God. Saying, 'But what about Your promise of my seed becoming a great nation? Have you forgotten that?' But no! Abraham knew God now! Such was his confidence in God and his faith in His power that **Hebrews 11: 19** tells us that he reckoned God was even able to raise Isaac from the dead if that was necessary! What faith! What confidence! Yes, Abraham came through this test just as God knew he would. Remember, whatever God allows in your life and whatever He asks of you, He is genuine and loving in His requests. He wants the "GOLD" of our faith to shine brighter; so at times, maybe, He brings us through the fires of bitter experience. Yet He does it because He loves us, and wants us to know Him in a deeper way.

2. ABRAHAM'S RESPONSE

"Abraham rose early..... and went to the place of which God had told him." (verse 3) Absolute obedience and complete surrender is evident here. It always thrills me to see how, without question, Abraham took Isaac and went. No questions asked; no putting off the evil hour with unnecessary delays – not very much said. Just ACTION! Obedience to the Lord is always costly, in one way or another. We mentioned in our first lesson the OBEDIENCE OF FAITH. Here it is seen to be most costly. As eventually Isaac was laid on the altar, we can be sure that ALL ABRAHAM HAD was given there to God. All the fulfilment of the past; all his hope for the future: ALL laid on the altar of sacrifice to God. Remember that this man learnt the first lesson in obedience when he left Ur. From that time onwards, his resolve was strengthened. I wonder how much you are ready to respond to God's requests and demands – what is your response?

3. ABRAHAM and ISAAC and the LAMB

"Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac, his son; and he took the fire in his hand and a knife, and the two of them went together." (verse 6) Can you imagine the deep feeling in Abraham's mind and heart as with his only son whom he loved, he went to the place of sacrifice? Only a man who knew God as well as Abraham did, could have done this. God was to him, the God of the impossible. Look carefully at the conversation between father and son as they walked together. **"Where is the LAMB?"** Isaac asks. **"God will provide for Himself the Lamb"**, responds his father. No doubt or despair in these words. Pausing here we feel that we can hear the cry of so many with regard to a way of cleansing from sin. **"Where is the Lamb?"** If you look at **John 1: 29** you will find John's answer when he saw Christ, **"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."** The Old Testament cry in the darkness was answered in the wonderful person of the Lord Jesus. Think about this!

4. ABRAHAM and HIS GOD

"There behind him was a ram caught in a thicket... Abraham... offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son." (verse 13) Abraham went all the way. His faith in God cost him everything. Yet God honoured his faith and provided a way of escape. There it is – notice **verse 14** – **"Jehovah-Jireh" – The Lord will provide.** We can say that FAITH HONOURS GOD at all costs. But we can say with equal assurance that GOD HONOURS FAITH. **Verses 15-19** give a fitting climax to a life of absolute surrender to God. This is the wonderful part about it all. Trial did not bring separation between Abraham and God – it just drew them closer together. Read **Hebrews 12: 5-12**. Isaac was given back to Abraham – back, as it were, from the dead!

Thus the foundation of the great Nation of Israel was laid in the faith and dedication of Abraham, the friend of God. As we close our study, let these words of H. Evan Hopkins challenge you:

"The Saviour is not looking for men and women who will give their spare evenings to Him – or their weekends – or their years of retirement. Rather He seeks those who will give Him first place in their lives. He looks to, as He has ever looked, not for crowds drifting aimlessly in His track, but for individual men and women whose undying allegiance will spring from their having recognised that He wants those who are prepared to follow the path of self-renunciation which He trod before them."

Questions

Study 1

Abram – Faith's Call

1. What standard of living was enjoyed by the inhabitants of Ur of the Chaldees in the time of Abram?
2. What do you understand by the term **"Obedience to the Faith"**?
3. In what way did God's call to Abram demand faith?
4. When comparing the life Abram already had with that which was being promised, in which ways would you say the new life was better?
5. What course must we take if we want our lives to follow the pathway of God's blessing?

Study 2

Abram – Faith's Choice

1. What was basically wrong with Abram's decision to go down to Egypt?
2. a) What did Abram have to do to restore his communion with God?
b) What can we learn from this?
3. How did Abram's faith in God affect his dealings with Lot?
4. What do you think are some of the 'things' referred to in **1 Corinthians 2: 9**?
5. Give two reasons why it is best to seek God's guidance for our lives.

Study 3

Abram – Faith's Course

1. What can we learn about Abram from his answer given to the King of Sodom in **Genesis 14**?
2. Why was the birth of a son so important to Abram?
3. **Genesis 15: 6** is quoted again in the New Testament.
a) Where is it quoted?
b) For what purpose is it being quoted there?
4. Although our Christian experience may be marked by both success and failure, of what one thing can we be sure?
5. Why is it better to wholly trust God in our lives and wait His timing in everything?

Study 4

Abraham – Faith's Cost

1. What did each experience of proving God do for Abraham?
2. What did God's supreme test of Abraham's faith reveal about Abraham's knowledge of God?
3. Why does God sometimes allow Christians to pass through bitter experiences and fiery trials?
4. What New Testament parallel do you see pictured in this incident in **chapter 22**?
5. What challenge (if any) has come to your heart and life through your study of Abraham?