

# A HISTORY OF DIVISION

## The patriarchs, *Genesis 18:16-19*

The Bible's story opens with a compacted, yet masterfully narrated, account of God's grand plan for humanity and of humanity's rebellion against Him and His plan. God responded to humanity's rebellion in a surprising way – He promised to bless the whole world through a man named Abraham. The introduction of Abraham results in the dramatic slowing of the Bible's story as it traces the development of the promise through Abraham and his family. This lesson will consider Abraham's family in the book of Genesis and their relationship to God and His promise as part of our ongoing series exploring the story of humanity in the Bible.

### Flawed yet faithful

- The Bible introduces the story of Abraham and his family by revealing that God intended to use them to bless “all the nations of the earth”<sup>1</sup> (*Genesis 22:18*).
- But they were not passive participants in the promise; God expected Abraham and his family “to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him” (*Genesis 18:16-19*).
- Genesis' record of Abraham's family, however, reveals a pattern of unrighteousness and injustice.
  - Consider, for example, the repeating pattern of deception in Abraham's family:
    - Genesis 12:10-20 - Abraham lied about his relationship with Sarah.
    - Genesis 18:9-15 - Sarah lied to God.
    - Genesis 20:1-18 - Abraham lied about his relationship with Sarah.
    - Genesis 26:6-11 - Isaac lied about his relationship with Rebekah.
    - Genesis 27:1-35 - Jacob deceived Isaac.
    - Genesis 29:15-25 - Laban deceived Jacob.
    - Genesis 31:17-20 - Jacob deceived Laban
    - Genesis 31:25-35 - Rachel deceived Laban.
    - Genesis 33:1-17 - Jacob deceived Esau.
    - Genesis 34:1-31 - Simeon and Levi deceived the men of Shechem.
    - Genesis 37:1-35 - Joseph's brothers deceived Jacob.
    - Genesis 38:1-30 - Tamar deceived Judah in response to his deception of her.
    - Genesis 42-44 - Joseph deceived his brothers.
  - The deception of Abraham and his family discloses an uncomfortable truth about them – it identifies them as offspring of the serpent (*Genesis 3:15; cf. John 8:44; Revelation 12:9*).

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.



- The unrighteousness and injustice of Abraham and his family consequently created constant obstacles to God's promise that required His protecting interventions (*cf. Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-18*).
- Even though Genesis' record of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) reveals a corrupt and dysfunctional family whose behavior seemed to threaten God's purposes, God remained faithful to them. God's faithfulness not only protected His promise it also resulted in transformations in the character of Abraham and his family.
  - Consider, for example, the change that took place in Abraham:
    - Abraham's story emphasizes his failures to trust God (*cf. Genesis 12:1, 4, 10-20*).
    - His failures to trust God extended beyond him, negatively impacting the people around him (*cf. Genesis 16:1-16; 20:1-18*).
    - But Genesis also notes the growth of Abraham's trust in God (*cf. Genesis 15:6*), a deep belief that led him to eventually rely on God rather than on anyone or anything in his world (*Genesis 22; James 2:23*).
  - The story of Abraham's growing faith illustrates God's expectations of all people; as Paul wrote, "those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith" (*Galatians 3:9*).

## Applications

- Abraham's transformation reminds us that God can change people.
- Abraham's transformation plays out over as much as forty years (*cf. Genesis 12:4; 21:5; 22:1-8*), revealing to us that transformation takes time.
- We must consequently trust God and be patient with one another; do not rush the transformation that God takes time to slowly develop.
- Do not discount the influence you have on other's lives. For example, the story of Abraham and his family reveals how parents' choices shape the behavior of their children.
- God remains faithful despite our failures; we should similarly remain faithful to one another.

God promised to, through Abraham and his family, bless the whole world. The story of Abraham in the book of Genesis reveals the reality and goal of God's promise – God seeks to transform the character of humanity. That transformation does, however, require our involvement. We should consequently ask ourselves whether we willingly submit to God's purposes or do we resist Him in favor of our fallen character.

