
VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

LECTURE 5: ABRAHAM

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The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Module

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

30 LECTURES

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21 CHAPTERS OLD TESTAMENT · 9 CHAPTERS NEW TESTAMENT

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2. Creation
3. Fall
4. Noah
- 5. Abraham**
6. Patriarchs I
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Lecture 5

ABRAHAM

Lecture Theme:

God condescends to call Abraham out of idolatry and into the way of faith and obedience in order to dispense gospel blessings to all nations.

Text:

“And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed” (Gal. 3:8).

TRANSCRIPT LECTURE 5

The contemporary relevance of Abraham seems beyond dispute. We hear appeals to Abraham in the ongoing conflicts over the territories in Palestine, and in the broader disputes between Jews and Muslims in the Middle East, though neither of them [has] a true claim to Abraham. Christians also, and rightly, look to Abraham as the father of those who believe. We must stick to the Scriptures in our understanding of Abraham. It is essential that we study closely God’s revelation in the Bible, the theology He provides in this portion of the history of redemption.

How does the history of the two seeds progress and expand under Abraham? What theological themes does God provide in Abraham’s call? How does God’s covenant with Abraham once again advance God’s plan of redemption and point us forward to what follows in Biblical history? Why does the New Testament emphasize so strongly that Abraham is the father of all those that believe? Do we find in the Old Testament the same Gospel and way of Salvation that we discover in the New Testament?

In this lecture, we will expound some of the theological themes that God provides in the history of Abraham. We will consider them under the call of Abraham, the covenant with Abraham, and the coming Redeemer and redemption promised through Abraham. If you continue listening, we will conclude this lecture by examining one exciting incident in the life of Abraham that brings our themes together, and illustrates how we must connect a specific Bible story to God’s big plan in the history of redemption.

First of all, let’s consider the call of Abraham. The development of the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, that is the Church and the world, continues. In Genesis 10, we see the sweeping genealogy of Noah’s three sons and the origin of future nations. You notice that the seed of the serpent is represented through Ham, Cush, and Nimrod, who exalted himself before the Lord. And, through him the Canaanite people. As promised,

the seed of the woman is traced through Shem, down to Abraham, and through him to Isaac and Jacob, with Judah selected to bear the line to the Mediator.

For the time, God will channel His revelation of redemption through the Shemites. But, God registers this table of nations because in the fullness of time, redemption will return to them, as will be promised again to Abraham. In Genesis 11, we have the Tower of Babel. The proud and rebellious world sought to unify and exalt themselves to the heavens. God curses and foils their mischief by confusing their language and dispensing the nations throughout the world. Keep this in mind because in the latter unfolding of redemptive history, God will reverse this curse through the power of the Gospel at Pentecost in Acts 2, where all will hear God's revelation in their own tongue.

And this, of course, will lead to the ultimate description that we have of heaven, in Revelation 5, verses 9 and 10, "for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth." Well, consider how God includes this in His promise to Abraham. The Old Testament prophets will later tell us more.

Notice how Abraham is called out. God punished the world with the confusion of language, which resulted in the multiplication and distribution of man throughout the Earth. Now, we must consider how He continued His promise through one man, Abraham, the father of all believers. Moses, looking back on this, says, in Deuteronomy 32, verses eight and nine, "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the LORD's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance."

You may have noticed in the previous lecture, that I referred to the Old Testament, believing people of God as the Church. This is entirely appropriate. Stephen, speaking of Moses, in Acts 7 verse 38, says, "This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness." Observe again, a point of continuity. We have one people of God, running through the Old Testament and New Testament. Beginning with Seth, to Shem, to Abraham, ultimately, expanded to include the Gentiles in the New Testament, as we'll see in a moment.

The New Testament word for "church" means, 'called out ones.' And, that is exactly what we see with Abraham in Genesis 12, verses one and following; God calls him out of Ur of the Chaldees, and separates him from the world. God calls him through the pronouncement of His divine Word. Notice again, God is revealing His glory. Going back to Stephen, in Acts 7, he says in verse 2, "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, and said unto him, get thee out of thy country."

God reveals Himself as Jehovah to Abraham. And, in chapter 15 verse one, He says, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." Again, in chapter 17 verse one, "I am the Almighty God." God's name is the disclosure of His glory. God reveals Himself and His glory in the calling of Abraham.

We should also note something here about the doctrine of election. God sovereignly chose Abram. God is the One who initiates. He seeks Abram. It is not Abram that seeks Jehovah. God comes pronouncing His blessing of salvation to Abraham. It is also, once again, a call to separation. He is called out from his country and his father's house. He is called out of idolatry. Joshua 24 verse two especially highlights this, his being called out of idolatry. He's called to place his entire dependence upon God. John Owen says, "As God now intended to set up a new phase of the church through a visible separation from the world and its involvement in false religion and corruption, so he laid the foundation in the demonstration of faith, obedience, and holiness, of those called into it. And, through it, into the promises of the coming Messiah Himself."

Under this point regarding Abraham's call, notice his response of faith and obedience. This is especially underlined in Hebrews 11, that lengthy section on Abraham from verses 8 to 19. Abraham responded to God's Word of promise by receiving it and believing it. And, consequently, bearing the fruit of faith in obedience. Abraham does this several more times in the following chapters. The New Testament expounds, extensively, the saving faith of Abraham. He was a Gospel believer; we see it already in Genesis 15 verse six, "And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness." As Paul says, we have in Abraham a clear example of a believer justified by faith alone, in Christ alone. You can see Romans chapter four. We'll look at this more fully when we come to the New Testament.

Secondly, we must consider the covenant with Abraham. God's revelation, regarding the salvation of His people in Christ, expands more and more with each new step in Biblical history. The covenant promise of Genesis 3:15 becomes fuller and clearer in God's covenant with Noah, and even more, now, in God's covenant with

Abraham. This one Covenant of Grace will continue to unfold through Moses, David, and into the new covenant. The Abrahamic covenant provides the groundwork, and the language and focus of God's dealing with His people, in the history of redemption. What we find here carries over into the periods that follow.

Notice that God initiates His covenant in chapter 12, verse one and following. He explains the saving content in chapter 15. He confirms it, sacramentally, with signs and seals, in chapter 17, and concludes it in chapter 22. In each section, we see recurring components. Let me mention a few of them.

First of all, we find a promised land. So, first of all, there is a promised land, a place for His seed. Now, we must wait to expound this in a later lecture. But, note here that Abraham knew the physical land pointed to a spiritual inheritance in heaven. Hebrews 11 verse 10 says, "For he," that is Abraham, "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." So, the first component is a promised land. Secondly, we see a promised seed, His physical seed would include a seed of promise. A third component is a promised blessing. He was promised fruitfulness that will encompass the nations of the world.

Well, we only have time to touch on a few highlights regarding this covenant, but let me draw them to your attention. First of all, the core of the covenant promise is found in the words of chapter 17 verse seven, "I will establish my covenant," and then it goes on, "to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." He will be their God, and they will be His people. You need to imprint those words on your mind, because you will see this language, this core of the Covenant of Grace repeated, literally over, and over, and over, throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament, all the way to its final culmination in Revelation 21 verse three. This is important for showing the continuity of the Covenant of Grace through the whole Bible.

Secondly, it is a covenant ratified by blood. In Genesis 15, we have an elaborate vision in which God appeared in smoke and fire and passed between the pieces of slain animals, taking upon Himself solemn oaths and imprecations that He would fulfill His Word.

Thirdly, we see again that the Gospel promise in the Covenant of Grace includes the household principle. The promise to Abraham extends to his children. Again, verse seven of chapter 17 (Genesis), "And I will establish My covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." This element of the Covenant of Grace continues into the New Testament. As we saw last time, Peter uses nearly the same words as Genesis 17 verse seven when preaching the Gospel in Acts 2:39. And, he says, "For the promise is unto you, and to your children."

Fourthly, since the promise of the covenant is to his children, the sign and seal of the gospel promise, circumcision, is also given to his children in chapter 17 verse 11 (Genesis): "And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you." And then, He goes on to command that it be given to his sons and those in his household. In Romans four verse 11, Paul calls circumcision a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith.

But, the sign of the promise does not presume regeneration. Not all will receive the promise with faith. Both Ishmael and Isaac received the sign of the covenant, circumcision. But, Ishmael is an unbeliever, and Isaac is a believer. We see the same with Jacob and Esau. Nevertheless, the command to give the sign to his children was absolutely necessary. In chapter 17 verse 14, we read, "And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant." We'll see this illustrated later, in Exodus four verses 24 to 26. God came to kill Moses for not circumcising his son. This will be important when we come to our study of the New Testament.

Thirdly, we must consider the coming Redeemer and redemption that is promised through Abraham. God's promise of blessing to Abraham extended through him to the whole world. We see that in Genesis 12 verse three at the end of the verse: "and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." This promise would only be fulfilled through the coming Redeemer, Jesus Christ, who is called the Son of Abraham in the very first verse of the first book of the New Testament, Matthew 1:1. Galatians 3 verse 14 says, "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Later on, in verse 29, it says, "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

And so, you can once again see this theme of the seed that is promised in Genesis 3:15. It's still being carried forward to Abraham and to Abraham's seed. And, it ultimately leads to Christ Himself, as you see in Galatians 3:14. And through Christ, that promise leads to Gentile believers and their children.

As you can see, the promise was never intended to be restricted to the Jews, that is, to physical blood lines, but extended to all those with sound and saving faith in the Gospel of Christ. In Romans 4 verse 13, we read, "For the promise that he," that is Abraham, "should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith." Therefore, Gentile believers are true children of Abraham and heirs of his promise. Galatians 3 verse 7, "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." Or, in verse nine, "So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham."

All of this underlines for us the way in which God's revelation, during the period of Abraham, points us forward to the Redeemer, Christ, and to the redemption that would come through Him. But, we also need, I think, a specific example. And so, lastly, we will consider one exciting event in the life of Abraham to illustrate the dominant Gospel themes that run throughout, and to show how Bible stories are related to the context of redemptive history. In Genesis 22, God reveals Himself. So, He's disclosing something about Himself. He reveals Himself as Jehovah-Jireh, which means, "the LORD, our Provider."

I want to highlight, not what Abraham did, that is, not the trial and triumph of Abraham's faith in Genesis 22. Though, that is very important as well and deserves our consideration and exposition. But here, rather, I want to emphasize what God did in this story. Because, the big point of the text in Genesis 22, is that the Lord provides a sacrificial lamb, so that His people, Israel, may live. In verse two, God calls Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering. Now, this was much more than just a trial of nature, if you will. A trial that would be difficult for a father to have to sacrifice his much loved son. There's more than that. Remember, God had limited the promise of the Messiah, and had thereby, bound up the salvation of the world in the life and line of Isaac.

So, it appears that Abraham is being called to part with salvation, to part with Christ Himself. Now, Romans 4 verses 16 to 25, describe how Abraham, nevertheless, clung to God's promise. And, it's a beautiful passage. You can look, as well, at Hebrews 11, for more on that point. But, you'll know the story, the angel stops Abraham, and he receives back his son, as from the dead, if you will. And, God provides, instead, a ram out of the thicket as a substitute in the place of Isaac. Now, it's after this, it's after the provision of the substitute, the ram; it's after the deliverance of Isaac, that in verse 14, Abraham calls the name of the place, Jehovah-Jireh. And this means literally, the LORD, or Jehovah, will, or shall, provide.

Now, if you were like me, you might have expected the words 'God hath provided.' Right? Isaac has been delivered from the altar, the ram has been provided. God hath provided. But, that's not what it says. It says, "God will provide." It is future tense, rather than past tense. What's happening here? Abraham is looking beyond. He's standing on that mountain in Moriah, in the land of Moriah, and he is looking into the future. He has a ram, he has back his son, but he sees that in all of these things, he has a pledge of better things yet to come. He's looking forward, through Isaac's line, to God's coming substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ. And, so he says, "God will provide."

It is this hour, this moment in Abraham's life, I am convinced, that Jesus refers to when He says in John 8, verse 56, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad." Remember in chapter 22, Genesis 22 verse two, this event took place on a mountain in the land of Moriah. Now, follow this through God's revelation in Biblical history. It's in that exact same place that, later, David would offer a sacrifice on the threshing floor of Ornan. And then, later on yet, Solomon built the temple in Mount Moriah, and he raised an altar. And, on that altar, countless thousands, thousands and thousands of sacrifices over the centuries were offered in that same place, that same spot, on that altar.

It is the same place, Mount Moriah, over two thousand years afterward, two thousand years after Abraham, that the Lord Jesus Christ is crucified. You see? God did provide the lamb, so that His people could live eternally. Abraham was looking forward to what was yet to come. Little did he know it would transpire, relatively, in that same area. Consider God's Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, in contrast to Isaac. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of the Promise. Was Isaac a son of promise? Yes. Jesus is the greater Son of Promise. He is the Eternal Son that existed before Abraham. Was Isaac long waited for? Did he only come when Abraham and Sarah were in their advanced years? Yes. But, Christ is the long waited for Son, the Messiah to come, the Lamb of God.

We see in the New Testament, the opening of the New Testament, people like Anna and Simeon, looking for Him. Did Isaac have a supernatural birth? He was born when his mother was way past childbearing years. The Lord Jesus Christ, much more. He is conceived by the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary. The Lord Jesus Christ, even more than Isaac, has meekness to submit to the sacrifice of Himself on behalf of His people.

The Lord Jesus Christ was foreordained from before the beginning. And, all of the Old Testament, sacrificial lambs pointed to the one and final Lamb of Sacrifice Who would bear away the sins of His people. We read in the New Testament, “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” That’s Romans five verses seven and eight.

You see here this fascinating and exciting story recorded for us in God’s inspired Word. In Genesis 22 is more than an interesting story. The content of that story is full of Christ, it is full of the Gospel, and it is full of the plan of redemption that God is unfolding in the history of the Bible. And, we must interpret and understand Genesis 22 in light of that. And, ministers must preach that passage in light of those spiritual realities, as well. It gives fresh light and color, and it also draws connections from the passage to Christ. But consequently, from the passage to Christ to us. And, we see the pressing relevance of a story, like the one found in Genesis 22, for the contemporary Christian. Christ was the object of Abraham’s faith. He remains the object of faith for every true believer today.

We’ve seen how important Abraham is to our understanding of God’s unfolding revelation of Himself and of salvation in Biblical history. We have learned that this inspired account of Abraham is directly related to every Christian today.

In the next lecture, we will consider the theology that God provides in the time of the patriarchs, after Abraham.