

SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

Message Title: "Three Pivotal Promises"

Speaker: Pastor Kevin Myers

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Icebreaker:

The Fractured Fairy Tales drama was pretty funny this morning with its jumbled mix of Bible stories. But isn't that how we often view the stories in the Bible...as a mix of unrelated stories whose characters we can't quite keep straight? What is the oddest thing you recall hearing from the Bible...that story or verse that made you go, "Huh?!?"

Message Overview:

In this series, we see the story of a God who throughout history has acted deliberately to accomplish His purposes. From the fall of righteous man in Paradise, to the destruction of the world due to rampant sin, to the saving of a remnant that His purposes might continue, nothing takes God by surprise. Everything is part of His redemptive plan to restore mankind back into right relationship with Himself and to eventually bring redeemed man back into Paradise. More than just a descent into philosophical musings and fractured bits of history, scripture is the unfolding story of a God who loves us unconditionally, pursues us untiringly, and deliberately acts to fulfill all His promises. As the series continues we will discover how OT events and prophecies find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ and are a reflection of events to come, as illustrated in the symmetry of the image below:



Discussion:

(Leaders: Do not try to cover every question provided in this study guide, but rather review the complete list, selecting a mix of questions that work best for your group, mixing scripture research/discussion as well as personal application of the teaching principles.)

In today's message, Pastor Kevin (PK) used Abram's story (he was later renamed Abraham) to highlight the question: **Is God is able to deliver on His promises?**

The Promises

- God calls Abram out of an idolatrous and sinful society to follow Him to a place He would show him. Abram obeys, and at a marking moment in his journey, receives **three promises** from God. What were they and what did they mean? (Genesis 12:1-3)
- The promise of One who would conquer sin and death was not a new one. When in history did God first promise a Messiah? (See Genesis 3:14-15) Can you recall other places in the Old Testament that foretell the coming of the Messiah?
- People often cling to promises in the Bible, finding strength and hope in the fact that God will fulfill them or has fulfilled them in their lives. Do you have a promise that is significant to you? What is it and what were the circumstances that made it special?

The Struggle to Believe God

- Though Abram ultimately believed God (Genesis 15:6), what was the glaring problem with the promise that he would be the father of a great nation? What event illuminates Abram's struggle to wait for God's perfect timing? (See Genesis 16)
- P.K. said, "If you focus on your pressures, the promises of God fade, but if you focus on God's promises, the pressure fades." In what ways have you experienced this in your life?
- Read Genesis 17:15-23. What issues does Abram struggle with here? Later in Genesis 22, God makes a huge ask of Abraham. What is it? How does Abraham respond? What life lesson had Abraham learned by this point that enabled him to respond without hesitation? (Hint: **Lean into God's Promises more than your Pressures.**)

Promises Delivered

- Despite Abram's momentary unbelief, God delivers on His promise that Abram will have a son through his wife (Genesis 21:1-5). How long did he have to wait altogether for its fulfillment? Have you been through a situation in which you had to wait a loooong time for something? How did that impact you?
- Read Proverbs 3:5-6, Matthew 6:25-27, and Philippians 4:6-7. What can we learn from these verses on how to deal with anxiety and pressure?
- P.K. likened the covenant God made with Abraham to the marriage covenant, in that it was relational in nature, and bound by unbreakable oaths. How does the divorce rate in our society, however, reflect our culture's view of covenants? Is God fickle like we are?
- If God without a doubt delivers on all His promises, what does that mean about future events spoken of in scripture...events pictured on the right side of the Genesis to Revelation triangle?

Wrap-Up:

We see from Abraham's story that God is able to deliver on His promises. Next week, history will show that with the birth of Isaac, the story of the nation of Israel begins to unfold, reaching its pinnacle in the settling of the Promised Land, and finding its culmination in the eventual birth of Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah. Keeping Abraham's story in mind, pair off with a member of the group and share with your partner an area in your life in which the pressures you face are battling to consume God's promises to you. Pray for each other that you will lean on God's promises rather than bow to the pressures around you.

Throughout the Week: (Optional)

(Leaders: Share these optional exercises for further study and growth with your group.)

Reflect on I Corinthians 13 this week. It is often referred to as the "Love Chapter" and is a great example of God's love toward us and how a marriage or friendship should transpire. Think of someone to whom you can show love using this chapter as a model. Fans of the music group PETRA will recall a song written by them based on these verses and may wish to play it as a means of keeping the chapter fresh on their minds.

Memorize I Corinthians 13:4-7, "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trust, always hopes, always perseveres."

Read Exodus 1-4 and Exodus 20 in preparation for next week's message. For more information on Abram, read the appendices.

Appendix 1: Abraham's Family Relationships and Early Life

- Abraham's father Terah, was an idolater "who served other gods" and worshiped the sun and moon (Joshua 24:2-3, 14-15). Terah lived in Ur, but late in life, he set out to move his family to Canaan, stopping halfway to settle in Haran, where he later died (see Genesis 11:10-32).
- Abraham's brother Haran died in Ur. Haran's son Lot decided to go with his uncle Abraham when God called him to leave home. Haran's daughter Milcah married her uncle Nahor.
- Abraham's other brother, Nahor, stayed in Haran after his father Terah died. Many years later, Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac. Isaac's wife was Nahor's grandchild Rebekah (Gen. 24:15).
- Abraham's wife Sarah was also his half sister. She was the daughter of his father, but not of his mother (Gen. 20:12). Sarah married Abraham before the family left Ur.
- Abraham spent his early days in Ur, which at that time was situated at the very fertile mouth of the Euphrates River. Spacious estates were irrigated by an intricate system of straight canals and ditches. The large two-story villas had thirteen and fourteen rooms. Education was also of a high standard.
In spite of its advanced civilization, Ur was steeped in idolatry. It is suggested that Abraham was being primed for idolatry priesthood (Josephus), but all we know from Scripture is that God called Abraham to leave his city in its heyday of power and prestige to go to Haran and then six hundred miles south to Canaan. At this time Abraham was seventy five years old. (Acts 7:2; Gen.12:1, 4)
- Abraham's name was initially *Abram*, which means "father of many or exalted father". God renamed him in Gen.17:5 to *Abraham*, which means "father of a multitude".
- Sarah's name was initially *Sarai*, which means "my princess". God renamed her in Gen.17:15 to *Sarah*, which means "the princess".

Appendix 2: Promises and Fulfillment

Promise	Scripture Reference	Fulfillment	Scripture Reference
Great Nation	Genesis 12:2	The first step was Isaac. A further step was the growth in Egypt. Israel was a great nation under King David. They are still a great nation today.	Genesis 21 Exodus 1:9 1 Chronicles 21:5-6
Great Land	Genesis 15:18-21	God showed Moses the land He promised, which became known as Israel. These boundaries were reached under the reign of David.	Deuteronomy 34:1-4 1 Chronicles 18-20
Great Messiah	Genesis 12:3	Jesus, the Messiah was a descendent of Abraham. Salvation is found through Jesus alone, which is the ultimate blessing.	Matthew 1 Acts 4:12

For the most part, Abraham did not live to see the fulfillment of God's promises. This may explain why he occasionally jeopardized it by failures of nerve and hope (chapters 12, 16, 20). But he also held onto it in faith (chapters 15, 17, 18), the virtue he was later known for (see Hebrews 11:8-12). Despite taking some detours, Abraham is known as a pillar of faith and as an example of how to follow God.