

THE GOD WHO COMES TO HIS PEOPLE

GENESIS 17-18

INTRODUCTION

- Some of us here every week, others not – so explain
- We read the Bible each week, and seek to learn from it and also be changed
- People have been doing this with the Bible for nearly 2000 years, and with the first part of it for at least another thousand beforehand.
- It shows us about (a) God, (b) the world around us, (c) ourselves – bringing life, peace – also challenge!

GENESIS

- Genesis – book of beginnings
- Written as a story, on the surface describing the lives of a succession of people, but more the start of a biography of God
- Why story?

Albert attended naval college as a teenager and served in the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force during the First World War. In 1920, he was made Duke of York. He married Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon in 1923, and they had two daughters, Elizabeth and Margaret. In the mid-1920s, he had speech therapy for a stammer, which he learned to manage to some degree. His elder brother ascended the throne as Edward VIII after their father died in 1936, but Edward abdicated later that year to marry the twice-divorced American socialite Wallis Simpson; Albert thereby became the third monarch of the House of Windsor, taking the regnal name George VI.

- We get so much more of a sense of what he was like by watching *The King's Speech*.

ABRAHAM & SARAH

- Story so far – left home and extended family to follow God's call.
- God's made promises but they look pretty unlikely at the moment!
- They've taken things into their own hands and Abraham's had a son by another woman.
- It's been a journey of discovery for them – finding out more about what God's like. Many of us can relate!

WHAT DO WE LEARN ABOUT GOD?

- Most cultural views of God tend to fall into three categories:
 - Gods are like humans but with superpowers, and get involved in human life for sport (ANE, Greeks / Romans)
 - God is distant and unknowable – perfect, and removed from us (Islamic culture)
 - God is an impersonal force – a power or life-force that flows through everything (Buddhism, Star Wars)
- Want to focus on one thing. Up until now, God has spoken to Abraham. We don't know how exactly – the account doesn't say, but there's been communication somehow. Already, we learn that God is personal – that is, he speaks, listens, interacts with people.
- But what follows is truly amazing. God's just made a promise to be Abraham's God, and for Abraham and his family to be his people. Think of it like a Ukrainian refugee coming over here and being offered British citizenship, and on acceptance being told that the Queen will be their Queen and they will be a royal subject with all the rights and obligations that that entails. OK, so far we can picture this.
- Now imagine that a few days later, there's a knock at the door, and the Ukrainian refugee finds the Queen on their doorstep, asking to come in for tea and personally guaranteeing that they will have a secure and safe future in this country. I can't imagine that happening, but that's the simple truth of what's happening here. God comes down to visit Abraham, to talk with him, and to give him reassurance of his promise.
- This visit changes Abraham & Sarah's life. HOPE – REASSURANCE – COMFORT.

JESUS – GOD VISITS

- And you see, this is right at the heart of the Christian faith. Not just a one-off.
- God didn't just come down once to visit Abraham. Already that's pretty special, but this is God's very nature – he is a present God who promises to be with us.
- The whole first half – full of encounters, but also promises of a future coming. Hope. Reassurance. Comfort. Rescue.
- Then Jesus. Claims to be God. Demonstrates it. Dies and is resurrected.
- In three decades, Jesus shares the human experience in full.
- 6 days ago: Bible Society says demand in Ukraine vastly outstripping supply. Why? In that crisis, people know they need the God who knows their situation and meets them in it.
- We like to think that we're gradually making the world a better place, but all our efforts are still hampered – by us.
- Jesus promises to rescue – not by evacuating people to safety, but by changing us on the inside.
- Story of Saul → Paul
- Story of Mousa
- A whole raft of less dramatic but equally real testimonies in this very congregation.
- It's an ongoing process – still things to work out. God with us through it.

WHAT ABOUT US?

- I said that we try to look at what the Bible tells us about God and what it tells us about ourselves.
- We have a choice – do we want to be transformed?
- When I was 14 – is today that day for anyone else?