

III. The Gathering and Preservation of a Covenant People (12-50)

A. Abraham (12-25)

1. First stage of life - 11:27-14

- a. **Ur of the Chaldees** traditionally has been placed at the mouth of the Persian Gulf (now 160 miles from the original coast). This is still the favored site. Like Haran, it was a major center for worship of the moon god, Sin. Dumbrell (*Covenant and Creation*, 56) notes that the family names (“Terah” might be related to the Hebrew word for moon, “yareach”) were possibly connected with the lunar cult; cf. Josh. 24:2.

Recent studies (Cyrus Gordon) suggest a northern Mesopotamian (Hittite) site, putting it in a line with Haran and Ebla and Bethel. (For arguments for a northern site, see J.J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison*, p. 165.)

b. Time period

- (1) Age of Abram = 75-85 years of age, probably around 2090 b.c. While Shem lived 500 years after the flood (Gen 11:11), see Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* (pp. 25-28ff.) for a chronology which shows that Shem undoubtedly pre-deceased Abraham.
- (2) Era: Ebla has just passed from the scene. Hammurabi of Babylon will flourish ca. 1792-1750.

c. **Call of Abram**

A NEW BEGINNING

Alan Ross calls Gen. 12:1-9 the central passage of the whole book of Genesis, noting that it introduces the covenant promises [which will be the theme of the NT] and conceding that this is “the beginning of the nation of Israel as a worshipping community. * * * Israel would learn by this account that their very existence as a nation was by God’s election of one man who responded by faith” (*Creation and Blessing*, p. 259).

Gen 12-36 is the heart of Genesis. There are parallels to the first part of Genesis as the second part (12-50) begins: there was a new beginning with Noah (9:1), and now, after the race has evidenced its own corruption (9:21ff; 11:1ff.), there is again a special **re-creation** with Abraham. Note the covenant terms of 12:2,3:

- “**great nation** (*goy*)” from God’s initiative and to fulfill His original design of divine [kingdom of God] rule as opposed to man’s ambition against God (ch. 11; cf. 10:32)
- “**great name**” ctr. 11:4; note Abe’s response in 12:8b (some like Luther and Ross translate “preached” instead of “called”; cf. parallel in 13:4)

— “I will bless you,” with the result that you may be a blessing. This is the crux of the call to Abe, which mirrors Gen. 1:28; in effect, Abe becomes the **mediator of blessing** to mankind, and it’s through his line’s multiplying that the original creation mandate finds renewed potential

—literarily, Dumbrell and Hamilton (p. 89) note that the five references to blessing here may be symmetrical to the five blessings and five cursings of chpts. 1-11. The purpose is to show that God’s redemptive purposes will overrule and re-establish His blessings. “...the centrifugal effect of these early Genesis narratives is now arrested by the centripetal potential movement of the world back to an Eden situation through Abram” (Dumbrell, 72)

The “Exalted Father,” Abram, will be later called “Father of a Multitude,” Abraham. In the calling out and establishing of a **single** nation through Abraham, he and his lineage become an instrument of grace and promise after the nations were scattered. Consider these purposes:

- 1) the promise made to Eve of a deliverer from the curse is preserved in a further narrowing of the godly posterity;
- 2) the faithful lineage of Abraham will be the custodian of revealed truth (Rom. 3:2)
- 3) the lineage of Abraham is to be a blessing (Gen. 12:2) in the world, this idea climaxing in the coming of the Redeemer (Gal. 3:14-16).

d. “Abraham the **Hebrew**” - 14:13

- (1) Scholars formerly identified the “Hebrews” with the ancient “Apiru” people as mentioned in the Egyptian Amarna tablets (called “Habiru” by Babylonians); this was not an ethnic group, but a social class. They made their mark as ones who could be raiders (particularly in Canaan) or as caravaners/donkey drivers.
- (2) More probably identified with Abe’s notable ancestor, **Eber**, Gen. 11:14-7
- (3) Merrill (p. 34) suggests that when Abe visited Egypt for the first time, it was in the reign of Pharaoh Achthoes III who had composed for his son “The Instruction for King Meri-ka-Re,” a work that reveals Egyptian hospitality for, yet prejudices against, wandering Semites: “Lo, the wretched Asiatic.... He does not dwell in a single place, [but] his legs are made to go astray.”

e. **Abrahamic Covenant** — Gen. 12, 13, 15, 17, 22 (Know these five chpts.)

- (1) The calling of Abraham not only marked the founding of a nation, but of organized, institutionalized religion—viz, the **visible church** in juvenile form. Note these elements of an organic religious body:

- (a) Spreading a Gospel (1st introduced in Gen. 3:15) (=preaching)
—Gen. 12:2,3; 8b?; cf. Gal. 3:6-9, esp. vs. 8; Heb. 4:2

Genesis 12:2,3,8 I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. ...and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.

- (b) Religious rite of Circumcision (=sacrament)
—Gen. 17:7,10,11; Rom. 4:11
- (c) Order and maintenance of the body (=discipline)
—Gen. 17:14; 18:19

(2) Elements of the Covenant

- (a) Material

Promised **land** for himself and his seed (cf. 1:28-30)
—13:14,15,**17**; 15:18

- (b) A big **family** (cf. Gen. 1:28)
—13:16; 17:5; 22:17

- (c) Redemptive element

- i) God is Abe's Sovereign - 15:1
- ii) The promises are eternal - 17:7; Gal. 3
- iii) The promised Redeemer Gen. 12:3; 17:7 cf. Gal. 3:14-16

- (3) The covenant was renewed by God several times, generally after a **point of testing** in Abe's faith (e.g., loss Ur and his father; loss of Sarai; loss of Lot and land; loss of Isaac)
—>12, 13, 15, 17, 22

f. **Melchizedek**, king of righteousness, of Salem (cf. Is. 9:6) —Gen. 14:17ff.

- (1) Context

This is in the context of the cov'tal promises of 12:2,3: 1) Abe is being made a great nation on a par (or greater) than the surrounding int'l powers, and 2) God curses those who fight vs. Abe (Gen. 12:3), 3) The bread and the wine from God's representative are tokens of the (cultivated) promised land to Abe who never dwelt in the land's cities.

Significantly, Abe dismisses the blessing of another king who would bless him, the pagan king of Sodom (14:17, 21ff).

- (2) Identity of Melchizedek (cf. Ps. 110; Heb. 7)

Probably not a theophany since he lived on the earth and held regular office. Hebrews says he was “without father or mother,” a phrase that Ross takes as meaning he was a man who appeared on the scene without any record of his lineage—this in a book given over to genealogies.

Some suggest this was Shem who was preserving and propagating a belief in the true God. Merrill argues that Shem was by now dead.

(3) Tithing prior to the Mosaic law

2. Stage 2 - Gen. 15-20

- a. Age 85-99
- b. Eliezer an heir? (15:2-4) There was an ancient practice confirmed by tablets from Nuzi (ca. 1500, Hurrians in N Mesopotamia = biblical Horites) that a childless father could leave his estate to an adopted servant. (Note 15:4 for God’s plans, however.)
- c. “Cutting the calf” in Gen. 15:9ff. = God, the Sovereign, binding himself to Abe since the vassal usually passed between the parts of the sacrifice. This confirms again the unconditionality of the “covenant of grant” in that God has bound himself to Abe, as well as vice-versa. Compare Jer. 34:18,19 for the ritual.

Jeremiah 34:18-20 'And I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not performed the words of the covenant which they made before Me, when they cut the calf in two and passed between the parts of it -- ¹⁹ 'the princes of Judah, the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf -- ²⁰ 'I will give them into the hand of their enemies

- d. A child by his maid servant - Gen. 16

This was common practice of the day as illustrated by Nuzi Law. The offspring by the surrogate mother was not considered illegitimate, but the legal heir of both the man and wife, unless the married couple later had a child.

- e. Circumcision and restatement of the Covenant - 17

(1) Now a seal of the covenant was introduced; covenant tokens had to be by blood, and this sign made the **covenant threats and promises** all the more real and personal.

(2) Symbolism

Promise: (a) Pointed to coming promised seed

Promise: (b) Symbol of cleansing (redemption token)

Dt. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4,14; Col. 2:11-13

Deuteronomy 10:16 "Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.

Deuteronomy 30:6 "And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Jeremiah 4:4 Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, And take away the foreskins of your hearts, You men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem,

Jeremiah 4:14 O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, That you may be saved.

Threat: (c) Symbol of threat of no posterity for disobedience (curse token) (Gal. 5:12; Phil. 3:2,3)

f. Gen. 18 - Abraham the mediator

(1) As mediator of God's blessing (12:3) he intercedes for souls (vv. 24ff.)

(2) As a father he acts responsibly in rearing his children so that they may realize the promises given them on the account of the faith of the father (18:19 — "result clause" in the Hebrew). This verse strongly hints at "covenant succession."

Genesis 18:19 (NIV) For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

g. Gen. 19 - Sin brings

(1) A cataclysmic judgment on the reprobate (ca. 2067)

(a) Supernatural brimstone? — Elijah in I Kings 18:38

OR?

(b) Timely and providential petrochemical eruption? (14:10 cf. 19:29)

(2) Second reference to drunkenness: an incessant plague upon God's people through the descendants of Lot, Gen. 19:33ff. (ctr. II Pet. 2:6-8). Yet, one of Lot's descendants will be a forerunner of Messiah.

3. Stage 3 - Gen. 21-25:11

a. Abraham's age = 100-175

b. Birth of Isaac (21), the child of promise (cf. 3:15)

(1) Miraculous birth

(2) Only begotten son (Gen. 22:2 cf. Heb. 11:17)

(3) Offered in sacrifice (cf. Rom. 8:32)

(4) Recipient of chosen bride (cf. II Cor. 11:2)

c. Sacrifice of Isaac - 22

- (1) Final test of faith; patience tested before Isaac born, and now more grievously tried. “Lad” in vss. 5,12 can range in age from infant (Ex. 2:6) to young man (Josh. 6:13).
- (2) Site = Mt. Moriah, probably in same vicinity, phps. even same site as the later temple mount at Jerusalem (II Chron. 3:1)
- (3) Primitive, yet obvious belief in the resurrection (22:5; cf. Heb. 11:17-19)
 - (a) Abraham believed God, that He WOULD keep his covenant promise through Isaac; this implicit faith in his God was again reckoned to Abraham as his righteousness (cf. 15:6; Jms. 2:21-23); Hamilton: “It is not Abraham-has-performed, but God-will-provide” (p. 109). Here *Jehovah-Jireh* literally translates, “The Lord will see to it.”
Abraham is considered our spiritual father (Gal. 3:6-9; Rom. 4) for these reasons: 1) that he is our pattern for saving faith, and, 2) that he is the head of the same covenant with all its promises that we also enter into by faith
 - (b) Hebrews 11:17 as applied to Isaac is a good commentary on the NT meaning of “only begotten,” (*monogeneis* in Greek) which appears to mean more than “unique” since Ishmael was also a unique son of Abraham. *Primary relationship* (not origination) is implied. This relationship guarantees the rights of the firstborn who is in special relationship.

d. Death of Sarah at age 127 - Gen. 23

- (1) Died as a “stranger in a strange land” without ownership of the promised territory, except for her posthumously purchased burial plot which would serve as site where the rest of the family would await the promised deliverance
- (2) Reference to Ephron the Hittite
 - (a) Critical scholars denied the biblical reference to the Hittites until the 20th century when their great empire was unearthed in Turkey
 - (b) Hittite customs
 - i) Ephron wanted to sell the whole estate to shift his compulsory military service to Abraham
 - ii) Abe insisted on paying since a land transfer by gift called for the recipient to do homage to the Hittite gods. — J.P. Freeman

e. Abraham’s last days, Gen. 24

(1) Wife for Isaac

- (a) A servant, phps Eliezer of 15:2, is sent to take a wife for Isaac.
 - i) Isaac is kept home perhaps to avoid temptations outside the promised land.
 - ii) Eliezer would have been Abe's heir if no son had been born; this custom was found among the Hurrians of ancient Nuzi
 - iii) God's will was revealed (v. 7) to the servant as he was actively seeking it - vs. 27
- (b) Isaac, part of the godly seed ("Sons of God") is not to take a wife from among the daughters of men (24:3; ctr. Esau's first marriage) but rather from the chosen race. It is an exercise in the belief in *Jehovah-Jireh*.

(2) Keturah - ch. 25

- (a) Concubine apparently promoted to wife (cf. I Chronicles 1:31,32)
- (b) Midian (vs. 1), her most famous and nettlesome son

B. Isaac - Chpts. 25-28

Some macro-outlines make Isaac central to the Genesis text:

- A Primal History 1-11
- B Abraham 12-25
- X Isaac 18-35
- B¹ Jacob 25-35
- A¹ Joseph 36-50

1. The promised line continues

- a. Isaac and Rebekah's faith that God would keep His promise through them is tested through 20 years of barrenness
- b. God displays His sovereignty by going against contemporary human convention in saying that the elder shall serve the younger (Rom. 9:10-13). Note also that Abe and many other covenant characters are the youngest of their siblings, e.g., Rachel and Leah. It gives new meaning to the Lord's teaching that the first shall be last and the last shall be first (Matt 19:30).

Thus the covenant is established by grace (see Sailhamer, *PaN* P. 186), while obedience is the necessary concomitant: Isaac's children are promised the covenant blessings "because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept my ... commandments."
-Gen 26:4,5.

2. The promises are conveyed to the Usurper (Jacob) through treachery
 - a. Birthright for a mess of pottage -25:27ff. (cf. Heb. 12:16) (“Birthright” = clan leadership and double portion)
 - (1) The birthright in the ancient world carried with it the idea of headship of the patriarchal clan (political [patriarch] and religious leader [priest]), as well as a double portion of the inheritance.
 - (2) A Nuzi tablet tells how Tupkitilla, in a moment of weakness and hunger, sold his inheritance claim to an orchard to his brother Kurpazah for 3 sheep.
 - b. Family blessing by stealth – 27 (“Blessing” = promise of royal destiny)

The family blessing secured the clan’s destiny and promise of royalty. As illustrated here and by Jacob’s blessing on Ephraim and Manasseh (48:12ff.), it carried with it all the covenant promises of destiny for the dynasty to be worked out through this new branch of the family tree.

An oral blessing was binding (see Nuzi parallels of the brother who beats probate challenge in claiming his bride, ZuluIshtar), as evidenced by Esau’s plea for a separate and new blessing.
3. The Abrahamic covenant promised to Jacob (28:13-15) and claimed by him (vss. 20-22) at Bethel where he may have seen Abraham’s altar (12:8).

C. Jacob — 28-36

1. Confirmation of the covenant with Jacob — 28:13ff.; see Hamilton’s alliterative outline of this confrontation with God (p. 122; note also the sermon outline on p. 125).
2. Two sisters become sisters-in-law
 - a. Again, marriage was not outside the chosen line
 - b. A **Dowry** in the ancient world was unlike the modern European dowry where the father has to pay the groom to unload his daughter. Jacob worked off his dowry to Laban which 1) covered the loss of her economic worth to the father’s household, and 2) also was a security that could help provide for the daughter if the husband should ever divorce her and send her home.
 - c. Throughout the OT, God in His poetic justice uses the despised things of the world to confound the wise and mighty: second place Leah is given the most children, and

from among them come the kingly and priestly lines, as well as the promised Redeemer.

3. Hebrew parsimony and the right of inheritance — 31

After being cheated of their rightful earnings from Laban (vss.7-15), Jacob's family skips town with the goods. Rachel absconded with the family images, "teraphim," the ownership of which indicated headship of the clan and right to the inheritance of the firstborn.

The Nuzi tablets ("Nashwi adopts Wullu" in Pritchard's *ANE* I:168) have given us understanding of this interesting angle on Jacob's flight. It may well be that, if Laban had no sons when Jacob arrived on the scene, he may have adopted Jacob as his heir and then welcomed him to seal the family tie by marriage. Meanwhile, sons (heirs) were born to Laban.

4. Transformation of Jacob into Israel at Peniel, "face of God" (32:29; Hamilton, 125); cf. Judges 13:18 and Is. 9:6.

- a. Climax of Jacob's strivings
- b. God's Angel guards the eastern entrance of God's land
- c. Name change seals Jacob's new identity as he leaves the land of idols/teraphim

5. The Covenant reconfirmed to Jacob again at Bethel and sealed to him in his new (and improved!) name, Israel — 35

Notice the abiding elements of the creation covenant in vv 11,12: 1) fruitfulness (1:28), 2) royalty, 3) land

Genesis 35:11-12 ¹¹ Also God said to him: "I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. ¹² "The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land."

D. Joseph: the preservation and incubation of the elect nation, chpts. 37-50 (begun with the calling out of Abe). Joseph had the "... faith of Abraham, the gentleness of Isaac, and the courage of Jacob" (Leon Wood, *A History of Israel*, p. 75).

1. Promiscuous Judah (38)

- a. Position of this interlude

(1) This episode may seem out of place in the Joseph narrative, but it fittingly

wraps up the saga of Jacob: begun with the struggle of two twins, the younger prevails in winning the blessing and birthright, and God brings good out of deceit (Tamar was “more righteous”).

- (2) Serves as a foil for the upright Joseph, but Judah’s actions were unwittingly in keeping with Hittite law if there were no brothers-in-law to raise up posterity.

Differences btwn Judah & Joseph in Gen 38 & 39	Similarities of Episodes
Sexual temptation conquers in 38	Innocent accused in both
Sexual temptation resisted in 39	Cloak kept as evidence in both

- (3) Judah and Joseph are the focus of the future

- b. *levirate* (Latin “for brother-in-law”) duties before the time of Moses (in Dt. 25:5-10; cf. Lk. 20:27-33)
 - c. Tamar’s request for a pledge of payment is confirmed by Ugaritic law which demanded three items of ID in court cases
2. Joseph sold into slavery (ch. 37, ca. 1900, before Hyksos rule of Egypt in 1750)
- a. For the price of a male slave, 20 pieces of silver (Lev. 27:5; cf. Zech. 11:12)
 - b. Were the caravaners Midianites or Ishmaelites (37:28 ctr. 37:36)? See Judges 8:22,24 for a unified identity; it is also possible that both ethnic groups were in the one caravan

Judges 8:22,24 ²² Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, both you and your son, and your grandson also; for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian." ²⁴ Then Gideon said to them, "I would like to make a request of you, that each of you would give me the earrings from his plunder." For they had gold earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.
 - c. Potipher possibly a eunuch (37:36, *saris*) as captain of Pharaoh’s body guard
 - d. Potipher’s wife; cf. Egyptian “Tale of the Two Brothers” from the XIII century; (found in Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East*, vol. 1., pp. 12-14).
 - e. Psalm 105:17-22 adds the detail of chains in prison
3. Exaltation in Egypt (41) after his trials (39,40) of thirteen years (40:46)
- a. The famed Rosetta stone (300 BC) records that Pharaohs had a custom of releasing prisoners on the monarch’s birthday
 - b. That 20% of the crops was paid to Pharaoh (Gen. 41:34) is confirmed by Egyptian records.
 - c. Like Daniel (note Joseph’s rewards and Daniel’s in Dan. 5), God places His man in

the right place to intervene for His people.

- d. From a literary viewpoint, Moses paints Joseph much like Adam who had
 - (1) control over the whole realm (41:40,41)
 - (2) the help/wisdom of God to do right (not evil), 41:39
 - (3) been given a wife to help him (41:45)

Joseph is depicted as the ideal man (cf. Ps. 8). The story of Joseph is a reflection of what might have been had Adam remained obedient to God and trusted him for the “good.” At the same time the picture of Joseph is an anticipation of what might yet still be, if only God’s people would, like Joseph, live in complete obedience and trust in God.” —Sailhamer, *PaN*. 242.

- e. 41:50: Wife, Asenath, daughter of the priest of On (later “Heliopolis”), the sun worship center NE of modern Cairo

- f. Sons

- (1) Manasseh = “forgetting” previous trials
- (2) Ephraim = “fruitful” (note 1:28)

4. Reunion with his family and reconciliation with his treacherous brothers — 42-45

- a. The previous 20 years had not obliterated the brothers’ sense of guilt (42:21,22 cf. Ps. 51)
- b. Joseph’s refusal to accept adulation from his brothers, as the story concludes, is indicated by the words: “Fear not, for am I in the place of God?” (50:19). B. Dahlberg, in attempting to link themes of the narrative about Joseph with similar ones in Genesis 1-11, contrasts this word of Joseph with the word of the serpent, “you will be like God” (3:5). He also contrasts the word of Joseph, “you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good” (50:20), with the serpent’s “knowing good and evil.” Such comparisons, among others again are illustrative of the literary artistry throughout this first book of the Bible. —Hamilton, p. 134

5. Renewal of covenant with Jacob as God leads him and his into Egypt, Gen. 46:3,4. Jacob in obedience leaves his homeland for a strange land much like Abraham had.

6. 46:8-27, Thematic design of Jacob’s genealogy

- a. Here is a list of those who went into Egypt with Jacob. The list, however, is stylized, and includes names of people who were descended from those who went down. Seventy are named (v. 27). The list includes great grandsons—e.g., v. 12 (Judah was only three years older than Joseph), and v. 21 (Benjamin was too young for two grandsons; cf. Num 26:40).

The LXX, cited in Acts 7:14, gives 75, evidently adding Joseph’s five descendants from Num. 26:29-36 to those in v. 20. But the figure of 70 seems better; cf. Ex. 1:5; Dt. 10:22. This list includes all sons, grandsons, and great

grandsons who headed independent families—the great grandsons thus being listed organizationally as grandsons (see Keil’s commentary on this passage). *JAB Notes*, p. 45.

- b. v. 26:27: “It can hardly be coincidental that the number of nations in Gen. 10 is also ‘seventy.’ Just as the ‘seventy nations’ represent all the descendants of Adam, so now the ‘seventy sons’ represent all the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the sons of Israel. ...the writer has gone to great lengths to portray the new nation of Israel as the new humanity and Abraham as a second Adam.” God will work with the nations through Israel to bring about His plan of salvation and blessing. Sailhamer, *EBC*, 261
7. The die is cast for the 12 tribes (blessings in ch. 49)
- a. Double portion of the birthright is forfeited by Reuben (I Chron. 5:1) and conferred upon Joseph (firstborn of Rachel) through his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh — Gen. 48
 - b. Judah receives the patriarchal blessing (49:8-12)
 - (1) Note Judah’s preeminence already in 46:28-34
 - (2) “Shiloh” (49:10)
Etymology uncertain, perhaps from *shalah*, “to be at rest, to bring rest” or perhaps a contraction of the relative pronoun *asher* with the indirect object (3ms) *lo*: “that which is to him;” (cf. Ezk. 21:27). The Qumran sectarians identified Shiloh as “the Messiah of Righteousness.”
8. Jacob embalmed (note Egyptian practice) and mourned for 70 days, only 2 days less than the Pharaohs. Significantly, the Hebrews were allowed a separate land (Goshen) to develop as a unique [covenant] people.
9. Key Verse: “But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.”
- Note how Genesis closes on the same theme as that with which it began:
“good and evil”
10. Joseph’s bones returned to the promised land in hope of the covenant’s fulfillment (Gen. 15:14; “...these all died in faith,” Heb. 11:13).