

Epic – Patriarchs

Gen 12; We just started a series called Epic – tracing the history of God’s work of redemption from creation to eternity

It’s an overview, broken down into 17 different historical periods, intended to help us see the big picture

B/c if you fail to see the whole, you’ll miss the significance of the parts

And the parts we covered last week, were Creation, Fall, and Flood

Which brings us to the . . .

Patriarchs

The 4th historical period in God’s epic, referring to the line of men God used to establish the nation of Israel

And unlike the previous time periods, we can put a start and end date to this one

Time Period – 2166BC-1876BC

Almost 300 years; Covering Abraham’s birth, the first patriarch, to Jacob, the last

Exactly how many generations passed after the flood we don’t know; But eventually Abraham was born

And based on verifiable dates of *later* events, biblical scholars are able to trace *backwards* to pinpoint the year at 2166BC; That’s the time period

Key People – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph

Joseph isn’t considered one of the Patriarchs, but he’s definitely a key person

Key Places – Ur, Canaan, Egypt

All found in what is known as the Fertile Crescent (**Map**)

Main Events – Abraham’s call, Joseph’s betrayal, Jacob’s move, Abraham’s covenant

Abraham’s call referring to God’s call on his life to move from (**Map**) Ur to Haran with his father; And then, several years later, on to Canaan

And that’s where I want to pick up the epic, in Gen 12:1-5a*****

[1] Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. [2] And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. [3] I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

[4] So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. [5] And Abram took Sarai [later changed to Sarah] his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan.

That’s the *Call of Abraham*; When God said – *I will make of you a great nation* (v2)

But there was one tiny problem – Sarah was barren; And beyond childbearing years

And when Abraham brought it to God’s attention, it says in Gen 15:5-6 . . .

[5] He brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if

you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

Despite Sarah’s infertility, God said he’d make a great nation of Abraham

And after another 15 years, at least, Sarah became pregnant at the age of 90; And bore a son named Isaac

Who, as a young boy, was nearly *sacrificed* in a test of Abraham’s faith and obedience, but went on to have twin sons of his own, named Jacob and Esau

And Jacob went on to father Joseph – the one with the Technicolor dream coat

Who was so hated by his brothers, that they betrayed him and sold into slavery

Where he ended up in Egypt (**Map**), eventually caught the attention of Pharaoh, and became second in command over all the land

Meanwhile, a famine struck Canaan, so Jacob sent his sons to Egypt for food

And after a series of encounters with Joseph, they ended up moving there*****

Those are some of the main events of this time period

But perhaps the most important, is the one that still applies today; Referring to the . . .

Abrahamic Covenant

That’s the main event of *all* main events, and I want to spend some time talking about it B/c it’s not only still operative, but widely misunderstood; Gen 17:1-8

[17:1] When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless [that was Abram’s end of the bargain], [2] that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.” [3] Then Abram fell on his face [his first act of obedience]. And God said to him, [4] “Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. [5] No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations [that’s what Abraham means]. [6] I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you.

[7] And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. [8] And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.”

It’s a promise of blessing, people, relationship, and land

Initially made to Abraham and his *biological* descendants, but now applied to those who believe in Jesus, Jew and Gentile alike

And I want you to see how; There are 6 parts; Starting with the fact that . . .

It was made with Abraham (Gen 17:1-8)

Several different times, in Gen 12, 15, and 17 – God confirms it; I’m making a covenant with you and your offspring; Forever; And then reiterates it again in Gen 22:18

Saying – *In your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed*

That’s a key verse that we’ll come back to later

2nd . . .

It was fulfilled by Joshua (Josh 21:43,45; 1 Kings 4:21)

God had promised to form a people group, be their God, and give them land; And he did

600 years after the covenant was made, the Israelites entered the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua; And it says in **Joshua 21:43** . . .

[43] Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there.

And then in **v45** – *Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.*

So the Abrahamic covenant was fulfilled by Joshua

And 500 years after *that*, it was still in force under Solomon; **1 Kings 4:21** says that . . .
Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt

Just like it says in Gen 15:18 – *The Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates”******

Unfortunately, that’s where it ended; At least for the Israelites; B/c . . .

It was withdrawn through Isaiah (Is 5:5-7)

200 years after Solomon, God withdrew his covenant with the *Israelites*, due to their disobedience

It’s found in **Isaiah 5:5-7**, where God says . . .

And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard [referring to the house of Israel; those to whom and for whom the covenant was initially made]. I will remove its hedge [i.e. the protection of my people and land], and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it [no more blessing]. For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting [his planting in the land]; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!

He looked for covenant *keepers*, and found covenant breakers

So he withdrew his blessing; He ceased to make them fruitful, and removed them from the land; Just as he warned in Dt 28:63, and just like what happened 125 years later They failed to obey, so he withdrew his covenant with them

➤ Now, you might be thinking – “Wait a minute; Aren’t his covenant promises *unconditional*?” And I would say, “Yes, some of them”

Like the covenant he made with *Noah*; It’s unilaterally dependent on God and God alone to keep it; It’s *unconditional* with respect to us

And to some extent, the same is true of the covenant he made with David; Saying, *I will raise up your offspring after you . . . and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.* (2 Sam 7:11-14); It’s unilateral and unconditional

But the others, are dependent on *obedience*; Like this one with Abraham; It required the obedience of circumcision, and faithfulness to God, and righteousness

And the Mosaic covenant, the same

Even the New Covenant, the one we live under, requires obedience

But thanks be to God, since we can’t hold *up* our end of the bargain, God gave us Jesus to do it *for* us; To live a perfect *life* for us, and die a sinful *death* for us*****

So not all covenants are unconditional; And certainly not this one – the Abrahamic covenant; Which is why it was withdrawn; At least from his *physical* descendants

➤ And lest you think I’m stretching it, look at what Jesus himself says, in **Mk 12:1-12**
[1] And he [Jesus] began to speak to them in parables [them referring to the scribes, chief priests, and elders; representatives of the people]. “A man [representing God in this parable] planted a vineyard [don’t miss the connection; he’s referring to the house of Israel; those to whom and for whom the Abrahamic covenant was initially made] and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower [IOW he provided for it and blessed it], and leased it to tenants [people who weren’t necessarily his own] and went into another country [he let some time pass].

[2] When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. [3] And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. [4] Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. [5] And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed [referring to the prophets of old].

[6] He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ [7] But those tenants [the people who were occupying the land] said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ [8] And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.

[9] What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. [10] Have you not read this Scripture: “‘The stone that the builders rejected [referring to himself] has become the cornerstone; [11] this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?” [God withdrew the covenant]

[12] And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So they left him and went away.

What God alluded to in Isaiah 5, Jesus made explicit in Mark 12

That he withdrew his blessing of protection and provision and land from the people of Israel, b/c they didn’t obey, and would reject his Son

IOW the Abrahamic covenant was withdrawn from his physical descendants

Which is why the Jews have no *divine right* to the land; Even today

But thankfully that’s not the *end* of the story; B/c the covenant wasn’t just intended for them

It was intended for Jesus (Gal 3:16)

True; That’s what **Gal 3:16** says – *Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say [referring to Gen 22:18], “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ.*

IOW the promises of Gen 12, and 15, and 17, and 22 – were *made* to Abraham, and *intended* for Jesus

The promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring . . . who is Christ.

Meaning that he is the one who God ultimately had in mind, when he said . . .

“I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. [3] I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Is there any better or greater fit to those verses, than Jesus? I think not*****

And Paul was explicit about it; Jesus is the one God ultimately had in mind when he promised a blessing of land, protection, provision, and everything else; It’s all his

And the beautiful thing is, it's ours as well; By virtue of our faith in him

It was extended to believers (Gal 3:29)

The Abrahamic Covenant has been extended to those who *believe* in Jesus

Like Paul says in **Gal 3:29**

If you are Christ's [if you're a part of his family], *then you are Abraham's offspring* [regardless of your lineage], *heirs according to promise.*

The promise of what? Blessing, community, relationship, everything

By virtue of our faith in Jesus, we get everything Abraham does; Like it says a few verses earlier in **Gal 3:7,9**

Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham [not those of lineage or blood, but faith] . . . *So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.*

So the covenant in Gen 17 was *made* with Abraham, *fulfilled* by Joshua, *withdrawn* through Isaiah, *intended* for Jesus, and *extended* to believers*****

He had *us* in mind when he spoke to Abraham; He did it for us

But there's one more aspect regarding the land, that you also can't miss

It was expanded to the earth (Mt 5:5)

No longer is it just the land of Canaan that's ours in Christ, but the whole earth

In Mt 5:5 Jesus says – *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.* Not just the land of Israel, but the whole thing; It's only a matter of time

B/c the earth is the Lord's and everything in it

And when we rule and reign with him in the millennium, after his return – there won't be any mistaking that the earth is *ours* as well

Not that we're going to take it by *force*, but love; *Jesus* is going to take care of the force part the Bible says; We're going to be ambassadors of love

Just like now; Only better; Perfect; Especially so on the *new* earth as Rev 21 says

All of which makes the *physical* aspects of the Abrahamic Covenant, like the land, passé; They're of no consequence

They've not only been fulfilled in temporal terms, but the spiritual is more important

Which means that the Abrahamic covenant is no longer about a geographic place here on earth, in the land of Israel, but about the place he's preparing in *heaven* (**Summary**)

It was *made* with Abraham, *fulfilled* by Joshua, *withdrawn* through Isaiah, *intended* for Jesus, *extended* to believers, and *expanded* to the earth

Which leads us to **God's Purpose(s)**; And the first, was . . .

To establish a people for himself

When God called Abraham, he was making a new people group; A people set apart for his purposes, and devoted to his ways

A people *through* whom he could show the nations his power and sovereignty

And a people *in* whom he could carry out his epic work of redemption

That's the 1st purpose

The 2nd, is . . .

To show he's firmly in control

One of the most moving moments in this period comes in Gen 50:19-20

Joseph's brothers are in Egypt, fearing his revenge after the death of their father Jacob, and he says to them . . .

Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? [Is it my right to judge and inflict vengeance?] *As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.*

Including the many people who have life *today*, by virtue of *Jesus*; Whose family tree included the Patriarchs

You meant evil against me [Joseph said], *but God meant it for good*

Showing that he's firmly in control, even in the worst of situations

Our Response – Trust

When God called Abraham, he didn't tell him all the steps of the journey

Abraham simply believed God, stepped out in faith, and trusted him

And the same was true of *Isaac's* near sacrifice – he obeyed, and trusted God to provide

And so did Jacob in moving to Egypt; And Joseph in *living* right

They trusted the God who called, and led, and commanded

And we can too; And should (**Summary**)

When he calls, trust; When you're not sure of the end from the beginning, trust

When you're not sure of the journey, trust

When you're not sure of the circumstances, trust

When evil strikes at the hands of ungodly people – trust him

When the way seems narrow – only trust him, only trust him; Just like the Patriarchs

Pray – Thank you for all you've done, and all you do; We are so grateful to be called children of Abraham by virtue of our faith in Jesus; And so blessed to be the recipients of such massive promises

Receive our tithes and offerings now, for the work of your *kingdom*, and the sake of your glory