

Part 2: Our Forefathers



Abraham and Isaac



Background Notes -

PURPOSE: To tell the story of the founding of God's chosen people through the man Abraham and his descendants Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Also to introduce early some of their important practices like circumcision, priesthood, proper marriages and sacrifices. Finally, teaches that God's providence thwarts human plots, turning malice into advantage.

AUTHOR: This narrative incorporates J, E, D, and P (see Part 1).

DATES DESCRIBED: Abraham arrived in Canaan around 1850 BC, and the first Israelites ended up in Egypt around 1700 BC.

STYLE: Unlike the mythological beginnings which were folkloristic in style (*not* to be confused with fiction!), the stories of the patriarchs are told in a narrative style interrupted by direct address (dialogue with God) whenever a religious or ethical implication is needed.



Opening Quotes -

“Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine, and being a priest of God Most High, blessed Abram...” Gn 14:18

“Abraham put his faith in the Lord, who credited it to him as an act of righteousness.” Gn 15:6

“You shall name him Ishmael... a wild donkey of a man he will be, in defiance of his kinsmen.” Gn 16:11

“Looking up, he saw three men standing nearby.” Gn 18:2

“Will you sweep away the innocent with the guilty?” Gn 18:23

“‘Son,’ Abraham answered, ‘God himself will provide the sheep for the holocaust.’” Gn 22:8

“I swear by myself, declares the Lord, I will bless you abundantly...and in your descendant all the nations of the earth shall find blessing.” Gn 22:17

“Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a fertile field which Yahweh has blessed.” Gn 27:27

“To give our sister to an uncircumcised man would be a disgrace for all your males.” Gn 34:14

“The evil you planned to do me has by God's design been turned to good.” Gn 50:20

the BIG PICTURE		← : LAW, History, Writings, Prophets		← : key covenants in our Father's plan	
12 Periods ▼		Plot ▼	Other books related to period ▼		stories in each period ▼
BC	🌐 THE BEGINNINGS	GN 1-11	Ps 8, 104		Creation, Adam & Eve, Cain & Abel, Noah's ark, Tower of Babel
1850	👤 THE PATRIARCHS	GN 12-50			Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), Joseph, Melchizedek
1250	⚠️ EXODUS FROM EGYPT	EX			Moses, the burning bush, the plagues, passover, exodus
1200	♣️ JOURNEY TO CANAAN	NM, Jos	LV, DT		Sinai desert, 10 commandments, Levites, Law, Joshua
1100	👤 THE JUDGE CYCLE	Jg	Ruth		12 tribes, Deborah, Gideon, Samson, Samuel
1030	👑 KINGS & PROPHETS	1 & 2 S	1 Ch, Ps, Prov		Saul, David, Solomon, Jerusalem, the Temple
1000	🏰 THE DIVIDED KINGDOM	1 Kg	2 Ch, Prov, Ecc, Songs		Israel (N), Judah (S), Elijah & Elisha, Isaiah, Assyrian exile
721 587	🌀 BABYLONIAN EXILE	2 Kg	2 Ch, Tob, Hos, Am, Hab, Is, Jer, Lam, Jl, Mic, Zp, Jon, Nah, Ob, Ez, Dan, Bar		Babylonians, "major" prophets, Isaiah (to Israel), Jeremiah (to Jerusalem), Ezekiel (to Exiles)
538	⚙️ THE RESTORATION	Ezr, Neh	Est, Judith, Hag, Zech, Mal, Job		Cyrus, 2 nd temple, 2 nd Law, "minor" prophets, new writings
163 63	🕯️ THE REPURIFICATION	1 Mac	Dn, 2Mac, Sirach, Wisdom		Greeks, Maccabean revolt, Hasmonean Dynasty, Romans, Jewish sects (Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, Essenes)
AD	✝️ JESUS CHRIST	LK	MT, MK, JN		Incarnation, Good News, New Law, Cross & Resurrection
33 70	🕯️ APOSTOLIC CHURCH	Acts	Rm, 1&2Co, Ga, Ep, Phil, Col, 1&2Th, 1&2 Tm, Ti, Phm, Hb, Ja, 1P, 2P, 1,2&3J, Jd, Rv		Pentecost, council, journeys, epistles, Body/Bride of Christ



The Story of Part 2: Our Forefathers



There were many false gods being worshipped in Mesopotamia when Yahweh, the one true God, called the old childless man **Abram** to become the forefather of his chosen people. God told him to leave his country Haran and go to Canaan, a land promised to him and his future progeny. One day after battle with five kings, **Melchizedek**, king of Salem and “priest of the Most High God,” mysteriously appeared and blessed Abram in God’s name with bread and wine. God renamed Abram to Abraham, “father of many nations,” and told him that all nations would be blessed through him.

One day God visited Abraham in the form of three men, or angels. One stayed with him and the other two went to pronounce destruction on the city of Sodom if the immorality that people had cried to God about was true. After the two angels found the men of the town wanting to have sex even with them, they pulled Abraham’s nephew Lot and his family out of Sodom quickly, as fire and brimstone destroyed the town. Lot’s wife turned around to look and was turned into salt.

Abraham had asked God if the city would be spared if as few as ten innocent people lived there. God assured them that yes, the whole city would be spared. (A few centuries later the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel taught that even if one innocent person was found, the entire city would have been saved.) Abraham had only asked God if ten innocent people were found, afraid that he might be encroaching on God’s prerogatives. Abraham considered himself insignificant before God, and God declared him righteous because of his strong faith.

Because they were so old, Abraham’s barren wife Sarah tried to take the matter of giving Abraham an heir into her own hands by giving him her concubine Hagar to have children with (a common practice back then). But God had a son in mind for Abraham by Sarah, and a year later, as promised, Sarah miraculously gave birth to Isaac. Ironically, God then asked Abraham to sacrifice his son as an offering! Child sacrifice was common in Canaan, and God was allowing Abraham’s faith to be tested. Abraham was about to kill his son when he was stopped by an angel of God, for he had proven his faith. God also wanted to teach the people that child sacrifice was not something he desired.

After some time Abraham’s wife Sarah died, and he buried her in some land he bought in Canaan. Isaac and this piece of land were the beginning of the fulfillment of God’s promises to Abraham of land and descendants. When Abraham died he was buried with his wife.

Abraham had sent a messenger to find a wife for Isaac. Her name was Rebecca. Isaac and Rebecca gave birth to twins, Jacob and Esau. Esau was born first, and was a hunter. Old Isaac loved Esau. Rebecca loved the second twin, Jacob, who tended more to the home. Jacob was a trickster from his youth. He tricked Esau into giving him

his birthright as firstborn (a big deal back then) for a cup of stew that Jacob knew Esau loved! When Isaac was blind and on his death bed, he was ready to pronounce the final blessing on his firstborn. Rebecca then had Jacob put on Esau’s clothing to make Isaac give the blessing to Jacob disguised as Esau. Although Isaac heard Jacob’s voice, he smelled the clothing of his favored son, and lovingly gave him the blessing. Esau was furious when he found out, but Isaac did not revoke the blessing from Jacob!

On his way back to Haran to marry his uncle’s daughter Rachel, Jacob was visited by God in a dream and was told that he would carry on the promise made to Abraham and Isaac. In Haran he was able to marry the beautiful Rachel, but only after being tricked himself by his uncle Laban into working seven years, then marrying Rachel’s sister Leah, then working another seven years before finally marrying Rachel! Jacob had children through Leah, then Leah’s slave girl, then Rachel’s slave girl, but Rachel was barren, until God finally answered her prayer, and she gave birth to Joseph.

On his way back to Canaan, God confirmed his promise to Jacob in a strange way. After Jacob stole his brother’s blessings earlier, God accepted Jacob’s persistence and allowed Jacob to wrestle his angel and even “force” a blessing from him! “Your name is no longer Jacob,” said the angel when Jacob wouldn’t let go, “but **Israel**, for you have shown your strength against God and man and have prevailed!” Jacob called for his family to abandon all other gods and accept the one true God.

After settling in Canaan, Jacob again would be deceived himself. The favorite of his sons was **Joseph** and his other sons were jealous. One day they threw him into a well and left him for dead, deceiving Jacob by telling him that Joseph had been killed by wild animals. Meanwhile some Midianites picked up Joseph, took him to Egypt and sold him as a slave.

The king of Egypt was very impressed one day when Joseph alone could interpret a dream the king had of an upcoming drought. He even made Joseph the governor of Egypt, in charge of storing reserves of food! The draught eventually hit, and famine spread everywhere, affecting people near and far, including Joseph’s father and brothers back in Canaan. His brothers came to Egypt begging for food, offering to be his slaves, fearing punishment for what they had done to him, but Joseph told them that all was forgotten, and that in fact their evildoing was all a part of God’s plan to save his people and provide for them!

Joseph and his family, the first Israelites, settled and prospered in Egypt for some time, but their destiny lay in an exodus back to Canaan, their promised land.



Defending the Faith: Islam

"Is not Islam a truer and simpler religion than Christianity, with the Koran presenting God as one and not as three? Or are Muslims really just another pagan religion destined for hell by rejecting Jesus?"

Islam, with Christianity and Judaism, is one of the three major religions of the world. How did this come to be? Islam rejected the Trinity and the Incarnation, but adopted the fundamental Judeo-Christian truth that God is one, all-powerful, and transcendent. The equality of men regardless of their class was another truth of Christianity stressed by Mohammed at a time when the Roman Empire was gone and feudalism was a way of life. This simplified monotheism and its emphasis on equality was very appealing to Arab nomads of the desert and to slaves who found their dignity, and sometimes even their freedom, by converting to Islam. This drove the followers of Mohammed in their *jihad* (holy war) against the Christians, and the Crusades would never regain all of the land conquered by the Muslims.

The initial success of Islam can be explained in practical terms by its simplified monotheism, its emphasis on the equality of men, its military might (and the prospect for land), and the Caliphs' accumulated riches during Christianity's dark ages. But the Bible gives us another reason, an earlier reason. Hagar, the slave girl who gave birth to Abraham's first son Ishmael, cried out to God after being cast out by Sarah and Abraham after Isaac was born. God did not reject Hagar but promised her that her son's descendants were also destined to become a great nation. The nations of Islam and Israel are

descended from Ishmael and Isaac, and therefore are half-brothers with a common father, Abraham. The fighting today between Palestinians and Jews over the Gaza strip is actually an ongoing family feud between half-brothers over the same piece of promised land!

As for the Koran, it is taught to be the word of Allah dictated to his prophet Mohammed. This would have set the Koran apart from all earlier holy writings had it not been for the fact that the Bible had already revealed God's words and actions in history, completed three centuries earlier. And rejecting the Trinity by insisting that God is one and not three is like insisting that a triangle is one and not three whenever someone says that a triangle is one shape with three sides. Christianity does not teach three gods (!) but one God who has *revealed* himself as three Persons. By the power of the Holy Spirit we have come to believe in Jesus Christ, the Word of the Father made visible. The same Holy Spirit through the Church teaches that God has included the Muslims in his plan of salvation, for they profess with us the faith of Abraham and adore the one, merciful God as mankind's judge on the last day (Catechism, no. 841). It is not *Christianity* that saves, but *Christ* that saves. So if a Muslim can be saved, it is only if Christ saves him when he comes to judge the living and the dead.



Expressing the Faith: El Shaddai

A song by Amy Grant using a title of God revealed to the patriarch Abraham.

***El Shaddai, El Shaddai,
El Elyonna, Adonai,
Age to age, you're still the same
by the power of the name.
El Shaddai, El Shaddai,
Erkamkana, Adonai,
we will praise and lift you high,
El Shaddai.***

*Through your love and through the ram
You saved the son of Abraham.
Through the power of your hand
turned the sea into dry land.
To the outcast on her knees
You were "the god who really sees"
and by your might, you set the children free.
(chorus)*

*Through the years you made it clear
that the time of Christ was near
though the people couldn't see
what Messiah ought to be.
Though your word contained the plan
they just would not understand.
Your most awesome work was done
through the frailty of your son.
(chorus)*

(chorus)
*...I will praise you till I die,
El Shaddai*

↗ **Next time: "Let My People Go"** ↖