

**PEOPLE OF GOD HAVE LEADERS**  
**Early Leaders in the Rise of the Nation**  
**Abraham**

**September 9, 2020**

**Completed 4 of 10 Themes**

God Saves a People

People Find God is Faithful

People Reflect Upon God

People Live in God's World

**Introduction to New Theme**

Genesis is our resource to know how the Israelites came to be in relationship with God.

Relationship took a concrete form with the call of Abram.

It continued all the way through the New Testament.

So much of the story line of the people moves along as the story of its leaders.

And twice in the New Testament there is a roll call of the Old Testament leaders.

We find it in Acts 7 (Speech by Stephen) and in Hebrews 11 (Hall of Faith).

Leaders in the Bible functioned by virtue of a special relationship to God.

They heard and obeyed the word of God.

Often the word *hear* is associated with obeying or answering.

Sometimes the leaders presented the word of God to the people.

Sometimes they led by example, as in the case of Joshua.

Greatest leaders combined both functions, as did Moses.

Greatest task of leaders was to inspire followers.

Leaders in the Bible discerned the will of God and inspired followers to know it.

**Story of Abraham (Genesis 12-25)**

We have learned that Exodus is the defining moment for the Jewish community.

It is linked closely with the history and religion of the ancestral period.

Ancestral period is covered in Genesis 12-50 and acts as the prologue to the liberating event.

Story of the start of Israel has come to us through a long process of oral and written tradition.

It has been shaped to make clear a confession of faith in the one true God.

Our narratives about the prehistory of Israel belong to the Old Epic Tradition.

It offers us some idea of how the Israelites came to be united as the people of God.

Many view the scriptural portrayal of the ancestral period as story and not as history.

Only source for our knowledge of the ancestors of Israel is the Biblical story.

It was written in a time far removed from the events described.

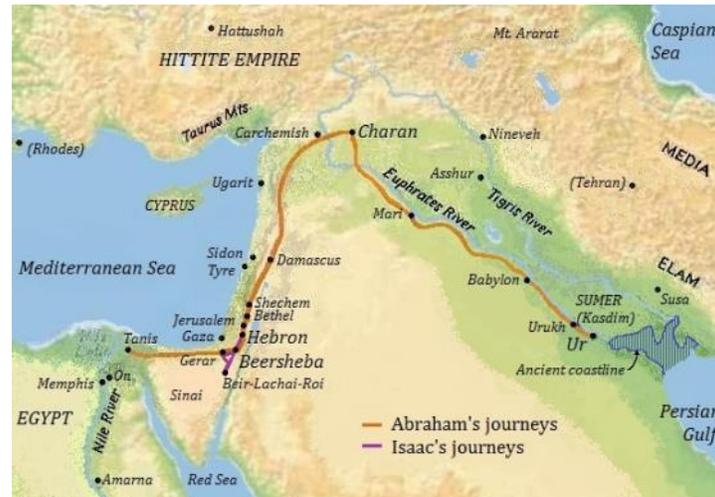
Despite this fact it is likely that the narratives reflect to some degree the life of Palestine.

Time frame would have been in the early second millennium BC (Middle Bronze Age).

Social organization was that of a clan or extended family with a chieftain at the head.

History of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob preserve the memory of clan movements.

Area in which Abraham moved was known as the Fertile Crescent.  
Ancestral history started in Ur of the Chaldeans (the southernmost part of Mesopotamia).  
Terah (the father of Abraham) moved his family from Ur to the city of Haran.  
Abraham migrated into Canaan (the earlier name of Palestine).  
He eventually settled in southern Canaan and near Hebron.



Our focus narrows down to a small town, to a single family, and to a single individual.  
At the same time the world remains very much in view.  
Downward spiral that started in Eden plunged the world into a catastrophe.  
Post-flood world was once more on the way to a negative future.  
However God did not abandon creation to the consequences of its own sins.  
Genealogies testify that life (however troubled) continued.  
Covenant God made with Noah gave the post-flood world a sign.  
Promise of God (in the shape of a rainbow) ensured the people a future.  
Shift to Abraham did not mean a new world.  
Intent of God was to reclaim the world and keep it in place.  
In the Bible we have a clear view that God was to reclaim it through the family of Abraham.

### Importance of Abraham

Descriptions below come from . . .

<https://www.whyislam.org/common-ground/place-of-abraham-in-islam-christianity-judaism/>

**In Islam:** Prophet Abraham is the friend of God and the father of Prophets – Ishmael and Isaac and the grandfather of Prophet Jacob. He is also one of the ancestors of the Prophet Muhammad. Anyone who rejects Prophet Abraham is not a true believer in Islam. Prophet Abraham plays a key role in this regard. In terms of beliefs, a Muslim must believe in all of the Prophets. This includes not just Prophet Abraham, but his sons Ishmael, Isaac, his grandson Jacob and of course his descendant Prophet Muhammad.

- Abraham settled his wife and son in the valley of Mecca according to God's order. Intent was to start a new civilization. It was from this civilization that the Prophet Mohammed was born.
- His willingness to sacrifice his beloved son, Ishmael, in order to obey God exemplifies Abraham's sincere devotion to God. The commemoration of this sacrifice is practiced with the sacrifice of an animal during Hajj and is one of the two Islamic holy days: Eid-ul-Adha.

**In Judaism:** Abraham is the father of the Jewish people. God's covenant with Abraham is expressed in the rite of circumcision. This act is called the entry into the covenant of Abraham (our father) and the name of the rite is the *berit* (the covenant). Abraham is also considered the spiritual father of anyone who converts to Judaism. At a Jewish conversion ceremony a convert is given a Hebrew name and is called a *child of Abraham our father*.

Rabbis consider Abraham to be the first monotheist.

Rabbinic literature tells a story (not in the Bible) that Terah was a maker of idols.

Abram (while still in his father's household) discerned that the idols were false gods.

He believed there was only one true God.

One night he went into his father's workshop and smashed and burned all the idols.

Rabbis concluded he was worthy of God's choosing.



### **The Call of Abram (Genesis 11:27-12:9)**

#### **Abraham as (Risk Taker) (Obedient) (Focused)**

Things to note:

Family of Abram does not come out of the blue (as some other Biblical characters).

It has deep connections to all the nations of the world.

Author does not introduce the God who speaks to Abram.

We assume that he is the God who created the world and has been engaged with the people.

Call of Abram is understood as the response of God to the dilemma created by sin and evil.

In this initial encounter between God and Abram the promise is pure grace.

And the promise is three-fold –

Descendants (I will make of you a great nation)

Land (to your offspring I will give this land)

Blessing (I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing)

God promises blessings to Abram but not because Abram did anything to deserve it.  
Neither is it for the sake of Abram himself.  
He is blessed to be a blessing for the sake of the whole world.  
Abraham and his descendants are to be the conduits of blessing for all the families of the earth.

Three-fold promise to Abraham continues to reverberate throughout Scripture.  
But there is tension in the promise –  
Abram and Sarai wait many long years for a son.  
Only piece of the Promised Land that Abraham ever possessed was the burial plot for Sarah.  
Yet Abraham believed in the promises of God.  
He left his father and his homeland and went to the place that God showed him.  
He believed in the promise of a son even when he and Sarah devised another way to have a child.  
He stood ready to sacrifice his son, Isaac.

Promise also bound God to Abraham and his descendants.  
Promise bound God inextricably to his family and to the nation that would soon develop.  
It sustained Abraham and Sarah and their descendants in faith even when not fulfilled for them.  
God bound himself to this people forever.

### **Abram and Sarai in Egypt (Genesis 12:10-20)**

#### **Abraham as (Lacking in Integrity)**

A patriarch would often visit a foreign land in the company of his wife.  
Fearing that her beauty might become a source of danger the man resorted to subterfuge.  
He would pass himself off as the brother of the woman.  
Similar accounts are found in Genesis 20:1-18 and Genesis 26:6-11 (this time it is Isaac).

Custom was unique to Hurrian society.  
On Palestinian soil these customs gradually lost their original meaning.  
Biblical tradition retained the details but not their importance.  
In Hurrian society the marriage was strongest when the wife had legal status as sister.  
A man would sometimes marry a girl and adopt her at the same time as his sister.  
It would be two separate steps recorded in independent legal documents.  
Violations of these sister arrangements were punished more severely than breaches of marriage.  
Biblical tradition used it to mark the cherished social standing of the wives.  
Background guaranteed the purity of the wife's descendants.  
Ultimate purpose of Biblical genealogies was to establish the superior strain of the life-line.

Some scholars conclude that this story of Abram and Sarai prefigures the experience of Israel.  
Yet in this case the author portrays the Egyptians in a more positive light.  
Egyptians are not the embodiment of evil.

### **Genesis 13**

#### **Abraham as (Negotiator)**

Lot was brought up at first by this grandfather, Terah.  
Task to take care of Lot was then taken over by Abram.  
Abram went on to treat his nephew with unfailing attentiveness and tenderness.

Need developed for them to part ways.

Each required a large grazing and watering area for their respective herds.

Choice of territory rested with the elder (Abram) but he generously ceded this right to Lot.

Lot took advantage of this unforeseen opportunity and picked the greener and richer portion.

Irony was that it would turn into what we know as Sodom and Gomorrah.



## **Genesis 15**

### **Abraham as (Patient) (Trusting)**

Do not be afraid (Hebrew: al-tira) is a phrase that means *You are about to hear good news!*

We hear a second promise from God and the response from Abram is to lament.

Abram cried out in pain because he and Sarai were still childless.

He reminded God of the divine promises in Genesis 12.

God responded by renewing the promise of many descendants.

In fact, God responded by expanding the promise!

And Abram trusted God.

Promise was made forever bound by a ritual that literally *cut a covenant*.

One making the covenant commitment walked down the middle between the animals cut in half.

It was the Lord who cut a covenant with Abram.

Promise made to Abram was so absolute that God would die rather than break the promise.

Promise eventually led to the death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Faithful to creation, to Abraham and Sarah, and to David Jesus died so that we would have life.

Note: In Jeremiah 34 the slave-owning Judeans set their slaves free using this ritual.

Slaves were set free when Jerusalem was under siege by the Babylonian armies.

When the army departed the slave-owners re-slaved the free people.

Slave owners proved faithless to the covenant they had cut which displeased the Lord.

## **Genesis 22**

### **Abraham as (Unswerving Faith)**

A great deal has happened between Genesis 12 and Genesis 22.

We are to read this story with this entire history in mind.

Story is the climax of all the events that have preceded it.

Throughout the narrative of his life, the pressing question is whether Abram will produce a son.

As readers we are relieved when Sarah finally gives birth to Isaac.

God affirmed that this was the one through whom his promise would be realized.

Throughout these chapters we have seen the faith of Abraham waver.  
In Genesis 12 Abraham responded to God without hesitation.  
In Genesis 15 Abraham believed the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness.  
But at other times Abraham acted in ways that suggested doubt.  
We go back to the time that he tried to pass off his wife as his sister.  
And so worried about producing an heir he slept with a woman other than his wife.  
And then he laughed when God told him that Sarah would bear a child in their old age.  
Indications throughout that Abraham still did not quite trust God to accomplish his promises.  
Was God a God of his word?

God asked Abraham to demonstrate his faith by trusting God with his future.  
Genesis 22 is described as a test which implies God had no intention of going through it.  
Test was to force Abraham to face his own conflicted and divided loyalties.  
Test served its purpose and left an indelible mark on both God and Abraham.  
Abraham knew that life with God was a gift and his blessings were freely bestowed.  
God also learned that Abraham feared him.  
It is the first time the narrator described Abraham in this way.  
Prior to this the text depicted Abraham as listening to and obeying God.  
In Genesis 22:12 God experienced from Abraham respect, awe, and a healthy dose of fear.

Something changed between Abraham and God that day.  
Abraham learned to trust and fear God.  
God proved that he could be trusted.  
Son of Abraham would be spared but God would give up his own Son to death.  
It would fulfill what God started in Abraham –  
Restoration of blessing to the nations and to the world.  
Story invites us to a posture of fear and awe as well as profound gratitude to God.  
God is faithful to his covenant promises all the way through our redemption.

### **Assignment for September 16**

Story of Isaac and Jacob  
Read Genesis 26-35

