

## Bible History Survey

### Part III: The Patriarchs

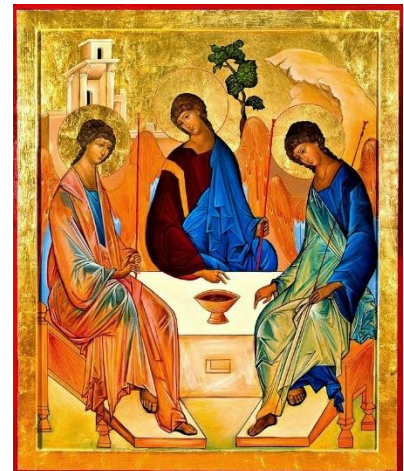
#### 1. Abraham (2166–1991 BC): Genesis 12:1–25:18

##### a. God's call of Abram: several promises (12:1–7):

- Land of Canaan (“claims” the land for the worship of the true God with altars, moving southward: vv. 7, 8; 13:18)
- Great nation
- Bless Abram
- Bless those who bless him
- Curse those who curse him
- All nations of the earth blessed in him

##### b. Repeated and confirmed

- 13:14–17
  - ◆ land
  - ◆ descendants numerous as the dust
- 15 (introduced with prophetic language)
  - ◆ a son from Abram's own body
  - ◆ descendants numerous as the stars
  - ◆ land
  - ◆ covenant cut, but confirmed by God alone
- 17
  - ◆ Perpetual covenant with him and his seed
  - ◆ Father of many nations and future kings – name change
  - ◆ Commitment to Abraham and his seed to be their God
  - ◆ Perpetual possession of the land
  - ◆ Circumcision as the sign of the covenant
- 18:
  - ◆ Christophany
  - ◆ promise of a son through Sarah in a year



##### c. Threats

- King of Egypt (12) and Gerar (20)
- Sarah and Hagar (16 and 21)
- The near-sacrifice of Isaac at Mor-iah (22)



d. Deaths of Sarah (23) & Abraham (25): Sarah at age 127, Abraham at age 175, buried in the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron (present site occupied by a combination mosque and synagogue).



- e. The Covenant: The worldview of the people of Isarel was shaped by the three main covenants God made in the Old Testament: the Abrahamic, the Sinaitic/Mosaic, and the Davidic. Jews were the physical descendants of *Abraham* who studied and lived according to the Law of *Moses*, and hoped for the Son of *David*, the Messiah. These are important covenants for Christians as well, for they are the spiritual descendants of Abraham, trusting in Jesus who lived according to the Law of Moses and was a prophet like him, and is the eternal King, the Son of David, who reigns over God's people forever.

- Primary spiritual/messianic blessings

♦ The Seed: Christ

The Abrahamic covenant appears repeatedly in Scripture. Particularly poignant is the repetition of the covenant after Abraham nearly sacrificed his son Isaac:

**“By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of his enemies, and *in your offspring* shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice”** (Gen 22:16–18).

The Hebrew word for “descendants” and “offspring” is the same, זֶרַע *zera'* “seed.” Sometimes the word is used collectively, that is, the entire group of many, and sometimes it is used in a singular sense, that is, of one particular offspring. The italicized word in the quotation above should be understood in the singular sense. This one descendant of Abraham is a source of blessing to *all nations*, so He must by God at the same time He is Abraham's offspring. This is how Scripture interprets Scripture. St. Paul writes: **“the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ”** (Gal 3:16).

Further confirmation of the messianic interpretation of the Abrahamic Covenant is provided by Zechariah's song, the *Benedictus*. Zechariah rejoices that his son John the Baptist will be the prophet to herald the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant by preparing the way of Jesus: **“the Lord...has raised up a horn of salvation...to remember His holy covenant, the oath that He swore to our father Abraham”** (Lk 1:68–73). Later in His ministry, Jesus taught that Abraham was aware of the full meaning of the covenant: **“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day: and he saw it, and was glad”** (Jn 8:56).

♦ Numerous descendants: the holy Church

The chosen people of God are not limited to a particular group of descendants of Abraham, but those who are Abraham's children by faith, believing in the One in whom Abraham believed. Those who are bodily descended from Abraham but who reject the Christ are not true sons of Abraham, but of the devil.

But when [John] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham” (Matt 3:7–9). They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are doing the works your father did...You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires” (Jn 8:39 – 41, 44).

Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith....if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise (Gal 3:7–9, 29 see also 4:21–31).

♦ The inheritance: heaven

The New Testament explains that the “promised land” or the “inheritance” was never only the land of Canaan, but always included the ultimate inheritance of heaven:

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. ... he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, ... he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. ....[he] died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.... they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city (Heb 11:8–16).

**“I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”** (Matt 8:11–12).

• Derivative physical blessings

♦ The seed

1. Through Sarah: Isaac, father of Israel and Edom
2. Through Hagar: Ishamel, father of twelve Arab tribes
3. Through Keturah: six Arab tribes

◆ The inheritance of Canaan

2. Isaac (2066–1886 BC): (21:1–8; 22; 24; 25:19–26; 26)

- Least narrative given of all the patriarchs
- Marries Rebekah at age 40; she is barren for 20 years.
- Promise given to Abraham given to Isaac at Beersheba (26:23–25), the first plot of land that Abraham owned (see 21:33)

3. Jacob's (2006–1859 BC) struggle for the blessing (God exalts the humble): 25:19–36:43

- Twins in womb (25:19–26): Promise given to Jacob
  - Esau: “hairy”
  - Jacob: “he grasps the heel/deceives”
- Birthright (25:29–34): the worldly inheritance of possessions
- Father's blessing (27:1–45): the messianic promise
- Jacob flees to his mother's family
  - Told to take a wife from his mother's family, after his father's example
  - Ladder at Bethel (28; see John 1:49–51)
  - Labors seven years for Rachel, deceived by Laban and married to Leah, labors another seven for Rachel
  - Jacob's children (29 & 30): The Messiah will come not from the beautiful woman, but the one who was plain/rejected.

• Children of Jacob:

- |                                   |                                 |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1) <b>Leah:</b>                   | 3) <b>Zilpah</b> (Leah's maid): |
| Reuben – lay with Bilhah          | Gad                             |
| (see 35:22; 49:4)                 | Asher                           |
| Simeon – ch 34                    |                                 |
| Levi – ch 34                      | 4) <b>Leah:</b>                 |
| Judah                             | Issachar                        |
|                                   |                                 |
| 2) <b>Bilhah</b> (Rachel's maid): | Zebulun                         |
| Dan                               | Dinah                           |
| Naphtali                          |                                 |
|                                   | 5) <b>Rachel:</b>               |
|                                   | Joseph                          |
|                                   | Benjamin                        |

- Wrestling with God (32:24–32), renamed Israel “contends/strives God” (see also 35:10) → often taken as referring to the struggle at Peniel. Perhaps referring to what God will now do *for* Jacob and his descendants (compare with Abraham's name change): “God contends *for*” (Josh 5:13–14)

- God's blessing (28:10–17) with the repetition of God's blessings to Abraham and Isaac in 35:9–12

### 3. Blessing of Jacob's family: 37–50

- Disruption by favoritism and hatred (37:3–4)
  - Jacob loves the firstborn of his beloved Rachel
- Blessing of Joseph (39:2–6, 21–23)
- The providence of God (45:5–8; 50:19–20)
- The blessing of the 12 sons (49:2–27)
  - Blessing for Judah (49:8–10)
    - Tamar (ch 38)
    - Judah as intercessor and substitute (ch 44)
      - Confession of sin (v. 16)
      - Love for his father and plea for his sake
      - Offers to stay as substitute for Benjamin (compare with Judah's earlier proposal to sell Joseph 37:26–27).

### 4. Transmission of God's blessing to Abraham and his seed through His word of promise

- Apart from his family and their ancestors
- Apart from his possession of land
- Apart from natural fertility in procreation
- Apart from the law of primogeniture
- Apart from human plans and desires
- Despite human sin

### G. Main Themes

- God as the creator of His people Israel
- Power of God's gracious promises in creation and Israel's history
- God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants
- Operation of God's blessing in a fallen world through Abraham's descendants
- Origin of Israel's sanctuaries at places where God appeared to the Patriarchs
- God's hidden providence that brings good out of evil in human affairs

### H. Purpose of Genesis: a book of beginnings that shows

- How Israel was created and upheld by God's word with its performative commands and promises
- How the blessing of God works constructively even in a fallen world
- Israel's place in the world and its relationship with other nations
- How the Israelites came to live in Egypt