



# Genesis

## Beginnings

Week 3  
Chapters 12 – 17

Call, Covenant, and Child

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## *The Bible as a six-act unfinished play!*

*Act One*      *Act Two*      *Act Three*

Genesis will take us  
well into Act 3!

Creation → Fall → Israel →

*Act Four*      *Act Five*      *Act Six*

Jesus → The church → Renewal of creation

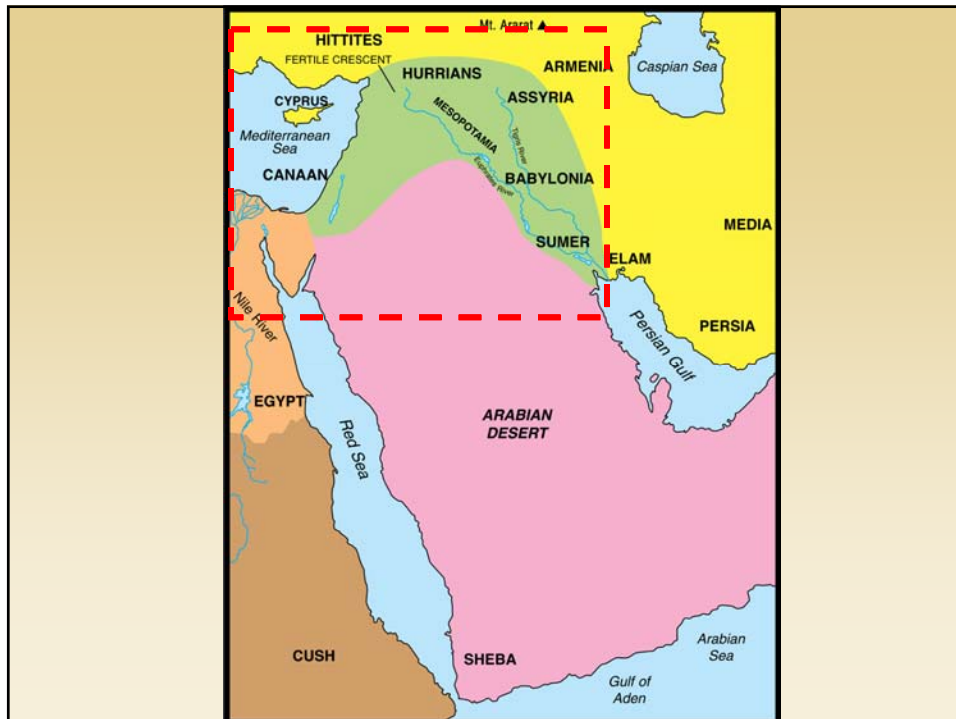
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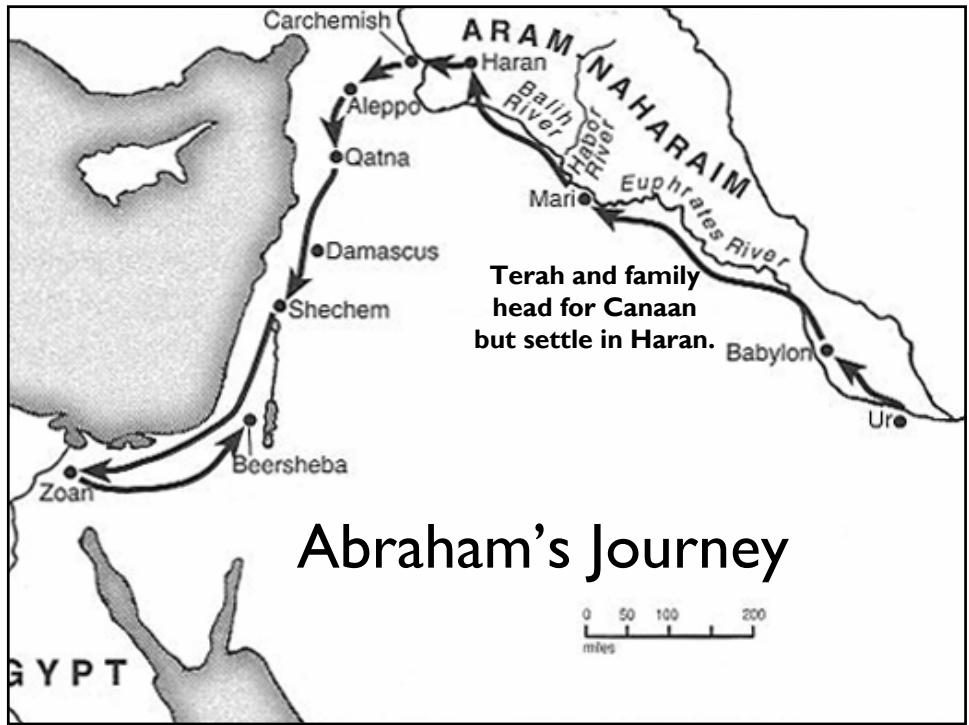
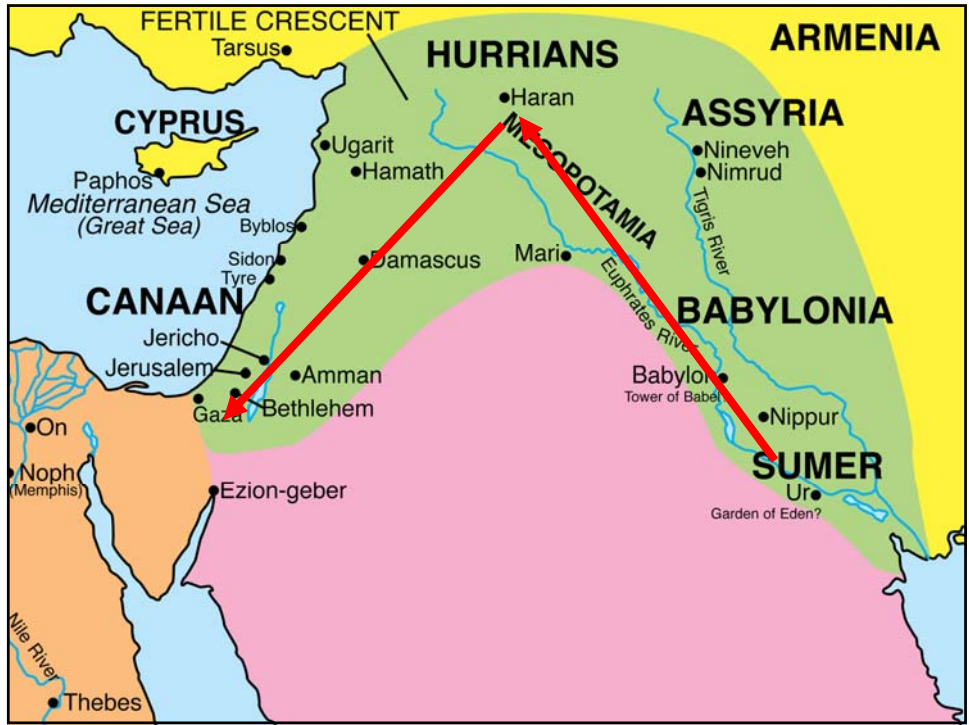


## The Time of the Patriarchs

- ❖ Though Abraham is linked to Noah genealogically (11:10-27), the nature of the narrative now changes. We embark on a journey through the ancient Near East – its peoples, its cities, its customs, its gods.
  - Though archaeology will likely never find a trace of Abraham, the more we have learned about customs and law and languages of Abraham's day, the more clear it is that the stories of the Patriarchs come from those times and are not a creation of a later day.
- ❖ Abram lived about 2000 BC. By Abram's day, great civilizations had risen and fallen – the Sumerians, the Akkadians, and so on. Egypt was in its twelfth dynasty by 2000BC. Hammurabi was a rough contemporary of Abraham. We've found traces of a town on the site of Jericho dating to 7000BC!
- ❖ These civilizations produced great art, culture, and architecture but they lacked a sense of history and progress. Their world was like a wheel, not really coming from anywhere or going anywhere. But, beginning with Abraham, God set about to reshape worldviews – there is history and purpose, focused upon the God-Who-Acts.
  - Thomas Cahill's *The Gifts of the Jews* is great on this.

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## God calls – the decisive journey (12:1-9)

- ❖ God now sets about to form a people, through whom God will redeem the world and reconcile humanity to himself. This begins with the call of a single man – Abram, son of Terah.
- ❖ Abram is called by God to leave a lot, not a little. He is leaving family and home, but Abram is obedient.
  - What promises are made! This covenant summarizes God’s plan – all peoples will be blessed through Abram!
  - Note God’s promises of a *land*. This promise is still very much on the political scene today. There were already people on the land when God promised it to Abram and his descendents. God also promises a *people*.
  - Five times in 2 verses, God blesses. But those who turn on Abram will be cursed.
- ❖ So Abram heads south to Canaan – a well-populated and established land. It was as strategic then as it is now. He goes with Sarai (his wife) and Lot (his nephew) and probably hundreds of persons in their community. In Chapter 14, Abram is able to pull together hundreds of fighters.
  - East of Bethel, Abram “pitches a tent” and stakes his claim to the land through his worship of God.

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## Abram in danger (12:10-13:1)

- ❖ This story seems like a counterpoint to the obedience and faith that we’ve already seen from Abraham.
- ❖ He bails out on the Promised Land and takes off for Egypt. We can’t be sure why, but given what happens, it doesn’t seem like God sent him! But still, God will work with what he’s got.
- ❖ With brutal disregard for Sarai, Abram offers her up to Pharaoh after making sure their story is straight so he is safe.
  - This story is one example of many from the Bible where we are told the unvarnished truth, even if it is a story of faithlessness and foolish choices.
  - Why does God afflict Pharaoh? The story offers no explanation. But it is clear to Pharaoh that something, *someone*, powerful is at work with Abram. Already, God is seen as more powerful than Pharaoh even though he has never heard of God.
  - Abram is shamed by the Pharaoh! Pharaoh allows Abram to leave with all his “stuff.”

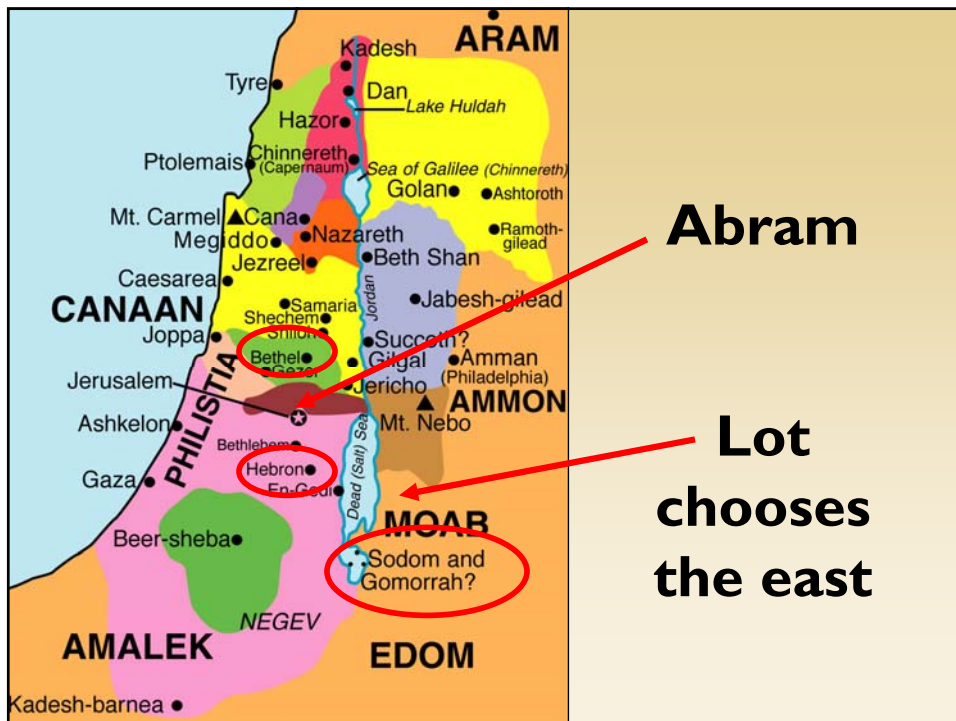
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## Be separate (13:2–18)

- ❖ What a contrast to the previous story!
- ❖ Lot has been with Abram and the two are prosperous and attracting the attention of their neighbors. It is even hard for their flocks to pasture on the same hillsides.
- ❖ Selflessly, Abram lets Lot choose whether he wants to head east or west. He grabs the fertile lands of the Jordan River valley.
- ❖ Abram turns to the west, to Canaan. God reiterates his promises to Abram. Lot may have taken what seems to be the best, but Abram has God's blessing.
  - What a grand restatement and expansion of God's earlier blessing.
- ❖ Abram heads south to Mamre at Hebron.

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## **A just war? (Genesis 14)**

- ❖ Foreign kings invade the lands Lot settled in. Lot and his family are swept up by the conquerors. Abram rides to the rescue, defeating the foreign kings and saving the local kings.
- ❖ Melchizedek means “king of righteousness.” Salem means “peace.” He is clearly very important and is the priest of the “Most High God” (“*el elyon*”). This is all peculiar and very difficult to interpret. There isn’t much here to help us understand the writer of Hebrew’s references to Melchizedek.
- ❖ Abram offers a tithe to Melchizedek – the obligation of a subordinate to a superior.
- ❖ Abram refuses the offer of the King of Sodom, choosing to rely on God rather than rely on the wealth of Sodom. The wisdom of his choice will be borne out in the next chapter.

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## **A sovereign protector, a man of faith (Genesis 15)**

- ❖ God promises. Abram protests. God responds. Abram accepts.
  - God comes to Abram to reassure him that God is his protector. But he has no children – how can the covenant be kept? God reiterates the promise. And Abram believes. He trusts that God is faithful and Abram’s trust/faith makes him right with God. See Romans 4:3.
  - Abram *will* have an heir. They *will* have the land – but not for a very long time. A delay is not a denial of the promise.
- ❖ God instructs Abram to make an ancient ritual. God (the firepot and blazing torch) passes through the middle of the sacrifices -- not Abram, only God. Abram is a *passive* observer of what God is covenanting to do.
  - The sign of this covenant will be circumcision of eight-day old babies, who can only be passive.

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## **Marital stress & a birth (Genesis 16)**

- ❖ There is no need to be too hard on Sarai for taking matters into her own hands. God *could* work through her in this way. Sarai's plan was socially acceptable. She would have legal rights to the child.
  - Still, as events move forward we learn that Abram and Sarai don't really believe that Sarai will bear a child. This is a story about a lack of faith.
- ❖ When social disruption follows, Abram washes his hands of it and Hagar flees. It is God who intervenes, who reopens an issue that seems closed.
  - An angel of the Lord meets her, promises that she will be the mother of a multitude, and tells her to turn around and go back.
  - Note that the angel does not promise that all nations will be blessed through her child, to be named Ishmael ("God hears"). This is a blessing for the child but not the Abrahamic blessing. Yet again, God's grace extends even to those who will be on the "outside."
  - Hagar names God!
- ❖ Abram names the boy, Ishmael, endorsing Hagar's revelation. Sarai does not adopt the child as her own.

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## **New names and a sign of covenant (Genesis 17)**

- ❖ God's promise to Abraham (meaning "father of many is (1) linked to creation ("fruitful"), (2) royal, and (3) eternal. They belong to each other. Abram is expected to be faithful and blameless, *walking before God* (in God's presence).
- ❖ This is God's work, so the sign is covenant is purely "God-speaking" – circumcision for all males at eight days. Infants cannot respond.
  - It is to encompass all the males in the household, born and bought. Circumcision will graft slaves into the family.
- ❖ Sarai will yet bear a son, to be named Isaac. Abram's laughter is a bit like the blindness of Jesus' disciples. It is as if it is all too much to grasp.
  - Ishmael will be blessed but the covenant will pass through Isaac.

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## ***Where is Jesus in this?***

- ❖ God's covenant with Abraham will reach its fulfillment in Jesus. Jesus' faithfulness to his own vocation is the proof of God's faithfulness to the covenants that God makes.
  - No promise of God is going to come up empty, even though we may not live until its fulfillment. Abraham doesn't!
- ❖ Paul builds upon Abraham's faithfulness (15:8) to drive home his point that we are all made right with God (righteous) through faith. It is Abraham's faith that made him right with God and not anything that he did. See Romans 4.
- ❖ Obedience and good works are the enactment, the incarnation of faith. Good works are what makes continuing faith possible. God expected Abraham to be obedient, faithful, and blameless – to be mature and whole. Jesus expects no less of us.