

Reading the OT
Week 3

The Patriarchs

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Abraham (c. 2000 B.C.)

Left Ur with his family

His father settled in Haran and died there (11:32).



PATRIARCHAL RELIGION

(All quotations taken from the NIV Cultural Backgrounds Bible)

In Mesopotamia there arose around this time the first concept of a "personal god."

In this period people began to see themselves in a personal relationship with a family god who undertook the divine sponsorship of the family. As a result, most family worship was directed to this god with the expectation that protection and guidance would be provided.

In Mesopotamia this god came to be known as the "god of the father(s)"—a description also used in Genesis. A personal god was not viewed as the only god, but was the god most directly involved with the family and the one that was the focus of most of the routine religious activity. Devotion to this deity was extended in the family from generation to generation, and as such was inherited rather than chosen. Though the major gods could on occasion serve as a personal god, more typically a personal god was a lower-echelon deity in terms of rank within the pantheon. Only in Israel did a personal God eventually become the God of a nation.

The Biblical text is clear on the point that Abram comes from a family that is not monotheistic (see Jos 24:2, 14).

Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your ancestors, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods. But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the Euphrates and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants.

Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

We must assume that he was brought up sharing the polytheistic beliefs of the ancient world. In this type of system the gods are connected with the forces of nature and show themselves through natural phenomena.

COVENANT

Gen 12:1-3, 15:18

The monotheistic worship of Yahweh is a clear distinctive for Israel in contrast to the peoples of the ancient world, but more distinctive still is the covenant relationship between God and people.

Israel's self-identity, her view of history, her belief in her destiny, her understanding of the attributes of God (e.g., as holy and faithful), her understanding of her obligations to God (articulated in the *torah*), and the basis of the prophetic institution all derive directly from the covenant.

In each of those areas, despite the existence of similarities with the rest of the ancient world, the Abrahamic covenant marks the departure and underlies the uniqueness of Israel.

In the ancient world gods may have been viewed as personal gods who undertook the protection of the family, but they did not make covenants.

Gen 12:1-3

The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

“I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.”

Go from your country, your people and your father’s household. One reason God may ask Abram to leave these behind is because it is in these three connections that one related to deity. The gods one worshiped tended to be national or city gods (“country”), the clan god (“people”), or ancestral gods, i.e., ancestors who have taken a place in the divine world (“father’s household”). As Yahweh severed the ties Abram would have had with other deities, he then filled the resulting void as the only God Abram would need.

Great nation. This offer is unique in the ancient world. One can certainly find offers by deities to make someone king and to prosper their line—or even a promise that a particular individual would have many offspring. But the prospect that an individual would grow into a great nation is not broached in any other extant literature from the ancient world.

Though we have no indication that Yahweh explained or demanded a monotheistic belief or that Abram responded with one, it is clear that the worship of Yahweh dominated Abram's religious experience. By making a break with his land, his family and his inheritance, Abram is also breaking all of his religious ties, since deities are associated with geographic, political and ethnic divisions. In his new land, Abram does not have any territorial gods; as a new people he does not bring any family gods (though Rachel attempts to when she leaves); having left his country he does not have any national or city gods. It is Yahweh who fills this void, becoming "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

Names

Abram's name changed to Abraham; Sarai's to Sarah

Names generally offered information about the person's identity and in a variety of ways names were believed to be intertwined with a person's destiny.

By changing his name God was designating Abram's destiny—to be the father of a multitude.

The name Abram meant "the father is exalted." Reference to "father" (ab) in personal names usually indicated veneration of an ancestor, so this name looked to the past. His new name Abraham designated him as the significant ancestor as it looks to future generations yet to be born.

(Sarai>Sarah "princess," no change in meaning)

The whole story of the Old Testament is one in which the promises of God hang by a thread.

Abraham God promised a son, descendants and land.
 Sarah was barren,
 gave birth to Ishmael
 gave birth to Isaac
 God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac

Sacrifice of Isaac. Gen 22:1-19

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”

Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?”

“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.

“The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.

When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”

Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.”

The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, “I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”

Isaac is given less prominence in the patriarchal narratives than Abraham or Jacob, but his importance for covenantal faith was recognized in such NT passages as Romans 9:7, Galatians 4:21–31, and Hebrews 11:9–20.

Rom 9:7 Not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.”

Hebrews 11:9 By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

Running through all of this is the theme of faith and obedience.

[Gen 37-50. Story of Joseph]

Conclusion: Gen 50:15-21.

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father."

When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

P.S.

[Ch 38 Judah and Tamar.

Not a story we learned in Sunday School!

Why is it here?

Levirate marriage

Look at Matthew 1:3]