

# Abraham

Noah to Abraham; Abram's early career; Melchizedek; Abraham's posterity; establishing the covenant; lessons from Sodom and Lot; "other" nations in Genesis; the problem of seeming patriarchal misbehavior. Genesis 11:27–20:18

## [Culture Moment: Rosh Hashanah]

- Hebrew for "Head of the Year"
- Formerly the "feast of Trumpets" or "feast of horns"
  - So named for the blowing of the "shofar"
- Took place on the first day of the seventh month
  - After Babylonian captivity, the Jews rescheduled their calendar so that this became the new year of their civil year
  - Traditionally the Jewish (religious) year began in Spring
- 10 Days of Awe preceding Yom Kippur, when Jews prepare by repenting and making amends
- In later traditions this day was associated with
  - Creation of the world
  - Day of the Fall
  - Return of Noah's third dove
  - Day of Isaac's binding
- See Lev 23:23-25; Numbers 29:1

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## History of Abraham (11:27–25:11)

- **Descendants of Terah (11:27–32)**
- **Abram's Early Career (12:1–14:24)**
  - Call of Abram (12:1–9)
  - Abram and Sarai in Egypt (12:10–20)
  - Separation of Abram and Lot (13:1–18)
  - Lot's Captivity and Rescue by Abram (14:1–16)
  - Abram Blessed by Melchizedek (14:17–24)
- **Abraham and the Covenant (15:1–20:18)**
  - Covenant with Abram (15:1–21)
  - Birth of Ishmael (16:1–16)
  - Sign of the Covenant/Circumcision of Abraham (17:1–27)
  - A Son Promised to Abraham and Sarah (18:1–15)
  - Judgment Pronounced on Sodom (18:16–33)
  - Depravity of Sodom (19:1–11)
  - Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (19:12–29)
  - Shameful Origin of Moab and Ammon (19:30–38)
  - Abraham, Sarah, and Abimelech (20:1–18)

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## Noah to Abram (11:10–32)

- **Generations of Shem (11:10–26)**
  - **Connects the following Abraham saga with the earlier story of Noah and his family**
  - Note the shortening lifespan of mankind
- **Generations of Terah (11:27–32)**
  - The three sons of Terah – **Abram**, Nahor, Haran
  - **This account skips over 460 years of history to leap from Noah to Abraham**
    - Remember, Jackson calls Genesis "The Prologue" to the rest of the story
    - **This account is meant for only one people – the Jews and their ancestors, it is not a comprehensive history**
  - Abram leaves Ur with his father, nephew and goes to Haran on the way to Canaan
    - *Historically Ur was either in southern Mesopotamia (Sumeria) or northern (Tel Urfa, in modern Turkey and the traditional site)*

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## Abram's Early Career (12:1–14:24)

- **Call of Abram (12:1–9)**
- **Abram and Sarai in Egypt (12:10–20)**
  - Foreshadows Jacob's departure and return, Israel's own bondage and return to Canaan
  - Odd "half truth" about Sarai being his sister (later revealed in 20:12 that she is his half-sister)
- **Abram returns to Bethel (13:1–4; means "house of God")**
- Separation of Abram and Lot (13:5–18)
  - First mention of the wickedness of Sodom in 13:13, *perhaps representative of J's concern for morality*
- Lot's Captivity and Rescue by Abram (14:1–16)
- **Abram Blessed by Melchizedek (14:17–24, next slide)**

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## Melchizedek in Genesis (14:17–20)

- **Melchizedek is a name-title meaning "righteous king" or "king of righteousness"**
  - **This Melchizedek is the king of Salem and the priest of the "most high God"**
  - Salem is related to *Shalom*, meaning "peace," and is the later site of Jerusalem
  - The priest-kings in this time seem to be similar to the time of kings Mosiah or Benjamin in the Book of Mormon – the kings presided over the land and priesthood
- Abraham recognizes Melchizedek as a Patriarchal superior and pays tithes to him
  - **In Jewish Tradition Melchizedek has been identified with both Shem and even Noah!**
    - Remember these men had antediluvian life-spans! They may very well have still been around in the time of Abraham
    - In the Book of Abraham, he receives the priesthood from the fathers, perhaps even these fathers?
- Melchizedek presides over a feast and blesses Abram, "the possessor of heaven and earth"
  - *This story provides a patriarchal connection with the later Jerusalem and its temple cult*
  - **See Psalm 110:4**

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## Covenant with Abram (15:1–21)

- Abram Desires Offspring (15:1–6)
- **Abram's Sacrifice and YHWH's Promise (15:7–21)**
  - *See next slide for the seven times God makes promises to Abram*
- **First Covenant with Abram: Land (15:17–21)**

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## God's Promises to Abram

### Precursors to Covenants (Genesis 12–17)

1. Abram shall be a great nation, go to Canaan, in thee shall all families of the Earth be blessed (12:1–3, in Haran)
2. The Promised Land of Canaan given to the seed of Abram, Abram builds an altar (12:7, Shechem when first arriving in Canaan)
3. The land again promised, Abram's seed as the dust of the earth (13:15–16, Canaan after returning from Egypt)
4. Abram's seed as the stars (15:5, after rescue of Lot)
5. Abram's seed shall be held as stranger's in a land for many years, the land between the Nile and Euphrates given to Abram (15:9–18, when promise is made with a covenant, see next slide)
6. A great nation and kings will arise from his generation (17:2–8, after Hagar bears Ishmael, promise again made with a covenant, see next slide)
7. A Son Promised to Abraham and Sarah (18:1–15)

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## Birth of Ishmael (16:1–16)

- Sarah desires a Child “through” Hagar (16:1–6)
- Deliverance of Hagar (16:7–14)
  - The “angel of the Lord” delivers her and makes promises to *her*
  - Her son will be called Ishmael, meaning “[God] hears”
- Hagar Returns and Gives Birth (16:15–16)

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## Promises Formalized as Covenants

- Twice (the last two times God makes promises) God’s promises to Abram are solemnized (i.e. they are presented as part of a **covenant**)
- Each time the covenant is ratified or effected by a ritual act (i.e., an **ordinance**)
- **First Covenant (15:18–21) focuses on land**
  - Follows on Abraham’s belief, which is counted for righteousness (15:6; see Romans 4:3)
  - Associated with **sacrifice** (an ordinance; 15:9–11, 17)
  - Preceded by “a deep sleep” (like Adam; see 2:21) and a prophecy of Israel’s bondage and deliverance and Abraham’s own “good death” (15:13–16)
- **Second Covenant (17:1–16, 21) focuses on posterity and land**
  - Accompanied by new names, indicating a new beginning or a new status
    - Abram (exalted father) → **Abraham** (father of a great number)
    - Sarai (my princess) → **Sarah** (princess)
  - Associated with **circumcision** (an ordinance and an outward sign of the inward covenant; 17:10–14)
  - Like baptism today, *the ordinance of* circumcision was necessary to be part of the people of God (see 14:14)

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## Abrahamic Covenant Synthesized (Genesis 15, 17)

### ■ God's Promises to Abraham

- Land
- Posterity
- Blessings to the Nations
  - In LDS theology, **priesthood blessings are included in this**, carried from Noah to Abraham, but the only priesthood mentioned in the Old Testament (outside of the passing reference to Melchizedek himself) belongs to Aaron

### ■ Abraham's Promises to God

- **Walk with God** - "be perfect" is to follow God's commands (17:1)
- Sacrifice – building an altar and sacrificing animals (15:9-10)
- Circumcision – A token of the covenant (17:10-11)
  - Sacrifice and Circumcision are both ritual acts associated with a promise from God – the formula for a Covenant

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## Titles of God and New Names

### ■ Titles of God and New Names

- *EI Elyon*, "Most High God"
- *Adonai YHWH*, "Lord GOD"
- *EI Shaddai*, "Almighty God" (17:1)
- "Lord God of Hosts"

### ■ Meanings of Human Names

- Abram, "exalted father," becomes Abraham, "Father of Great Number"
- Sarai, "my princess," becomes Sarah, "princess"
- Ishmael, "God hears"
- Isaac, "he laughs"
- Esau, "hairy"
- Yakov (Jacob) – supplanter
- Abimelech, title and name – "Father king"
- Melchizedek, title and name – "Righteous king/ king of righteousness"

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## The Fall of Sodom (18:16–19:38)

- **This account deals again with society, morality, and justice (common so-called “J” themes)**
- **Judgment Pronounced on Sodom (18:16–33)**
  - Abraham dickers with the Lord Middle-eastern style!
- **Depravity of Sodom (19:1–11)**
  - Already mentioned in 13:13, the wickedness is now full as demonstrated by the wicked attempt on the two angels
  - Lot’s bizarre willingness to exchange his daughters for his visitors might reflect the importance of the guest-host relationship in antiquity
- **Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (19:12–29)**
  - Genesis theme of “nations weighed in God’s moral balance”
  - The depravity of Sodom and Gomorrah was such that they had to be removed from the land – permanently (cf. the time before the flood?)
  - Wicked people removed from the land of promise, but good people shall inherit it

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## Lot Escapes, but . . .

- Loses his wife, who cannot give up the world (19:26)
- Shameful Origin of Moab and Ammon (19:30–38)
  - His daughters apparently think humanity has been wiped out, that they must start again like Adam and Eve’s children or Noah’s family
  - Their spiritual education was obviously lacking!
  - To some extent, this story was played up by later editors, who wanted to “smear” the origins of Israel’s neighbors, who were often her enemies
  - Leads to the issue of the treatment in Genesis of “Other Nations” besides the chosen line . . .



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## Other Nations

- Why would later redactors and editors focus on other nations?
  - Literary foils – contrast and define a nation by what they are not
  - Historically a way for later Israelites to relate to their neighbors
- **Why are some chosen and others expelled or destroyed?**
  - Again, one of the themes of Genesis: **God weighs nations in his moral balance**
  - God is no respecter of persons, so those who are favored must have been obedient and those who are not must have been wicked
    - Historically speaking was Israel was more obedient and so chosen?
    - Justice needs to be served to disobedient nations
  - The Promised Land is a type of heaven → only then righteous will live there

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## Justice and Mercy

- Often times, the God of the Old Testament is seen as a “Just God”, but there is still mercy here
  - Cain – cast out and sent away to protect him from revenge, his people grow, prosper and progress
  - Sodom – given a chance to receive mercy if there were even ten good men in the city
  - The Flood – the wickedness was so widespread that it was an act of mercy for those spirits who would have no chance of righteousness
  - Ishmael – his very name means “God hears”, his nation is blessed
- **God will extend Mercy to those who seek it**
  - Hagar – though Sarah cast her out an angel appears in the desert to save her
    - Angel of the Lord is identified with YHWH
    - Fountain of water in the wilderness – cf. Exodus story

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## Abraham, Sarah, and Abimelech (20:1–18)

### An Apparent Lie Raises the Question of Patriarchal Misbehavior

- Twice Abraham seems to lie or tell only part of the truth
  - Abram and Sarai in Egypt (12:10–20)
  - Abraham, Sarah, and Abimelech (20:1–18)
    - We mitigate this by saying but she was related and it was for their protection, or Abraham was told to say so (as in the Book of Abraham)
    - Both of these men immediately repented and sent Sarah back when the Lord plagued them for Sarah's sake – but the Lord also prevented Abimelech from sinning with her – another act of mercy?
- Difficult from the modern perspective
  - Great modern respect for leaders discourages us from looking for mistakes
    - Especially in a church context we have a righteous tradition to honor our leaders – we pass over faults and errors and only look at the good
    - Often we assume that the spirit would not allow prophetic figures to make mistakes, yet they remind us that they are still human
  - Perhaps these scriptural examples show that even after we make an error we can still be used by the Lord – they are examples for our sake
  - Above all remember that we are all human and we have all been given our agency!

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## More Thought—or Questions—on “Patriarchal Misbehavior”

- More examples are coming—wait for Isaac and Jacob’s mistakes!
- **Why would later people’s leave these seemingly unrighteous acts in their sacred writings?**
  - *Perhaps as an example to later peoples that forgiveness is possible?*
  - Before the giving of the Mosaic Law, even good people could make serious errors?
    - Modern parallel: before the Restoration people did and believed thus and so . . .
  - Also **possible misunderstandings of the text and errors in transmission and translation have added to the confusion**

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