

PATRIARCHS: PART 1

Read: Genesis 12-24

Corresponds to Workbook pp 27-34

This portion of the Salvation Story focuses upon the pivotal role of Abraham, who with his wife Sarah become the parents of Isaac. (The three Jewish patriarchs are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). God gives Abraham three specific promises in a covenant that will direct the course of the narrative to the establishment of Christ's Church.

Who will be the woman who bears the seed that will triumph over Satan? With every successive generation, the question hangs!

Gen 12:1, 4

Abraham is applauded for his quick obedience and willingness to move at God's command. This is found in other Biblical heroes such as St Joseph, and speaks of an interior trust in God that is held forth to be emulated. Like Abraham, "Joseph was willing to cooperate with the divine plan, though he in no way knew its contours or deepest purpose. Like Mary at the Annunciation, he trusted and let himself be led.

Reflect: Think of a situation in your life that is out of control. How much do you trust God and let yourself be led by him through this situation? Where do you have difficulties acting as Joseph did in this Gospel passage (Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24A)."¹ _____

Gen 12:1

Did God tell Abram to bring along any extended kin? Who is Lot (Gen 12:4, 13:8, 14:14, 14:16)? _____

Lot will prove to be a headache for Abram! What principle does this suggest with respect to *exactly* obeying God (not partially)? _____

It is not coincidental that God remains quiet until Abram and Lot part ways, and then God resumes communicating with Abram (Gen 13:14).

Gen 12:2-3

What three major promises does God make to Shem's descendant Abram (which he will unfold further in the coming chapters) BEFORE he began his migration from Haran?

- (1) _____ (Gen 15)
 - (2) _____ (Gen 17)
 - (3) _____ (Gen 22)
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¹ From *Lenten Gospel Reflections: Daily Meditations from Bishop Robert Barron*. Accessed online March 19, 2021.

Taking a glimpse ahead:

*The promise of a nation will be fulfilled in Moses, with the Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 24)

*The promise of a name shall be fulfilled in David, with the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7).

 ("To make one's name great" is a Hebrew expression referring to the establishment of a kingdom or dynasty.

*The promise of universal blessing finds its fulfillment in Jesus' New Covenant (Luke 22).

Gen 12:4

How did Abram obey God? How did he subtly not obey him completely? *Hint:* How might Lot have been a sort of "insurance policy" with his mistrust that God could work around his advanced age and Sarai's barrenness? _____

At age 75 and with a barren wife, "Abram went as the Lord directed him." How do you discern the will of God? How have you seen God direct where you have lived? _____

The Patriarchs will relocate several times, at times following God's express will and at other times following their own.

What definition of faith does Hebrews 11:8 supply, and how is that definition applied to Abraham? _____

Faith is both a grace and a human act, working in tandem. According to CCC 153-155, "Believing is possible only by grace and the interior helps of the Holy Spirit. But it is no less true that believing is an authentically human act....Believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the divine truth by command of the will moved by God through grace."

"Grace does not work like a penny in a slot machine. Grace will only move you when you want it to move you, and only when you let it move you"- Venerable Fulton Sheen.²

Gen 12:10

What catastrophe does Abram encounter in the Promised Land? What does Abram do in response? Is there any mention he consulted God about this decision? _____

Gen 12:11-19

How does Abram try to survive by his own wit, without relying on God? Is God pleased by His unfaithfulness to his wife? How does the silence of God during Abram's entire sojourn in Egypt give you a hint? _____

Gen 14:18

² Sheen, Venerable Fulton from his book *Remade for Happiness*. Accessed online from *Daily Catholic Wisdom* at yourfriends@catholicwisdom.org on March 18, 2021.

After Abram successfully rescued Lot from an invading army, he was thanked by grateful kings—and a mysterious King of Salem named Melchizedek. What does Melchizedek do that foreshadows the Catholic priesthood? _____

Some early Rabbinic sources maintain that Melchizedek is none other than elderly Shem himself. If so, how would his blessing of Abram be particularly significant? (Remember Shem received Noah's blessing). (Salem will become Jerusalem). _____

How does Melchizedek foreshadow the actions of Jesus at the Last Supper? _____

Gen 15:3

What sharp complaint does Abram make to God? How does God reply in such a way as to make Abram grow in trust? _____

An important fact to note: When God makes this promise, it is in the middle of the day; stars are invisible to the eye.

When have you trusted God based solely on His word? _____

Gen 15:13-16

What does God reveal to Abram about the future of his descendants? How might this knowledge have comforted the Jews later enslaved in Egypt? _____

"God confirms his spoken promise with a solemn act: He passes through the middle of the cut-up animals as a smoking fire and as a flaming torch. What is the significance of this seemingly bizarre scene? In Abram's world it was part of the solemn act of making a covenant. By walking between the two halves of a sacrificed animal, the persons entering the covenant were saying, 'May I end up like these animals- dead and cut in two- if I am not faithful to my promise and oath'- a very serious curse indeed, for covenant unfaithfulness! In response to Abram's lack of faith, God makes a covenant and binds himself to keep his word (Hebrews 6:16-18)."³

Gen 15:17-18

How does God make a dramatic covenant with Abram regarding the land? What are the land boundaries of the Promised Land? Note all the descendants of Ham who live there, which spells trouble on the horizon! _____

Gen 16:1-5

How did Sarai try to take matters into her own hands? _____

How does this imitate Eve giving forbidden fruit to Adam? _____

³ Gray, Tim and Jeff Cavins. *Walking with God: A Journey Through the Bible*. © 2010 by Ascension Press, West Chester, PA, pp 38-39.

Is it hard for you to wait for God to work out his plans for your life, when it is not according to your timetable? _____

The Egyptian maidservant Hagar bore a son by what name (16:15)? What will become of this son (Gen 17:20; Gen 25:12-18)? _____

What demand does Sarai make of Abram in Gen 16:5-6? How does Abram not protest this injustice? _____

How does God show mercy to Hagar and Ishmael, and thereby show Himself to be the compassionate God of the alien as well? _____

Gen 17:1-3

When Abram was 99 years old, what did God tell him that was both revelation and command? _____

How is this a chastisement? Had Abram been walking in God's presence, blameless, in the entire affair with Hagar? (Keep in mind that God has been absolutely silent for thirteen long years after Abram took Hagar as a surrogate mother). _____

Nevertheless, what does God promise, elevating his prior promise to covenant status? _____

Definition of Covenant:

"More than a personal relationship, God wants to make us part of his family. That happens through covenants, which are not the same thing as contracts. A covenant is a permanent exchange of persons. It creates a family. Covenants are made by an oath sworn in God's name."⁴

"Christianity is not a system of ethics; it is a life. It is not good advice; it is Divine adoption"- Venerable Fulton Sheen.⁵

Gen 17:4

God begins to spell out his covenant in greater detail. What were Abram's descendants to do (Gen 17:9-10)? _____

How immediately did Abram obey? Gen 17:23 _____

Gen 17:5

⁴ Leonard, Matthew. From *The Bible and the Sacraments*. Accessed online from *Daily Catholic Wisdom* at yourfriends@catholicwisdom.org on September 18, 2020.

⁵ Sheen, Venerable Fulton. From his book *Remade for Happiness*. Accessed online from *Daily Catholic Wisdom* at yourfriends@catholicwisdom.org on March 19, 2021.

How are Abram and Sarai's names changed by God? What significance does this have?
Note: In Jewish tradition, one's name is often bound with one's identity or purpose. For example, "Jesus" literally means "God saves." _____

Gen 12-23

Point of Reflection:

Hebrew Show and Tell

"Following the commandment to 'honor thy father and thy mother,' it was rare to reprimand publicly an ancient forefather. Thus, the Biblical narrative, showing a reverential respect for the beloved forefather, doesn't come right out and say, "Abram disobeyed God by....' But, while the accusation is withheld, the story will *show* us what Abram did wrong by highlighting the resulting consequences—assuming we are astute enough to put it together. *This lesson is vital for reading Scripture: Hebrew storytelling sometimes prefers to show rather than tell.* It is the job of the reader to put together the clues and hints scattered throughout the narrative, without which the story could seem nonsensical."

List all the ways that Abraham had faith and obeyed/trusted God: _____

List examples where Abraham's faith seemed to falter and mistrust surfaced/ where he tried to 'work it out himself': _____

What hybrid of faith/mistrust is your life? _____

The story of Abram's complicity in banishing Hagar and their son Ishmael (an almost certain death sentence in the desert environment save for the intervention of God) is intimately intertwined with the covenant of circumcision and later the demand by God for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. When a story's inclusion seems puzzling, always look just prior and after the story to understand its relevance to the narrative. Nothing is ever included in the pithy and concise canon of Scripture without a reason--- every word and detail!

"By placing the recounting of Abram's sin with Hagar between the covenant oaths of Genesis 15 and Genesis 17, the narrative suggests that God recalls Abram to make a new covenant in atonement for his sin in Genesis 16. Circumcision, then, is not only a sign of God's covenant with Abraham, but also a not-so-subtle punishment for Abraham's sin of the flesh."⁶

Gen 18:12

What is Sarai's reaction to the visitor's prophecy that she would bear a son within a year? _____

⁶ Gray, Tim and Jeff Cavins. *Walking with God: A Journey Through the Bible*. © 2010 by Ascension Press, West Chester, PA, pp 41.

Gen 18:14

An excellent verse to memorize!—“Is anything too marvelous for the Lord to do?”

Gen 19:1-11: Sodom and Gomorrah

What does God think of the practice of homosexuality? _____

What happens to Lot’s wife? How comfortable have you become with your surrounding culture that is not God-fearing? _____

What do Lot’s two daughters do reminiscent of Ham? What are the terrible consequences? _____

Note: The Moabites and Ammonites become future enemies of Israel. (Abram should have left Lot back in Haran! Abram’s disobedience will have long range consequences for the nation of Israel).

Gen 21:1-11

The promised son Isaac is finally born of Sarah! What happens to Ismael? _____

Gen 22:2

This is the first time in Scripture that the word “love” appears. The word “son” is used more than twelve times in this chapter alone to emphasize the love bond. God is putting Abraham to the test. How is Abraham like God the Father? _____

How is Isaac like Jesus? _____

Note: Isaac would have been about 16 years old now and strong enough to have wrestled away from his Father and the altar; he submitted voluntarily. Moriah is the same site as Calvary.

Gen 22:7

What sobering question does Isaac ask? _____
Who will provide the lamb, according to Abraham? How will Jesus later be this Lamb of God sacrificed at the same site? _____

“If this story is read apart from all the previous stories about Abraham, God’s command appears quite arbitrary. Indeed, read in isolation, Genesis 22 seems to lead readers to the conclusion that God’s ways are cruel and unpredictable. Abraham is portrayed as obedient and righteous, but the God who threatens a beloved son seems to appear rather less well than Abraham. Such a conclusion about God stems from a failure to read the story according to its own inner logic and meaning. **Ancient Hebrew storytelling techniques require readers to see seemingly disparate stories as inextricably related. A story must be read in light of those before and after it.** If we ignore the interconnections, we will cut the string between them, and the meaning and larger plot of these narratives fall out of our grasp like loose pearls from a broken necklace.

Many clues are given in the narrative as to why God asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, a request that takes modern readers by surprise far more than it did Abraham. One of the first is God's description of Isaac, not merely as a beloved son, but as Abraham's only son (Gen 22:2). One could call Isaac the only son of Sarah, but not the only son of Abraham. Why describe Isaac this way?

Genesis 22 begins, 'After these things.' 'These things' refers back to the story of the expulsion of Hagar and her son into the wilderness of Bersheba. In short, the story of Abraham's call to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac begins with a connection to the story of Hagar and her beloved son, Ishmael.

The last time Abraham saw Ishmael, he was sending Ishmael and Hagar on a death march into the wilderness with little bread and one water-skin. For all Abraham knew, Ishmael was dead. When God begins by saying, 'Take your only one son, Isaac,' those words are meant to make Abraham feel the sting of his guilt. God tells Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac as a 'burnt offering.' Burnt offerings were one of the five major cultic sacrifices practiced by Israel, and the Jewish reader of this story would recall that burnt offerings were made for atonement. The technical term 'burnt offering' is repeated five times in Genesis 22, to emphasize the importance of atonement in this story. The suggestion of the text is that Abraham's exile of Ismael into the wilderness without sufficient supplies required atonement, an atonement that was to be made in the sacrifice of his son, Isaac.

There are other striking parallels between Genesis 21 and Genesis 22. Each story begins with Abraham rising early in the morning to prepare for the journey (Gen 21:14; 22:3). In both stories a parent believes that the death of a beloved son is imminent. In both an angel of the Lord comes with deliverance: God opens the eyes of Hagar, and she sees a well that will bring saving water, while Abraham lifts his eyes and sees a ram that will replace Isaac as a burnt offering.

These parallels point vigorously to the plot line of the larger story. God is making Abraham experience what Hagar experienced. God himself will spare both beloved sons, bringing home the point that although Isaac is the son of promise and Abraham is specially chosen, God is the God of all. Justice is universal, and no one is to be abandoned or treated with less than justice requires. God will see Hagar and reveal himself as the defender of the alien, the orphan, and the widow, just as he will hear the cry of Sarah and give her a child of promise. The pattern that emerges is that God is universal in both his justice and his mercy: justice, in that one reaps what one sows; mercy in that God cares both for the child of the slave woman and the child of the promise."⁷

Gen 23:1-2

Sarah dies and is buried where? (23:19-20) _____

Gen 24: 11-27

How does God answer the servant's prayer (24:15)? _____
What character traits does Rebekah reveal in her watering of the servant's many camels?

⁷ Gray, Tim and Jeff Cavins. *Walking with God: A Journey Through the Bible*. © 2010 by Ascension Press, West Chester, PA, pp 43-45.

Gen 24: 62-66

How is this like a romantic movie episode? _____

It is interesting to note that Isaac is the only patriarch who will never leave the Promised Land and remains faithful to his wife. He is greatly blessed by the Lord during his life.

Summary:

“The Early World ended in Babel with rebellion. The period of the Patriarchs, however, begins with the obedience of one man, Abraham. In Act One of this period, the Lord of the cosmos calls Abraham to journey to a new homeland. Abraham obeys, making the journey to the land of Canaan, but questions, ‘What good is family land without an heir?’ In Act Two, Abraham, the father of faith, learns through trial and error how to trust God in all things, in particular for the gift of a son and heir, Isaac, and for the sustaining of Isaac’s life. The focus of Act Three is Isaac’s son Jacob, who wrestles with both God and man, and who receives a new name that reveals the future of the nation of God’s people. Act Four focuses on God’s beloved son Joseph and a remarkable tale of family feuds, favoritism, and forgiveness.”⁸

Looking back thus far, we have seen progressive covenants unfold:

1. Adam (Gen 1-3); One holy couple
2. Noah (Gen 9); One holy family.
3. Abraham (Gen 15, 17, 22); one holy tribe.

In the future, we will see the introduction of one holy nation (with Moses), one holy kingdom (with David), and one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church with Jesus (Luke 22).

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⁸ Gray, Tim and Jeff Cavins. *Walking with God: A Journey Through the Bible*. © 2010 by Ascension Press, West Chester, PA, pp 31-32.