



LESSON 4: THE PATRIARCHAL PERIOD

Discovering the Heart of the Old Testament

I. QUICK LOOK AT THE PERIOD

- A. This period is from the time of Abraham to Joseph (ca. 2000-1500 BC)
- B. Key people include Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Esau, and Joseph
- C. Key Scriptures are Genesis 11:25—50:26

II. PATRIARCHS OF ISRAEL

- A. A patriarch in the Ancient Near East was either the father of a family, or the ruler of a clan or tribe whose role was like that of a priest, a spiritual head of his family.
- B. The patriarchs of Israel were: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his 12 sons (Acts 7:8-9).
- C. About 26% of Genesis is dedicated to Abraham, the first Patriarch of Israel, and 25% dedicated to Joseph.



III. ANCIENT NEAR-EAST SETTING

- A. Two great empires existed at this time, the Egyptian Empire, and the Chaldean (Babylonian) Empire.
- B. Even though there was phenomenal progress in culture, literature, art, and material wealth, moral standards and religious life had declined rapidly.
- C. Idolatry had spread like wildfire.
- D. People worshipped images such as the sun, the moon, animals, and even called upon the dead to make intercession for them. Abraham grew up in this kind of environment.

IV. ABRAHAM

- A. While the Bible gives a genealogical continuity from Noah to Abraham, it does not imply a continuity of faith.
- B. Abraham is not found initially to be a righteous man, nor was he someone like Noah who lived in contrast to the world around him.
- C. It is clear in the Scripture that Abraham's family did not worship Yahweh (Josh. 24:2), so in a sense God came to Abraham "out of the blue."

V. ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

- A. The Abrahamic Covenant contains three main parts: the "seed promises" the "land promises," and the "blessing promises"
- B. Seed Promises
 - 1. From Abram would come a great nation.

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2. Abram's descendants would be enslaved and mistreated in a strange land for four hundred years--they would however, come out of the enslavement with great possessions.
3. Male descendants were to be circumcised on the 8th day as a sign of this covenant.
4. Ishmael would become a great nation and the father of twelve rulers (Genesis 25:12-16), but the covenant with Abraham would continue through Isaac.

C. Land Promises

1. Abram's fourth generation (twelve tribes of Israel) would return to the Promised Land after the period of enslavement.
2. God promised a specific land and described its boundaries (Genesis 12:7; 15:18-21).

D. Blessing Promises

1. Abram ("exalted father") would be blessed and he would be given a great name (Abraham meaning "father of many").
2. God would bless those who bless this nation and curse those who curse it.
3. God would bless other nations of the earth through Abram's descendants.
4. Sarai's name would be changed to Sarah, and God would bless her and give her a son--she would become the mother of nations.

VI. ABRAHAM TESTED

A. Genesis 22:1-19 describes how God tested Abraham by requiring him to offer his beloved son, Isaac, as a sacrifice.

1. Scripture states that Abraham did not debate the command but knew that Yahweh could bring his son back to life (notice the pronoun "we" in Gen. 21:5).
2. The Hebrew word "tested" (*nasah*) does not mean enticed to do wrong but to test a person's trust in God (1 Kings 10:1; 2 Chron. 9:1; Dan. 1:12, 14).
3. Human sacrifice was a pagan practice during this period.
4. Notice the parallel between the substitutionary ram and Jesus Christ.



B. The site of the event (Mount Moriah) was most likely the site of Israel's Temple.

VII. ISRAEL BECOMES A NATION

- A. When the children of Israel entered Egypt, they were a family, and four hundred years later when they left Egypt, they had become a nation.
- B. While in Egypt, Israel's descendants grew from 70 people (Genesis 46:27) to a nation of 600,000 men, besides women and children (Exodus 12:37).
- C. It is estimated that the total number of Israelites at the beginning of the Exodus was close to two million.

VIII. JOSEPH: A BIBLICAL "TYPE" OF CHRIST

- A. Of all the people in the Bible, Joseph was the most nearly perfect *type* of Christ
- B. Both were loved dearly by their fathers
- C. Both were hated by their brothers
- D. Both were tempted but did not sin
- E. Both were put in charge of a kingdom