

UNIT II

THE PATRIARCHS

The Question of Historicity

With the beginning of chapter 12 of Genesis, there is a definite transition. The material takes on more historical detail concerning individuals and places than that of the preceding chapters. The first eleven chapters are general summaries covering long spans of time. These summaries are used to set the stage for God's revelation through a chosen individual. Abraham became the father of the people through whom the message of redemption was to be made known to the entire world. Whereas millenniums were covered in the first eleven chapters, the next thirteen chapters are limited to the life of one man.

Not all agree that the individuals in Genesis 12–50 are historical figures. The name of no patriarch has been substantiated by archaeological discoveries. Several theories have been proposed concerning the historicity of the patriarchs.

1. The names of the patriarchs were eponyms; that is, the name of a person was invented to give some background to a clan or tribe. According to this theory, the name of Abraham was invented to explain the origin of the Hebrew people. Another variation of this theory suggests that tribe or clan names were individualized. The activities of a tribe would be attributed to the accomplishments of an individual.
2. A theory similar to the eponymous theory is the clan-figure theory. This theory suggests that Abraham was not an individual at all but represented the movement of the racial group called Hebrew.
3. A third theory suggests that the patriarchs were originally pagan deities who were gradually lowered to the status of human heroes.
4. Another theory suggests that the stories of the patriarchs were simply popular folk-tales about the greatness of ancestors. These were legendary narratives which were told in exaggerated form through the centuries. It should be pointed out that legends develop from some historical facts or persons.
5. The suggestion has been made that the patriarchal stories are cult myths. These stories were invented to explain the sacredness of the revered sanctuaries and ritual customs.

Persons in New Testament times accepted the patriarchs as historical individuals. Jesus spoke of the Jews as descendants of Abraham (John 8:31-44). Stephen gave a historical review in his sermon concerning the Temple in which he included Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Acts 7). There is no question that Paul believed that Abraham was a historical person.

The Historical Background to the Patriarchs

Although names of the patriarchs do not appear in archaeological discoveries, excavations support the biblical description of customs and cultures of the day. No archaeological discovery gives conclusive proof, but what has been discovered lends strong credibility to the historicity of the patriarchs.

Archaeological discoveries at the ancient city of Mari in the Middle Euphrates valley throw much light on the general background of the patriarchal period. Discovered texts give information from about 3000 B. C. Hammurabi was king of Babylon from about 1728 to 1686 B. C. The customs and events connected with his rule are in harmony with what is reflected in Genesis. Although the name of no biblical person has been discovered in the Mari and Nuzu texts, the names Abraham, Jacob, and Benjamin appear among the Amorites. During the time of Abraham, Canaan was a land of city-states whose princes were usually vassals of the Egyptian pharaohs. The entire area was troubled and marked by Amorite invasions into Mesopotamia, northern Syria, and perhaps Egypt. The Hyksos dynasty in Egypt during the seventeenth century was probably Amorites who had invaded Egypt. Egypt eventually threw off the yoke of the Hyksos dynasty and with great effort re-established her control over Canaan. There are indications that the Amorites (Semitic people—ancestors of Abraham) continued in various parts of the land of Canaan. The Amarna Letters refer to wandering bands called Habiru. The Habiru have not been identified definitely with the Hebrews, but there is a strong possibility that there is a connexion.

The Ras Shamra texts from Ugarit reveal a Canaanite religion similar to that reflected in the Bible. El was a Canaanite god whose consort was Asherah, and their son was Baal, the god of rain and vegetation. Baal was destroyed annually by his enemy Mot (death) and was rescued by his consort Anath so that once more the life-giving rain might come. Since Baal was a god of fertility and production, prostitution was part of the ritual. The Bible reveals that the Israelites were drawn frequently into

idolatrous Canaanite worship.

The Religion of the Patriarchs

Although the patriarchs worshipped only the one God (monotheism), evidence indicates they did not deny the existence of other deities. The uniqueness of patriarchal religion was the thoroughly personal relationship existing between the patriarchs and Yahweh. Their God was not an impersonal and inanimate idol, but He was the living, personal God who called men to Himself. He claimed absolute allegiance and made great promises to those who trusted and obeyed Him. The patriarchs did not sacrifice to God in order to win His favour but to express gratitude for His promises. God made Himself and His will known to His people. He gave them guidance and victory in their struggles of life.

Read all of the topic "The Question of Historicity," and then answer the following three questions:

Do all Bible scholars agree that the patriarchs in Genesis 12-50 were historical? _____

Theories of some of those who do not believe the patriarchs were historical are:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

(Compare your list with the text.)

Name three persons in new testament times who accepted the patriarchs as historical individuals.

_____, _____, _____

(Jesus, Stephen, Paul)

In Abraham's time, the political divisions of Canaan were called _____.

(city-states)

The rulers in Canaan were usually vassals of the _____.

(Egyptian pharaohs)

The religion of the patriarchs was unique in that a very personal relationship existed between the patriarchs and _____.

(Yahweh)

LESSON 4

ABRAHAM: A MAN OF FAITH

Genesis 11:10–25:18

Aim

To understand the place and the purpose of Abraham in God's redemptive plan.

Introduction

In their dating of Abraham, writers vary from 2000 to 1500 B. C. Lee Haines in *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary* dates his birth in 2161 B. C.; his entrance into Canaan in 2086 B. C.; the migration of Jacob and his family to Egypt in 1871 B. C.; and the Exodus and wilderness wanderings in the second half of the fifteenth century (cf. Haines, pp. 18f.). Critical scholars tend to date the patriarchs and the Exodus about two hundred years later; the period of the sojourn in Egypt is usually reduced to less than 400 years; and the Exodus is dated about 1290 B. C.

The Genealogy of Abram

Genesis 11:10-32

The genealogies in these verses connect Noah with Abram. Just as there were ten names in the genealogies from Adam to Noah, there are ten names in the genealogies from Shem to Abram. It is interesting to note that the span of life was reduced gradually from 600 years for Shem to 148 years for Nahor, the grandfather of Abram.

The birthplace of Abram was Ur of the Chaldees in Mesopotamia. The migration from Ur to Canaan was in two stages. Upon departing from Ur, Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot and their families to Haran. Terah remained there but Abram later went on to Canaan.

The Call of Abram

Genesis 12:1-6

Abram was born in a land of idolatry. Somehow God made His sovereignty known to him, and Abram recognized that Yahweh was in control of man. He realized that God had revealed Himself, and with this revelation there came a corresponding demand. This is a basic principle of religion.

The first element of God's call to Abram involved a separation — he was to leave his land, his kindred, and his father's house. Abram had been chosen or elected as a man from among many nations to be the channel of God's saving grace to all nations. The principle of election is primary in the divine method. The Christian religion is accurately described as the call of God and man's obedient response to that call. Perhaps there were several reasons Abram was selected by God. Ur was the most cultured city of the world at that time. The Sumerian culture had emphasized individual rights and values which were basic in the ethics of the Hebrew religion. Creation and flood stories were in the tradition of the Sumerian culture. Perhaps the most important

According to Haines the date of Abraham's birth

was _____.

(2161 B.C.)

Abraham's birthplace was _____ of the

_____.

(Ur, Chaldees)

Read God's call to Abram in Genesis 12:1-3 and the entire topic *The Call of Abram*. Write God's words which correspond to the first two elements of the call.

1. Separation - _____

2. Blessing - _____

(1-See v. 1; 2-See v. 2)

reason was that a man of faith was needed. Abram was willing to leave his family and his land to go into a strange country in response to the call of God. Apparently the predominance of idol worship in Ur necessitated the departure of Abram from that area lest he confuse elements of idolatry with the revelation of Yahweh.

A second element of the call of God involved a benediction or blessing. Yahweh promised Abram that if he responded in faith and obedience to His call, He would make him a great nation. He would bless him and make his name great. The blessing, however, was not an end within itself. As God blessed His people, He commissioned them. They in turn were to be a blessing to all the families of the earth. Because of what God did for Israel, the surrounding nations would recognize the superiority of Israel's God and be drawn to Him. As God blessed His people, they were to become a blessing to all of the families of the earth. Coupled with the blessing was the commission to be a blessing.

A third element of the call involved a condition. Abram must respond in faith and obedience. This condition was not stated directly but it was implied. If Abram had refused to go into the strange country in response to God's call, surely he would not have received the blessing. Only by faith would a man in that day leave the security of his fatherland and venture into another land to become a stranger among the people there.

The Character of Abram

Genesis 12:7-14:24

His faithfulness in worship (12:7).—The Lord appeared to Abram and promised him the land. Abram responded by building an altar and worshipping. This response was repeated frequently throughout his life.

His human weaknesses (12:8-20).—After staying in the vicinity of Bethel for awhile, Abram moved to Negeb (South country). During a famine in the land he went to Egypt. To protect himself from the Egyptians, he agreed with his wife that she would be known as his sister. Sarai was very beautiful, and Abram knew that envious men might put him to death in order to have his wife. Actually, he was speaking a half-truth because she was the daughter of his father but not of his mother. Abram repeated this scheme before Abimelech (20:1-18). On both occasions, Sarai was prevented from being taken to be another man's wife by the intervention of God.

Claiming that Sarai was his sister may have been a social custom Abram adopted from Haran. Haran was an old Hurrian centre. Archaeology has revealed an occasion in which a patriarch's wife was introduced as his sister. The dual role of wife and sister conferred on the wife a superior position in society. The author of Genesis, however, used the incident to show that Abram was evidently willing to endanger his wife's honour in order to save his own life. Perhaps these stories were included to show that God is faithful in His promises to bless in spite of man's failures and sinfulness. Abram's faith may have been wavering because he had discovered previously upon arrival in Canaan that the land was already occupied and because he expected blessings from God but instead was confronted with a severe famine.

His generosity (13:1-18).—Abram returned to the southern part of Canaan from Egypt and renewed his commitment to God at Bethel (13:3-4). In Egypt he appeared to have depended on his own ingenuity, but at Bethel (house of God) he returned to faith.

The flocks of Lot and Abram had become so numerous that it was necessary to separate them. The same land could not afford both tribes. Although Abram was the older, he gave Lot the op-

The call also implied a third element, condition, which was Abram's _____ and _____ (faith, obedience)

Abram responded to God's promise of the land by building an _____ and worshipping. (altar)

Before entering Egypt, Abram feared that envious men might try to kill him; therefore, he asked his wife Sarai to pretend to be his _____. (sister)

Read Genesis 13:1-4. When Abram left Egypt Where did he return? _____ What did he do there? _____ (Bethel, renewed his commitment to God)

portunity of choosing any portion of the land for himself and his flocks. Lot appeared to have been under the protection and the influence of Abram until this time. He was more concerned for the material, and when he went his own way into the fertile valleys his eyes focused on the world and the things about him. He did not shun the reputed wickedness of the Sodomites. Lot was soon living in Sodom and adopting the Sodomites' sinful ways. After he had selected the fertile lands, the Lord appeared to Abram and renewed the promise to give him a great land (13:15ff.). Chapter 14 and the following chapters deal with the swift fall of the disobedient Lot and the blessing of generous Abram.

His leadership ability (Gen. 14:1-24).—Four eastern kings invaded the area and took Lot captive. With 318 men, Abram overcame the combined armies of the four kings whose identification is still uncertain.¹ On the way back from his victory over the kings, Abram was met near Jerusalem by the king of Sodom. Melchizedek (my king is Zedek) was the priest-king of Salem (Jerusalem). As priest of the Most High God, he blessed Abram for defeating the invading forces and in turn received tithes of the spoils from Abram. In this transaction, Abram recognized Melchizedek's faith in the one true God who was identified as Yahweh. This experience possibly added to the later acceptance of Jerusalem as the central place of worship for Israel.

The Covenant

Genesis 15:1-21; 17:1-27

God had promised Abram that if he departed from his kindred and entered the new country, God would make him a great nation. A number of years had passed, and Abram and Sarai continued to be childless. Childlessness represented not only a failure on the part of the marriage relationship, but a certain failure in the covenant relationship. Abram was in a strange land which worshipped fertility gods. He had given a strong testimony to the power of his God, but the fact that he was childless left him embarrassed.

The Word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, assuring him of divine protection and renewing the promise of a reward. Abram concluded that since God had given him no heir by his wife Sarai, he must adopt the son of a slave born in his house to be his heir. This procedure was according to the law of the time. The Nuzu text declared that if a son was born later to the adopter, the adopted son must yield his place as heir to the adopter's own son. The Lord informed Abram that the slave should not be his heir (15:4). God's promise to a discouraged Abram that he would have numerous descendants through his own son was renewed (15:5). Abram would not need to depend on an adopted son for an honourable burial. Abram responded to the promise of God by believing Him —Abram gave himself completely into God's

¹ Albright and Rowley seem to think that Amraphel of Shinar is to be identified with Hammurabi. Hammurabi should be dated about 1728–1686 B. C. If Amraphel is Hammurabi, then Abraham should be dated in the eighteenth century B. C. instead of the twenty-first century. The Hebrew chronology places Abraham about 2100 B. C. Beginning with the Temple of Jerusalem under Solomon in 965 B. C., the statement is made that the Exodus took place 480 years previous. The Israelites had been in Egypt 430 years, placing the time of Jacob's migration to Egypt in about 1875 B. C. An additional 215 years from Jacob to Abram would date Abraham about 2100 B. C. The Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint state that the 430 years cover not only the sojourn in Egypt but also the entire period from Abraham's migration from Haran up to and including the Exodus (Exod. 12:40). The chronology of the Septuagint would allow a possible equating of Amraphel and Hammurabi.

Lot chose the best land but _____ against God.

Abram remained in Canaan and was _____ by God.

(sinned, blessed)

Read the account of Abram and the eastern armies in Genesis 14.

After defeating the armies, Abram gave tithes of the goods he gained in the battle to _____, priest-king of Jerusalem.

(Melchizedek)

hands—and was declared to be in right relation with God (15:6).

In 15:7 and 8, the promise of a land was renewed. The promise was sealed by a covenant in 15:9-21. A three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon were the animals used for sacrifice in the covenant ritual. The bodies of the larger animals were divided, and the two contracting parties passed between the rows, symbolizing their unity as well as invoking upon themselves a similar fate to that of the slain animals if they failed to observe their part of the agreement.

Making a covenant was expressed by the phrase “cutting a covenant.” The expression is found once in chapter 15 and eleven times in chapter 17. The expression may have come from the practice of slaying or cutting sacrifices in order to have blood with which to seal a covenant, or it may have referred to the cutting in half of the animals. The two halves of the bodies would fit together; a covenant binds two parties together into a unity. A covenant is a binding contract between two parties.

Instead of being spoken of as the Lord (*Adonai*) Yahweh as in chapter 15, chapter 17 speaks of God as *El Shaddai* (God Almighty). *Shaddai* was the God whom the patriarchs chose as their deity. Abram’s responsibility in the covenant relation to *El Shaddai* was to walk before Him and to be blameless (17:1). Abram was to live a life completely dedicated to God, and God was responsible to keep His promise to multiply the seed of Abram, to make him the father of many nations, to give him and his descendants a land, and to protect them. In walking blamelessly before God, Abram was not to worship the gods of the surrounding nations. He was to be faithful to the one God, who would show His superiority to the gods of the surrounding nations through His blessings to Abram. God made the Covenant binding upon himself. The failure of Abram to keep the Covenant would not invalidate it but would forfeit the benefits promised by God.

Archaeological discoveries have revealed that circumcision was practised at a very early date. The rite had the utilitarian purpose of personal cleanliness, the sacrificial element of a man’s offering part of himself to God, and the sense of an initiatory rite. An old custom was given new meaning. As the sign of the Covenant between God and Abram, circumcision became a constant reminder of the Covenant; it indicated the perpetual nature of the Covenant; and it signified purification and dedication to the Covenant. The rite was to be performed on all male members of the household, including slaves, on the eighth day after birth. For Israel, circumcision became the outward sign of membership in the community of faith.

According to 15:17, the ratification of the Covenant by God was indicated by the appearance of smoke. In 17:23-27, the ratification of the Covenant by Abram and his descendants was symbolized by circumcision which was not simply a ritual but also a symbol of grace, fellowship, and communion with God.

The sealing of the Covenant was accompanied by a name change. Abram (exalted father) became Abraham (father of many nations). Sarai (possibly meant contentious) received the name Sarah (princess). The son of her old age was known as Isaac (laughter). The explanation for the name Isaac is given in 18:10-15. When the messengers of the Lord arrived to announce to Abraham that he would have a son, Sarah overheard the conversation and laughed saying, “After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?” (18:12—NASB). Although Sarah had passed the age of child-bearing, she and Abraham were reminded that nothing is too difficult for the Lord (18:14).

The promise of a land to Abram by God was renewed and a _____ sealed the promise.
(covenant)

Genesis 15:17 states that ratification of the Covenant by God was indicated by the appearance of _____.
(smoke)

In Genesis 17:23-27, an old custom became the symbol of ratification of the Covenant by the Israelites. The custom was _____.
(circumcision)

With the sealing of the Covenant, the names of Abram and Sarai became _____ (_____), and _____ (_____).
(Abraham, father of many nations; Sarah, princess)

Sarah’s son was to be called _____ which means _____.
(Isaac, laughter)

In Genesis 18:14 Abraham was reminded that nothing is too difficult for _____.
(God)

Hagar and Ishmael

Genesis 16:1-16

An incident revealing the impatience of Abram and Sarai is inserted between the two chapters pertaining to the Covenant. Abram was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born (16:16). Abram and Sarai were acting within the legal code of their day which permitted a slave to bear a child for a childless wife, but the action revealed a lack of faith in God. Sarai gave her Egyptian slave Hagar to Abram to bear a son. Even though this transaction was within the legal rights of that day, bigamy never creates a happy situation in a home. Sarai became jealous when she saw that Hagar had conceived. Although a slave, Hagar assumed a superior attitude when she gave birth to a son. In a society without pensions for the aged or means of saving for retirement, the birth of a son who would take care of the aging parents was very important. Hagar had been permitted to bear a son who could take care of Abram and Hagar during their old age. Sarai could foresee the possibility of being replaced by Hagar in the respect and affection of Abram.

Sarai was not altogether out of order when she complained bitterly to Abram that her rights had not been honoured. According to the Nuzu text, the legal wife was to have all of the legal rights to the offspring borne by a concubine or handmaid provided by her. Sarai was following a family law of the Hurrians. She was acting within the rights of a law of Hammurabi when she demoted her slave after Hagar attempted to gain a position of equality. She did not have the right to dismiss Hagar, but she could treat her with abuse. Hagar chose to flee.

In Genesis 16:7-14 the first recorded appearance of the angel of the Lord occurs. The angel was a manifestation of Yahweh, apparently in human form, speaking and acting as God Himself. God's revelation in the form of an angel of Yahweh anticipated the New Testament revelation of God in the human flesh of Jesus Christ. Beer-lahairoi, the name of the well where the angel appeared, means "the well of the living one who sees me." The angel instructed Hagar to return to Sarai, and the angel promised to multiply her descendants.

God's Messenger

Genesis 18:1-19:16

Genesis 18:1 says that the *Lord* appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre. The next verse states that *three men* came to him. In 18:3 Abraham addressed them as "my lord." In 18:13 while the *three men* were renewing the promise of God concerning a son, Sarah laughed "and the *Lord* said to Abraham. . . ." The same expression is repeated in 18:20, but in 18:22 the *men* departed. The *Lord* spoke again in 18:26, and Abraham entered into dialogue with Him. In 18:22 the *men* turned to go to Sodom, but in 19:1 two *angels* came to Sodom in the evening. They are referred to as *angels* again in 19:15. The men of the city recognized them as *men* (19:5, 8, 10, 16). The relationship of Yahweh to the three men who visited Abraham is difficult to determine. In 18:22 perhaps two of the visitors departed towards Sodom, and Abraham was left standing "before the Lord." The two visitors became angels in chapter 19. Ralph Elliott suggests the concept of "the extension of Yahweh."² God was represented

The decision of Abram and Sarai to permit Hagar, Sarai's Egyptian handmaid, to bear Abram's son revealed their lack of _____ in God's promise.

(faith)

On what law did Sarai base her right to abuse Hagar?

(The Law of Hammurabi)

List some encounters between Jehovah or His representatives and Abraham in Genesis 18 that show that in the Old Testament God extended Himself into the world in many ways.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

(Compare your answer with the text also.)

² *The Message of Genesis* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1961), p. 133.

in the Old Testament as extending Himself into this world in many ways. God controlled the men and related to them in a way that He was represented as speaking through them. Angels were messengers of God. Their message was related directly to God so that Abraham could speak to the Lord as he spoke to the men.

The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah

Genesis 18:16–19:26

The wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah is illustrated by the desires of the base men of Sodom to treat the guests of Lot in an unnatural and lustful fashion (19:5). The population was so perverted that it had no concept of the divine will and way represented in the visit of the angels. Lot acted in accord with that society in his willingness to sacrifice his daughters. Women were considered property, and to offer his daughters to be used for the satisfaction of the lustful passions of the Sodomites would have been the lesser of the two evils.

An interesting debate of Yahweh with Himself concerning whether he should tell Abraham about the imminent doom of Sodom is found in 18:17–19. The conclusion was that divine judgement against unrighteousness should be made known to Abraham. The covenant responsibility of Abraham in being a blessing to the families of the earth was to make known not only God's merciful and gracious promises but also His requirements for righteousness and justice. To observe the punishment of Sodom would enable Abraham to instruct more effectively his children and household concerning the righteous and just ways of the Lord. It is implied in 18:19 that the Lord would be able to bestow upon Abraham His promises only if Abraham lived righteously before the Lord. Upon hearing of the impending destruction, he pleaded with the Lord to spare the cities if even ten righteous men could be found there. Because of Abraham's faith and faithfulness, the Lord spared Abraham's nephew Lot and his family. Since Lot's life centred in his possessions instead of his relationship to Yahweh, he hesitated to depart from Sodom. Lot's wife shared in his love of material possessions and could not resist looking back. She was turned into a pillar of salt (19:26).

Lot's Debasement

Genesis 19:30-38

The depth of sinfulness in the nature of man is noted again in Lot's relationship with his daughters. The sons born of Lot and his daughters' incest were the ancestors of the Moabites and the Ammonites. The Israelites were always striving with these tribes, and the author of Genesis may have been emphasizing the fact that the sinful origin of the nations led to disastrous results.

Lot shared in the prosperity of his uncle Abraham until he departed from the man of blessing. Although he had chosen the fertile Jordan Valley, he was reduced to poverty after the destruction of Sodom and spent his remaining years living in a cave. Lot was delivered from Sodom before its destruction only because God remembered Abraham. The author gives a slight defence of the character of selfish and pathetic Lot by noting that his daughters judged that they would have to intoxicate their father to achieve their immoral ends. The experience of Lot emphasizes again the tragedy of man's sinful nature.

Abraham's Removal to Gerar

Genesis 20:1-18

The events of chapters 13–19 took place around Mamre and

In dealing with the wickedness of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, God made known to Abraham His requirements for _____ and _____ (righteousness, justice)

The emphasis in Lot's life was on _____ (possessions)

The tragedy of man's sinful nature is seen in the account of _____ life. (Lot's)

Hebron. Chapter 20 records Abraham's moving southward towards the country of Negeb (the dry land). The statement that Abraham sojourned in Gerar possibly means that he became a resident there and returned to Hebron only for Sarah's burial. Kadesh is located about fifty miles south of Beersheba. Shur is an area of desert in the northwestern region of the Sinai peninsula. Since Gerar is some distance from Kadesh and Shur, perhaps Abraham had his pastures between Kadesh and Egypt and his citizenship at Gerar.

The story of Abimelech's taking Sarah into his house is similar to the events concerning Pharaoh of Egypt in chapter 12; however, there are differences in the details of the two events. Sarah must have been beautiful and a great temptation just as she was in Egypt. Whereas plagues had come upon Pharaoh, barrenness came to the household of Abimelech. Pharaoh discovered his own fault, but Abimelech was divinely warned in a dream.

The moral standards of the day are revealed by the fear that came upon Abimelech when he was informed that Sarah was married (vv. 4ff.). The dream prevented Abimelech from sinning and bringing guilt and punishment to the nation. Abimelech argued his innocence. God's reply in the dream revealed that He knew Abimelech's heart and was able to give providential guidance to him (v. 6).

Verse 7 mentions a prophet for the first time and implies that his primary duty was prayer. Abraham's character is defended by the author's explanation that Sarah actually was his sister, the daughter of his father but not the daughter of his mother (v. 12). Abimelech's experience made him aware that God's hand was upon Abraham; therefore, he made gifts of sheep, oxen, servants, and money. Abraham was invited to dwell in the land wherever he pleased, and Abraham prayed to God who healed the household of Abimelech. The high moral standard surrounding the life of Abraham is contrasted to that of Lot.

A Domestic Crisis

Genesis 21:1-34

The story of Abraham's family is interrupted by the incidents of Sodom and Gomorrah and the encounter with Abimelech, king of Gerar. When Abraham was ninety-nine years old, God promised that a son would be born to Sarah, and with him the Covenant would be established forever. Isaac was to become the father of twelve princes and the promised great nation (17:19-21, 24). Chapter 21 opens with the Lord keeping His promise to give Sarah and Abraham a child in their old age. Abraham was a hundred years old when Isaac was born (21:5). The birth of Isaac was a time of great joy for Sarah (21:6-7). However, her joy was cut short when she saw the teen-age son of Hagar, the Egyptian, mocking Isaac (21:9). Sarah demanded that Hagar and Ishmael be sent away. Abraham was distressed in the midst of the family crisis, but God instructed him to follow Sarah's demand because through Isaac the Abrahamic Covenant would be perpetuated. After wandering in the wilderness of Beersheba and exhausting their food and water supply, Hagar placed her son in the shade of a tree and went apart to do some serious thinking. God heard the cry of the lad and promised that he would become the father of a great nation.

The latter part of chapter 21 continues the account of Abraham's relationship with Abimelech. The two exchanged gifts and entered into a covenant to do no harm to each other.

How could Abraham justify calling Sarah his sister?

(See Genesis 20:12.)

Do you think the high moral standard of the day revealed in Genesis 20 was God design for Abraham, Abimelech, Lot, and others?

Abraham was _____ years old when Isaac was born.

(100)

The Test of Abraham's Faith

Genesis 22:1-24

Abraham had been chosen for a great purpose; therefore, God put him to a supreme test to determine if Abraham could stand true even when God's promises and demands appeared to be in conflict. Abraham had waited until he was an old man for the promise of a son to be fulfilled. Then God required him to sacrifice that son as a burnt offering. Earlier Abraham had been willing to leave the land of his kindred to follow his God. Could he believe in and be faithful to a God who appeared to be contradicting His purpose for giving a son through whom Abraham's descendants would be multiplied by requiring that son to be offered as a sacrifice?

Question has often been raised whether Abraham's God would require a human sacrifice. All of the details of the incident are not given; however, Abraham understood that God had made such a demand of him. The significant point of the story is that Abraham was willing to trust God even when he could not understand how God's purpose would be fulfilled. The birth of Isaac had been miraculous, and Abraham believed that God in His own way and by His own wisdom could accomplish His purpose.

Abraham's faithfulness to God was rewarded. Because of his faith in God, the messenger of the Lord renewed the promises of God to His faithful servant. A ram was provided for the sacrifice. Abraham learned from the incident that his God did not want the sacrifice of human life; He wanted faithfulness and obedience. Abraham's neighbours sacrificed their children to idols, but Abraham's God required a living sacrifice of a devoted life. Abraham's life was not to become centred in the gift with which God blessed his home, but he was to demonstrate the correct parental attitude of being willing to give his child to God without reservation.

The Death of Sarah

Genesis 23:1-20

Sarah died at the age of 127 years. Abraham negotiated with the Hittites for a piece of property on which to bury her. The Hittites offered him their choice sepulchre as a gift, but Abraham refused, insisting on paying for a piece of ground where he might bury his dead. He paid four hundred shekels of silver for the field of Ephron in Machpelah. This was the only parcel of land that Abraham ever owned in Canaan.

The Choice of Isaac's Wife

Genesis 24:1-67

Abraham was determined that his son would not marry a Canaanite. In safeguarding the divine promises which were made to him when he entered Canaan, Abraham planned to avoid a Canaanite marriage in order to preserve the purity of the race and to avoid the immoral practices of the Canaanite religion. Isaac was not to go back to Haran since that would be a rejection of the promises of God concerning the land given to Abraham and his descendants.

Abraham turned to his most trustworthy servant, Eliezer of Damascus, and made him swear that he would not take a wife for Isaac from the Canaanites.³ He was sent to Haran, the city of

³ See Genesis 15:2

Even though Abraham could not understand how God's purpose would be fulfilled if Isaac were sacrificed, Abraham _____ God.

(trusted)

Underline the correct words.

Abraham (was willing, was not willing) to give his child to God without reservation.

(Underline "was willing.")

Abraham was concerned that Isaac not marry a _____.

(Canaanite)

He wished to preserve the _____ and avoid _____ of the Canaanite religion.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Eliezer, a trusted servant, was sent to _____ to secure a wife for Isaac.

(Haran)

Nahor, to get a wife for Isaac. Eliezer's selecting of the future bride of Isaac is interesting and beautiful. It reveals many ancient oriental customs.

The Death of Abraham

Genesis 25:1-18

Before his death Abraham took another wife whose name was Keturah. Through his wives and concubines, Abraham did become the father of many nations. The Shuhites, the Midianites, and the Ishmaelites, as well as the Israelites, were among the nations descending from Abraham. He was 175 years of age when he died.

Name some of the nations which were descendants of Abraham.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Home Study Exercise

Basic activity (Levels 1, 2, and 3). Read Genesis 11:26–25:18 and the study manual and do the following exercise.

1. Give three theories suggested by those who do not believe the patriarchs were historical persons. _____

2. Describe the political conditions existing in Canaan at the time of Abraham. _____

3. How did Haines derive the date of 2161 B. C. for Abraham's birth? _____

4. List the requirements and the blessings promised to Abraham as found in Genesis 12:1-3. _____

5. Give the elements of God's Covenant with Abraham. _____

6. Explain how the Covenant was ratified by God and by Abraham. _____

7. What was the importance of Isaac's birth to Abraham? _____

8. Did Sarah treat her slave Hagar justly? Explain. _____

9. Explain why Yahweh decided to share with Abraham the plans to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. _____

10. What do you consider was Lot's greatest problem? _____

11. Was Abraham untruthful in calling Sarah his sister? Explain. _____

12. What moral standard did God expect of Abraham, Abimelech, and Lot? _____

13. Name two truths to be learned from the testing of Abraham's faith. _____

14. Why was Abraham so concerned about the choice of a wife for Isaac? _____

15. What evidence is there that God fulfilled His promise to make Abraham the father of many nations? _____

Supplementary activity (Levels 2 and 3). Read pages 36–53 in *The Making of a Nation* and do the following.

1. Briefly point out the differences between the religion of the Canaanites and of Abraham.
2. How do the laws discovered in the Nuzu (Nuzi) ruins help to explain Jacob's relationship to Laban?
3. Explain the meaning of "to cut a covenant."
4. Give two approaches used by scholars in attempting to date Abraham and the Exodus.

Advanced activity (Level 3). Read pages 50–78 in *The Book of Genesis* by Fritsch and do the following.

1. Explain the purpose of Abram's call in relation to the world.
2. Evaluate Abram's scheme with Sarai to inform Pharaoh that she was his sister.
3. Compare the characters of Abram and Lot.
4. Discuss the interest of scholars in chapter 14.
5. Explain Abraham's purpose in having a child by Hagar and evaluate Sarah's treatment of her slave.
6. Write an essay entitled "How God appeared to Abraham."

Seminar Discussion

1. Why did God elect a person like Abraham instead of one like Lot?
2. Evaluate the righteousness of Abraham in the light of his calling Sarah his sister on two occasions. Can God's election of Abraham be justified?
3. Do you think Mesopotamian culture and customs were perpetuated through the native son Abraham after he reached the land of Canaan?
4. Why would a God of love ask Abraham to sacrifice Isaac?
5. Were the patriarchs historical individuals?
6. Why did Abraham refuse to take a wife for Isaac from among the Canaanites?
7. Why was it important for Abraham to have a son by Sarah?