

## INTRO TO GENESIS PART 2

How does God bring about wholeness to a creation that has become broken? How brokenness began is described with the first humans in the garden. It gets worse with sibling rivalry. Even as Noah is a good man, he also falls from grace. The attempt to build a tower to the skies reveals that a humanity who seek to become God ends up becoming tyrannical oppressors of human and creational life.

1. The curses in Genesis 3 introduce the reality of the subordination of women and the birth of patriarchy.
2. The conflict between Cain and Abel introduces sibling rivalry and the reality of violence and murder.
3. The story of Noah introduces the subordination and enslavement of some people over other people. (Genesis 9: 18ff).
4. The story of Noah also introduces the reality of humans not only becoming plant-eaters (Genesis 1-2) but also meat-eaters (Genesis 9:1ff), necessitating the killing of animals, even as God is providing rituals and rules to do so humanely and with respect and gratitude (sacrifice (Genesis 8:20ff) and kosher rules (Genesis 9:4-4)).

All of this will factor into the second part of our story...

## GENESIS 12-16

With Abraham & Sarah we arrive at a new attempt by God to renew the world. God started with Adam and Eve, and as things fell apart and became unbearable, a new start was tried with Noah. Unfortunately, things deteriorated again but God refused to destroy in order to rebuild. Rather, with Abraham and Sarah, God wants to create a new path by creating a new people out of humanity to be a light to God to the world. Will it work?

Genesis 12 - 50 is broken down into the stories of four generations: Abraham & Sarah (12-25), Isaac & Rebekah (25-27), Jacob & Rachel (25-36), and Joseph (37-50). The beginnings of Abraham's family are traced back (11:10-32) all the way to Shem, son of Noah.

Abraham's father had intended to move the family (more like a clan) into Canaan (present day Israel) but had only got part way. After his father dies, Abraham receives a call from God to make the journey all the way. Abraham's origins are Sumerian (from Ur of the Chaldees) which stems geographically from modern day Iraq.

Abraham makes the trip with Sarah and his nephew Lot. As they arrive and do well for themselves, there is not enough land for the two of them (they are sheep herders), so

they split up. Abraham gives Lot first pick of land.

There are a number of adventures that take place, not least of which is a war between various tribes within and around Canaan. Abraham has made alliances with various chieftains, and he has a number of hired hands that he can use as a small army on short notice. This ability comes to good use as he tries and succeeds to rescue his captured nephew Lot.

The world of Abraham is very different from our own. The role of women is not the same as we would have it today. Women were often pawns in the male game of politics and property accumulation. Sarah is used this way in Egypt, and God is quite upset with Abraham for not having the guts to claim her as his wife. Also peculiar is Sarah's suggestion (in chapter 16) that Abraham make for them a descendent through a slave woman (Hagar) since Sarah herself cannot bear a child. Keeping slaves is bad enough but having multiple wives and sexual partners is bad too. Obviously in that world it was acceptable. God, however, really takes objection to 1) How Hagar is treated, and 2) that Abraham and Sarah cannot trust God enough to leave things as they are.

The biggest theme of these sections has to do with the covenant God initiates with Abraham & Sarah. A covenant is a relationship based on an agreement (like a marriage). God invites Abraham to make a covenant with God, and Abraham accepts the invitation.

The covenant is based on the promises of God to Abraham, and it is maintained by Abraham's faithful trust in God keeping those promises. The challenge, though, is in the waiting. God promises that Abraham will inherit the land of Canaan, that he will have many descendants and that they, as a people, will be the means of God blessing and saving the world. But Abraham doesn't even have one heir, as both Sarah and he are old. The land is also populated by many peoples and some of them are not friendly or open to sharing their land. How are Abraham and Sarah even going to make a start?

Abraham believes God, even though he hardly knows God. How does God speak to him? Probably through visions and inner convictions. Somehow, Abraham is in an on-going communication with God. He has a living relationship with God. This relationship will be tested on both sides. But the fate of a whole people hangs in the balance. Will Abraham's faith hold out? Stay tuned as we continue the story.

NOTE 1 - Some commentators suggest that in order to get a better sense of age, the reader should halve the various ages of people stated in the stories of Abraham and on. Thus, when it says that Abraham was 75 yrs old when he set out to Canaan, we should read that as 37.5 yrs (which would be old at that time for sure). When it mentions their ages as old for childbearing and rearing, we should think of them in their 40s.

NOTE 2 - Melchizedek is the king of Salem (another word for Jerusalem). He is both a king and a priest, indicating the religious nature of his Canaanite clan. The God he (and other Canaanite clans) worshipped is *El Elyon* (God most high). Thus, Abraham and they believe in the same God. The acknowledgement of Melchizedek, however, is that Abraham is blessed by God (Abraham prospering and succeeding as a sign of God's favour). Melchizedek the name also means 'King of Righteousness' in contrast to the King of Sodom whose name, '*Bera,*' means: 'in evil.' Already in this ancient story we see the clue of the sacredness of Jerusalem versus some of the territory which eventually becomes Moab and Ammon (the descendants of Lot). Melchizedek is also thought of as an early Christ-figure in the New Testament book called 'Hebrews'.

Some big questions to ponder:

1) Can someone so compromised as Abraham be a chosen vehicle of the divine to bring new light into a world where there is much pain and darkness? Or has God recognized that human beings are broken and the path to wholeness has to incorporate the brokenness as part of the journey? If the answer to the latter question is yes, then how do we read this story and listen for gospel in it? More to come...