



Class Notes

Abraham

Genesis 11-25

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How can the story of one family who lived thousands of years ago help us see God at work today? As God shapes Abraham through calling and testing, the story of the people of Israel and all of humanity is told in the ups and downs of his life. Journey with Abraham through a lifetime of failures and faithfulness as he learns to trust God's promise and becomes the father of many nations.

Last updated on: August 21, 2024

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Module 1: Introduction to the Abraham Story

SESSIONS 1-3

Discover the significant role Abraham and Sarah play in the biblical drama, and gain tools for understanding how their story is told.

Session 1: Abraham and Sarah in the Biblical Imagination

Key Takeaways

- Jesus constantly appealed to the Hebrew Scriptures to talk about his identity and mission, and the stories of Avraham and Sarah were an important part of this.
- The rest of the Bible mentions Avraham and Sarah over 115 times, highlighting the crucial role they play in the story of the Bible.
- Mary saw God moving in her life and story as a continuation of the promises made to Avraham.

The Importance of Abraham and Sarah

Within the story of the Bible, there are few characters who rival the importance of Abraham and Sarah. Abraham is mentioned in nearly every part of the Bible, and the story of his journey from Babylon to Canaan, the tales of his failures and his faith, and the covenant promises that God makes to him are all foundational in the biblical story and in both Jewish and Christian traditions.

The way their names are pronounced in English comes from the Greek spelling and pronunciation. The original Hebrew pronunciation of their names is a bit different, and in the rest of these notes, their names will appear based on the Hebrew and not the Greek.

- Hebrew: אברהם / אַבְרָם, Avram/Avraham; שרה / שַׂרַי, Sarai/Sarah
- Greek: Ἀβραάμ, Abraam; Σαρρας, Sarras

The following is just a sample of how later biblical authors recall the story of Avraham and Sarai.

God's Covenant Promise to Avraham

Exodus 2:24 NIV

God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.

Leviticus 26:42 NIV

I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.

Numbers 32:11 NIV

Because they have not followed me wholeheartedly, not one of those who were twenty years old or more when they came out of Egypt will see the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Deuteronomy 1:8 NIV

See, I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of the land the LORD swore he would give to your fathers—to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—and to their descendants after them.

Avraham's Journey to Canaan and God's Blessing

Exodus 32:12-13 NIV

¹² "Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. ¹³ Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'"

Joshua 24:2-3 NIV

² Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your ancestors, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods. ³ But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the Euphrates and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants.'"

Isaiah 51:2 NIV

... look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarai, who gave you birth. When I called him he was only one man, and I blessed him and made him many.

Ezekiel 33:24 NIV

"Son of man, the people living in those ruins in the land of Israel are saying, 'Abraham was only one man, yet he possessed the land. But we are many; surely the land has been given to us as our possession.'"

Avraham's Faith in God's Promise

John 8:39 NASB

They answered and said to him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham."

Romans 4:19-20 NASB

¹⁹ Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarai's womb; ²⁰ yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God ...

Hebrews 11:8 NASB

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

Galatians 3:29 NASB

And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

Hebrews 11:11 NASB

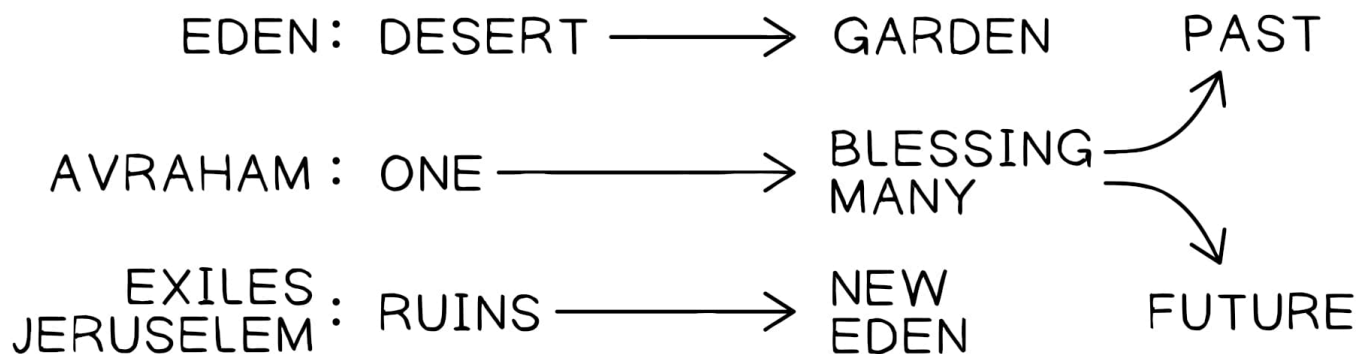
By faith even Sarai herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered him faithful who had promised.

James 2:21-22 NASB

²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? ²² You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected ...

Isaiah 51 and the Avraham Story

ISAIAH 51



Isaiah 51 and the Avraham Story. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Reflection Question

How do Mary's song in [Luke 1](#) and God's words through the prophet in [Isaiah 51](#) describe the role of Avraham and Sarah's story in understanding God's purposes in every age?

Session 2: The Abraham Story as a Whole

Key Takeaways

- The biblical narrative contains only certain events from the lives of Avraham and Sarah. The biblical authors select specific events to communicate an intentional message.
- The biblical authors design the text in symmetrically arranged sections, often in groups of three, to help readers make connections, comparisons, and contrasts.

The Macro Design of Genesis 11:27-25:18

Genesis 11:27-19:38

From Babylon to Hebron and Sodom

11:27-14:24

- **11:27-12:5** From Babylon to Canaan
- **12:6-13:18** From Canaan to Egypt back to Canaan
- **14:1-24** Avram rescues Lot from Babylonian alliance

15:1-17:27

- **15:1-21** Avram's faith and the covenant
- **16:1-16** The failure with Hagar
- **17:1-27** Circumcision and the covenant renewed

18:1-19:38

- **18:1-15** Avram and Sarah promised a son
- **18:16-33** Avram intercedes for Lot in Sodom
- **19:1-39** Lot is rescued out of Sodom's ruin

Genesis 20:1-22:19

From Sodom and Hebron to Mount Moriah

20:1-18

Avraham Deceives Avimelek About Sarah

- 20:1-2
- 20:3-13
- 20:14-18

21:1-21:34

- **21:1-21** Yitskhaq born and separated from Hagar and Yishmael
- **21:22-34** Avraham and Avimelek united through covenant

22:1-19

Avraham Loses and Regains Yitskhaq

- 22:1-3
- 22:4-14
- 22:15-19

Genesis 22:20-25:18

From Mount Moriah to Mesopotamia and Back Again

22:20-24

Rivqah Born in Mesopotamia

- 22:20-22
- 22:23
- 22:24

23:1-20

Sarah Dies and Is Buried

- 23:1-2
- 23:3-16
- 23:17-20

24:1-67

Rivqah's Journey from Mesopotamia to Canaan

- 24:1-28
- 24:29-51
- 24:52-67

25:1-18

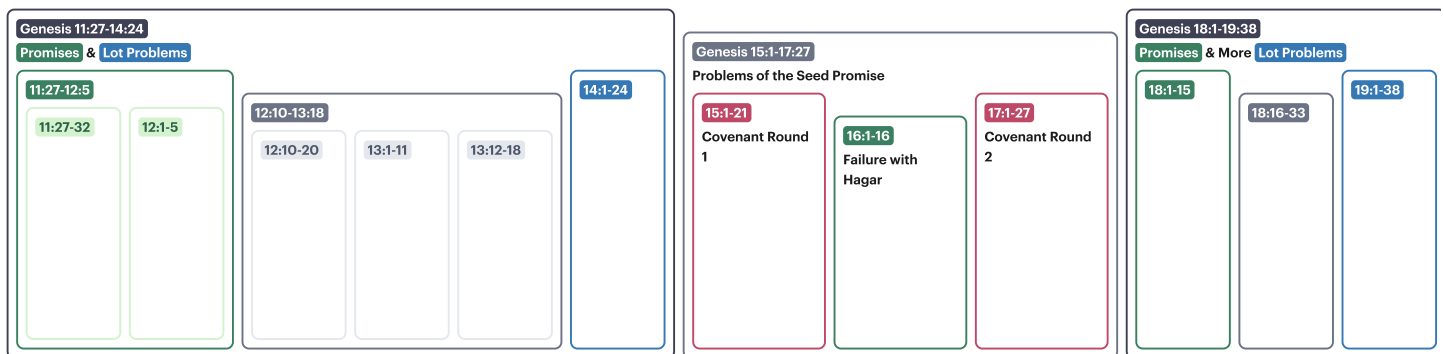
Avraham Dies and Is Buried

- 25:1-6
- 25:7-11
- 25:12-18

Genesis 11:27-25:18. Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

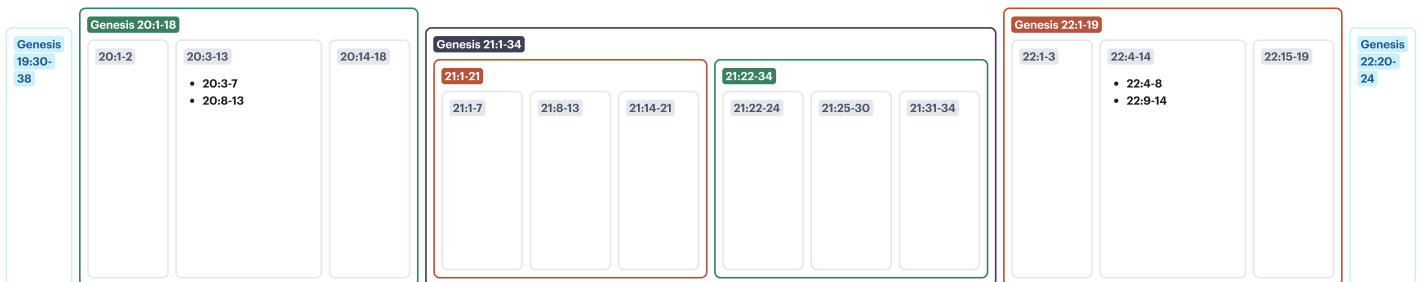
The Literary Organization of the Avraham Story Visualized

From Mesopotamia to Hebron and Sodom



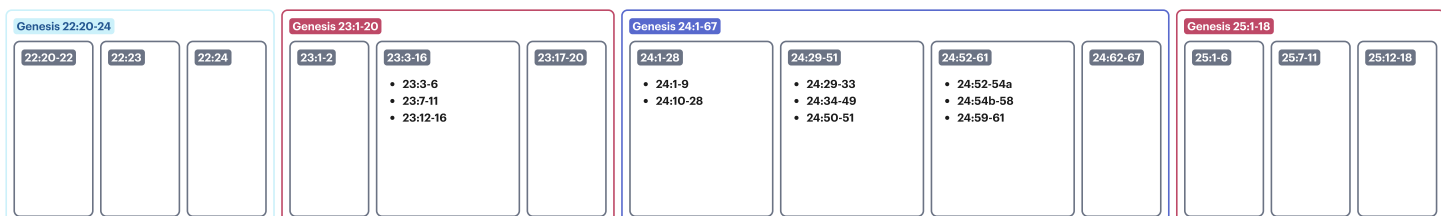
Genesis 11:27-19:38. Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

From Sodom and Hebron to Mount Moriah



Genesis 20:1-22:24. Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

From Mount Moriah to Mesopotamia and Back Again



Genesis 22:20-25:18. Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Notice that each of these three movements is not aligned with our contemporary chapter numbers, and so a glance at the content of these literary divisions may seem counterintuitive. This is primarily due to the fact

that the literary organization of the Avraham story is patterned after the literary organization of Genesis 1:1-11:26, both in its design and in the main themes explored in the narratives. So to truly grasp what the Avraham story is about, we need to recap the story so far as it's presented in Genesis 1-11.

Reflection Question

How does the analogy of the arranged potted plants help us understand the conventions of biblical literature?

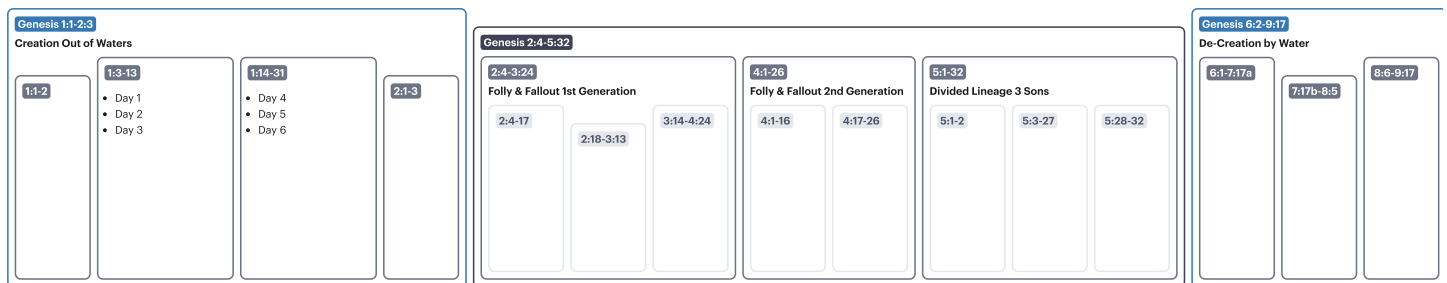
Session 3: The Literary Design of Genesis 1-11

Key Takeaways

- The story in Genesis 1-11 walks us through a thematic cycle of creation, escalating failures, de-creation, and finally the re-creation of a remnant that is commissioned as the new humanity.
- The story of Avraham is designed with multiple movements that repeat and develop this cycle.
- Knowing where you are in the cycle illuminates many of the unique features in the order and design of the Avraham story.

The Thematic Melody of the TaNaK

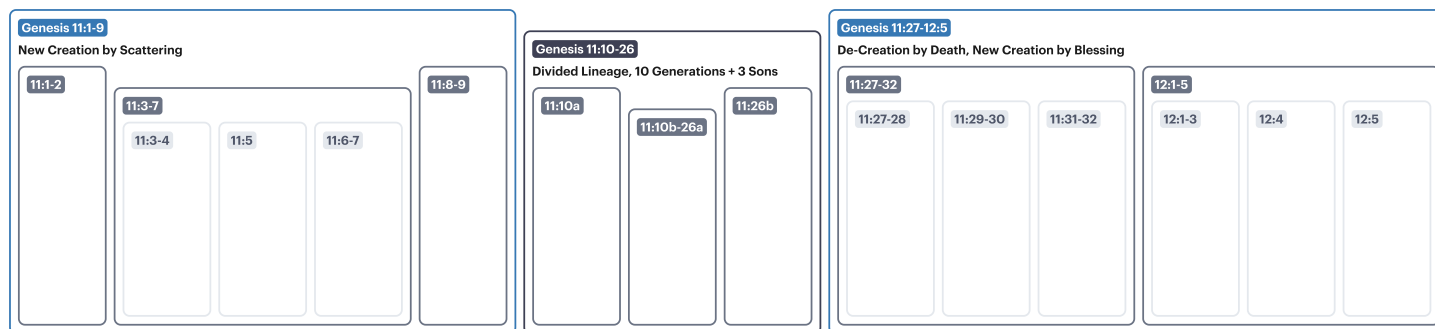
The literary organization of Genesis 1:1-11:26, both in its design and the main themes explored in the narratives, forms the organizational template of the TaNaK. So to truly grasp what the entire TaNaK is about, we need to recap the story so far as it's presented in Genesis 1-11 (adapted from D.A. Teeter, personal communication and his "Biblical Symmetry and Its Modern Detractors" paper delivered at the 2019 International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament congress).



Genesis 1:1-9:17. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).



Genesis 6:1-11:9. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).



Genesis 11:1-12:5. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

These thematic cycles set up a narrative pattern and thematic melody that recycles, develops, and advances with each new generation. The basic melody goes like this.

1. Creation and Blessing

- God brings order/life/blessing out of chaos/waters/death/curse.
- Key words: life, blessing, create, establish, seed, sprout, grow, fruit, fruitful and multiply. Also seven, fullness, and oath (all spelled שבע).
- Key images: dry land, refuge, safety, order.

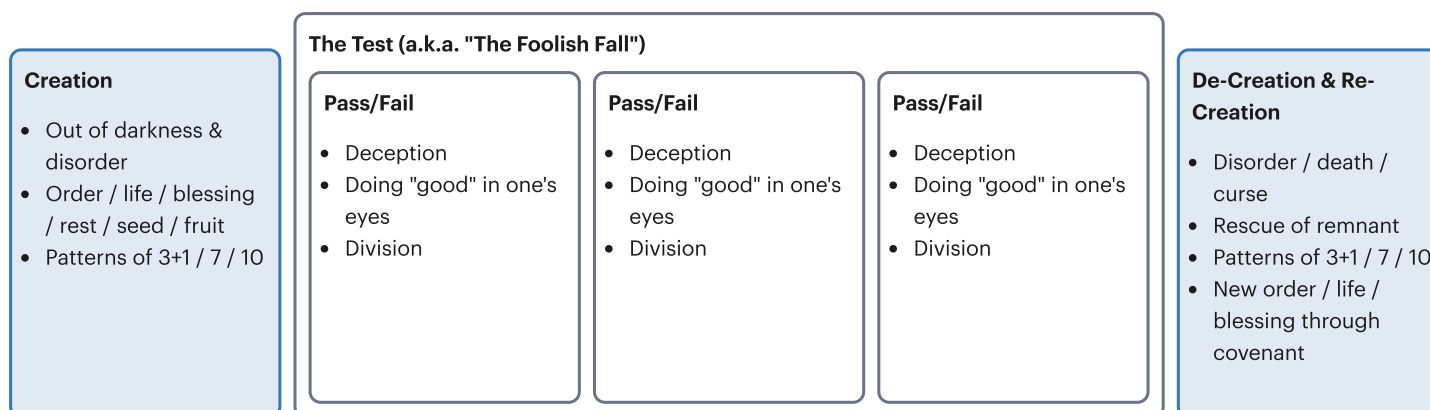
2. Folly, Test, and Failure (a.k.a. "the foolish fall")

- God invites a chosen human partner to share in the order/life/blessing, which places a decision/test of their trustworthiness on the table.
- God's chosen partner fails/succeeds the test, usually involving deception/division/violence.
- The same person/next generation faces their own opportunity and test and fails/succeeds, usually involving an intensified expression of deception/division/violence.
- The escalating sequence of tests and failures leads to a separation between the key characters so that one person or family splits off from the rest and is chosen by God for a new future.

3. De-creation and Re-creation

- De-creation: God brings about an inversion of #1 above, usually an escalation of chaos/death/curse.
- Out of that de-creation, God chooses/preserves a remnant/seed and begins a new movement of re-creation through them (often marked by covenants and wordplays on the Hebrew root שבע, "seven/fullness/oath," or ברית, "covenant").

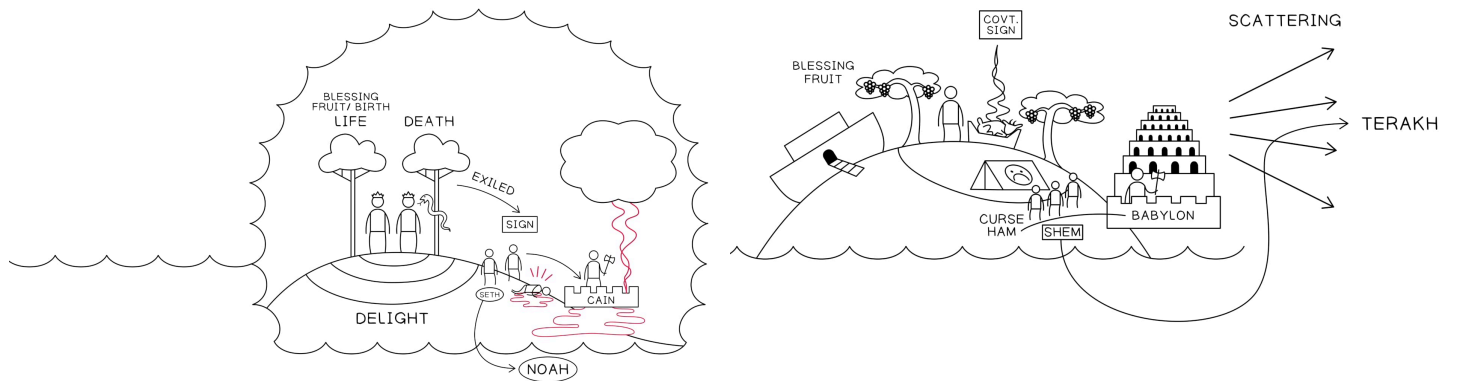
4. Press Repeat



Genesis 1:1-11:26. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

The Avraham stories are organized according to this same thematic melody as the cycle replays itself on the macro-level, medium-level, and micro-level of each part of the story.

Genesis 1-11 Thematic Melody Visualized



Genesis 1-11 Thematic Melody. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Reflection Question

How do the biblical authors link the Avraham story to the cycle of themes in Genesis 1-11?



Module 2: From Babylon to Canaan

SESSIONS 4-10

God chooses one family out of the scattering of Babylon. Study Genesis 11-14 as Abraham faces his first tests as God's chosen human partner.

Session 4: A Tale of Two Journeys

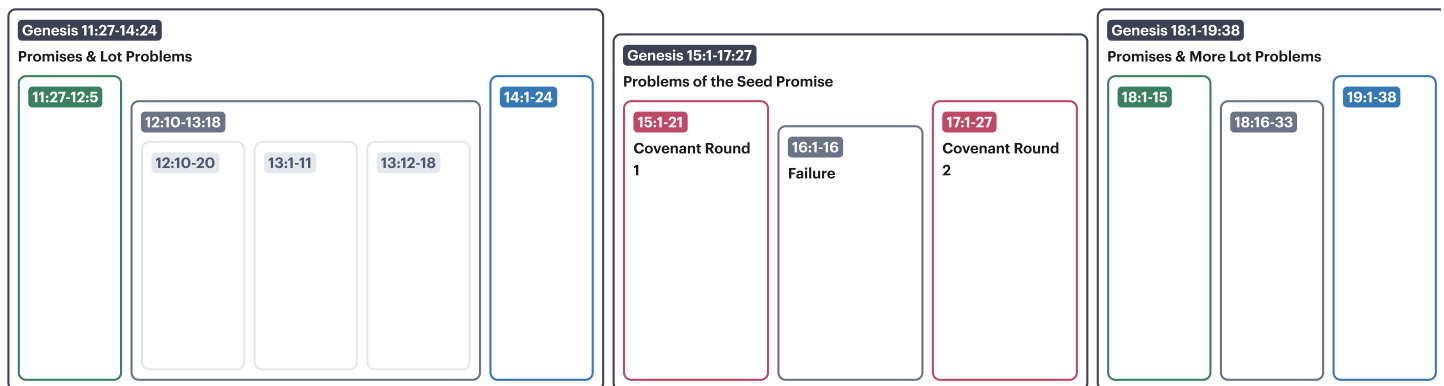
Key Takeaways

- The two stories of Terakh (Terah) and Avram are set alongside each other to compare and contrast: Terakh is marked by death and Avram is marked by blessing.
- Avram is depicted as a new Noah. He leaves the fire oven of Babylon after the scattering, like Noah left the ark after the flood.
- When God calls Avram, the focus of the biblical story narrows from the drama of God and the nations to God's work through one family.

Movement I: From Babylon to Hebron and Sodom (11:27-19:38)

There are three sections in this macro-unit, and they display a tight cohesion and symmetrical design.

The Macro Design of Genesis 11:27-19:38



Genesis 11:27-19:38 (Simplified). Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

This first large stretch of the Avraham story has been organized into three movements that each consist of three literary units. These triads are symmetrically designed at each level, inviting the reader to make vital comparisons and contrasts that inform each scene's contribution to the whole.

11:27-14:24 and 18:1-19:38

These are two large blocks where Avraham's nephew Lot features as a main character. In both cases, Avraham's disregard for God's command to leave his family behind results in huge trouble, first in Lot's capture by the Babylonian alliance ([Gen. 14](#)), and second when he needs to be rescued from Sodom ([Gen. 19](#)). In both stories God delivers the non-chosen nephew through Avraham's status as the chosen, blessed, and righteous intercessor.

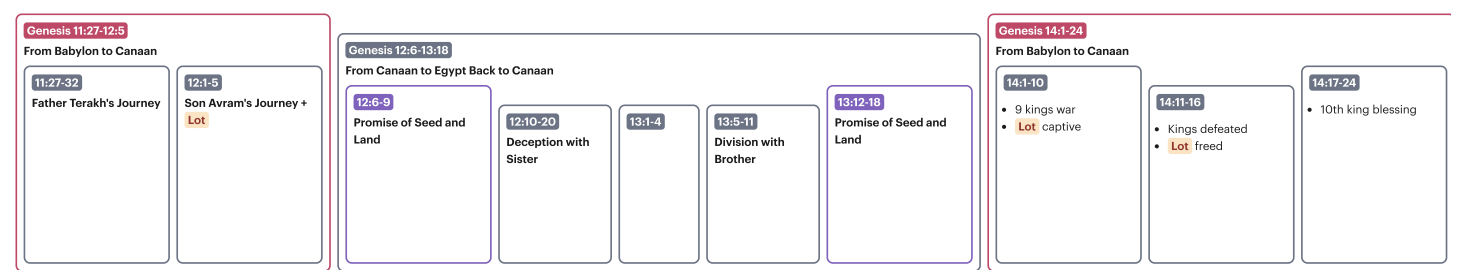
The first promises of a large family for Avraham and Sarah are made in 12:1-9, but they are not fulfilled until 18:1-15.

15:1-17:27

This triad of tightly organized stories is connected in important ways. They all revolve around Avraham's struggle to trust God's promise that he and Sarah will produce a child.

In chapters 15 and 17, Avraham both believes and doesn't believe in God's promise, leading to the second major covenant in the biblical story.

Part 1: The Macro Design of Genesis 11:27-14:24



Genesis 11:27-14:24. Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

In this first large movement of the Avraham story, the literary units are determined by movements to and from locations (Babylon, Canaan, and Egypt) and by the main characters in focus.

Notice the symmetrical design of the locations.

Genesis 11:27-12:5

From Babylon to Canaan

- Avram brings Lot (a no-no!)

Genesis 12:6-7

Canaan: Oak of Moreh

- Divine Revelation: "To your seed I give this land"

Genesis 12:8-9

Between Bethel and Ai to the Negev

- Altar built for worship

Genesis 12:10-20

Egypt

Genesis 13:1-11

To the Negev, to between Bethel and Ai

- Altar built for worship

Genesis 13:12-28

Canaan: Oaks of Mamre

- Divine revelation: "all the land ... I give to you and your seed"

Genesis 14:

Babylonian Invasion of Canaan

- Lot's presence brings trouble upon Avram

Genesis 11:27-14:24. Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

This design encourages the reader to compare the two stories that feature Babylon and the presence of Lot in Avram's family. In chapters 11-12, Avram brings Lot even though God told him to leave his family behind. This decision comes to haunt Avram in the story of the dispute between Lot and Avram that leads to his migration to Sodom. And, of course, Lot's presence in Sodom causes huge headaches for Avram in chapter 14.

Nested inside of the Babylon/Lot stories are two stories where Avram builds altars by sacred trees and receives a divine revelation about his future inheritance of the land. In the first story, it's a gift from God. In the second story at Mamre (13:12-18), the gift of the land reverses the danger Avram and Lot's dispute posed to the promise.

Inside of that are two stories about Avraham meeting God's presence in the land and building altars for worship; he is staking out the land as a place of sacred worship.

At the very center of this sequence is Avram's self-imposed exile in Egypt that leads to disaster when he puts the future of the promised seed in jeopardy.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 11:27-12:5

Introduction

²⁷ Now these are the generations of Terakh.

Part 1: Terakh's Journey

Death and Barrenness in Ur-Kasdim

- a **Terakh** caused the birth of **Avram**, **Nakhor** and **Haran** ;
a' and Haran caused the birth of **Lot** .
b 28 And **Haran died before his father Terakh**
c in **the land of his family**,
c in **Ur of the Chaldeans** .
-
- a 29 And **Avram** and **Nakhor** took wives for themselves,
b **the name of Avram's wife was Sarai** ;
c and **the name of Nakhor's wife was Milkah**,
c' the **daughter of Haran**, the father of **Milkah** and Iskah.
b' 30 **And Sarai was barren, she had no child** .

Terakh Takes His Family

- 31 **And Terakh took** (ויקה תרח...) **Avram** his son
and Lot , the son of Haran, the son of his son,
and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Avram's wife;

They Go Out of Ur To Enter Canaan but Don't Reach It

- and they went out** with them from **Ur of the Chaldeans**
in order to go to the land of Canaan ;
and they went as far as Haran, and they settled there.

Terakh Age + Death in Haran

- 32 And **the days of Terakh were five years and two hundred years**;
and Terakh died in Haran .

Part 2: Avram's Journey

Blessing and Children in the Promised Land

- 12:1 And Yahweh said to Avram,
a "Get yourself going
b **from your land**,
b' and **from your family**,
b' and **from your father's house** ,
a' to the land which I will show you.

- a 2 **And I will make you a great nation**,
- b and I will bless you,
- a' and I will make your name great;
- b' and so you shall be a blessing.
- a 3 And I will **bless**
- b **those who** **bless** you,
- b' and **the one who** treats you as **cursed**
- a' I will **curse**;
- a and in you all the **families of the land**
- b will find blessing."

Avram's Age + Exit From Haran

4 And Avram went just as Yahweh spoke to him, and Lot went with him, and **Avram was five and seventy years** **when he went out from Haran**.

Avram Takes His Family

5 **And Avram took (...ויקח אברם)**
Sarai his wife and Lot the son of his brother
 and all their possessions which they possessed
 and the people whom they had acquired in Haran,

They Go Out of Haran To Enter Canaan and Do Reach It

and they went out
in order to go to the land of Canaan
and they went the land of Canaan.

Genesis 11:27-12:5. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

Maps of Terakh's and Avram's Journeys



[Openstreetmap.org](https://www.openstreetmap.org).

Notice how this two-step journey is also a two-generation journey. What Terakh begins, Avram completes, but only because of the word of God that comes to Avram.

Terakh's journey begins with two tragic notes: Haran's death and the barrenness of Sarai his daughter-in-law. Sarai's infertility also highlights the contrast between her and her sister-in-law Milkah. They both have royal names ("Princess" and "Queen"), but Milkah's identity is described in terms of her family relations, while Sarai's identity is described only in relation to her inability to have children.

Terakh's journey begins with these tragic notes and then issues in a three-stage process from (1) "taking," to (2) "going out," and then (3) arriving in Haran where Terakh dies. Terakh's journey begins with Haran's death and ends with his own death in another Haran.



[Openstreetmap.org](https://www.openstreetmap.org).

Avram's journey begins with a recall to the two tragic notes that began Terakh's journey. He is to leave his family and father's house (marked by death), and God will make him a great nation (thus reversing Sarai's infertility).

Not only will God reverse the tragedies of his family, but he will bring about a Genesis 1 blessing that will produce an overabundance of blessing that will flow out from him to the other families of the nations.

Once Avram has received this divine word of blessing that reverses his father’s fate, he begins his own three-step process of (1) “taking,” (2) “going out,” and (3) arriving in Canaan.

When he finally arrives in Canaan, Avram completes the journey his father began. Notice how the scenes alternate precisely between three journey stages, punctuated by two stops in Shechem and Bethel where Avram builds altars and worships Yahweh, who called him and his family out of Ur of the Chaldeans.

A New Noah, A New Adam

The literary design of [Genesis 6:1-11:26](#) prepares us to see Avram’s exit from Ur of the Chaldeans after the scattering of Babylon in [11:27-12:9](#) as parallel to Noah’s exit from the ark after the flood.

Noah’s Exit From the Ark and Family Blessing	Avram’s Exit From Babylon and Family Blessing
Ten generations from Adam to Noah; 3 sons	Ten generations from Noah to Avram (of 3 sons)
Gen. 6:1-4 The flood story begins with violence and bloodshed perpetrated by warriors and “men of the name ”	Gen. 10:8-12 Babylon is founded by a violent warrior, a man of the name Gen. 11:1-9 Babylon is built by people who seek to make a name for themselves
Noah and those with him are sheltered in the ark during the flood	Terakh and those with him take refuge in Haran after the scattering of Babylon
Noah “goes out” from the ark with his family (צא repeated 4x in Gen. 8:16-19): “and Noah went out from the ark, and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives”	Gen. 11:31 Terakh “went out” from Babylon with his family: “and Terakh took Avram his son ... and they went out with them from Ur of Chaldeans” Gen. 12:5 Avram “went out” from Haran with his family “and Avram took his wife and the son of his brothers ... and they went out to go to the land of Canaan ”
God promises that Noah and his wife will be “fruitful and multiply” Gen. 9:1 “And God blessed them and said, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land’”	God promises to make Avram and his wife “fruitful and multiply” Gen. 12:1-2 “And Yahweh said to Avram, ‘... I will make you a great nation and I will bless you ...’”
Exiting the Ark and Babylon. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).	

Just as Noah’s life was preserved amidst a great act of divine judgment on human violence, so Terakh’s family is preserved from the divine judgment-scattering of Babylon. Noah’s exit from the divinely provided shelter is

followed by a promise of fruitfulness and blessing, and Avram’s exit from Haran includes a divine call to go to a new land of fruitfulness and blessing. All of these similarities highlight one of the major contrasts between Noah and Avram: Sarai’s inability to have children is very different from Noah and his wife’s many children and grandchildren. This contrast prepares us for the great drama of the Avram and Sarai story.

A Tale of Two Sojourns: Babylon and the Chosen Line

The sojourn of Terakh and Avraham is contrasted with the sojourn in the previous narrative of Noah’s sons that ends in the rebellion and scattering of Babylon. One story ends with disaster and the other begins in blessing.

Genesis 11:1-9 A Sojourn Into Disaster	Genesis 11:27-12:9 A Sojourn Into Blessing
Begins with “all the land ... journeying (נסע) from the east (מקדם)” [11:1-2] Concludes with “all the land” being “scattered” (נפוץ / הפיץ) [11:9]	Begins with one family leaving (ויצאו) the place of scattering, Ur of Chasdim [11:31] Concludes with Avram “journeying” (נסע) into Canaan in places “from the east” (מקדם) [12:8-9]
They find a “plain in Shinar” and “they settled there” (וישבו שם) [11:2]	They come to Haran and “they settled there” (וישבו שם) [11:31]
“Let us build (בנה) for ourselves a city and tower” [11:4] “... the city and tower which the sons of ‘adam built (בנה) for themselves” [11:5]	“and Yahweh said” (ויאמר יהוה) [12:1] followed by a reversal of circumstances — from barrenness to birth
“Let us make a name (שם) for ourselves” [11:4]	“I will make great your name (שם) [12:2]
“and Yahweh said” (ויאמר יהוה) [11:6] followed by a reversal of circumstances — from building to scattering	“and [Avram] built (בנה) there an altar to Yahweh” [12:7] “and [Avram] built (בנה) there an altar to Yahweh and he called upon the name (שם) of Yahweh.” [12:8]
A westward sojourn that ends with settlement by humans who use their potential for their own name, so that Yahweh becomes the antagonist and reverses their circumstances	A westward sojourn that ends with settlement by humans who have no potential to make a name for themselves, so that Yahweh becomes the protagonist and reverses their circumstances
Tale of Two Sojourns. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).	

Notice how the sojourn of “all the land” in [Genesis 6:1-11:26](#) furthers the thematic portrait of human nature expressed in [Genesis 6:5](#) and [8:21](#), “humans are bad from their youth.” They take their God-given potential and unity and use it for selfish and (what will become) imperial ends: the deification and exaltation of their name.

In contrast, the sojourn of Terakh begins with the tragic death of Haran his son, and it ends with his own death in Haran. These deaths are paralleled with Avram and Sarai’s inability to have children and perpetuate their name. But God intervenes with a word of promise and blessing, motivating one final sojourn westward to the land of Canaan.

Note how sojourning and building are at the center of both narratives, but toward opposite ends. The Babylonians build a city and tower for their own name, while Avram builds altars for Yahweh’s name.

From Where Was Avram Called?

The two narratives of [Genesis 11:27-32](#) and [12:1-9](#) contrast the journeys of Terakh and Avram. The first says that it was Terakh who “went out from Ur of the Chaldeans” to journey to Canaan, but instead he only made it to Haran and settled there ([11:31](#)). In contrast, Avram is addressed by God to go to Canaan, and so he “goes out” from an unidentified location ([12:5](#)) to go to Canaan. From where does Avram go to Canaan, and where is the location of God’s first appearance and speech to him in [12:1-5](#)?

Option 1: In Haran

The literary sequence of the two narrative units ([11:27-32](#) and [12:1-9](#)) could be interpreted as a time sequence where Avram’s journey with his father to Haran preceded God’s speech to him to leave and go to Canaan.

There is a wrinkle in this straightforward interpretation, however. The only other time Avram’s journey to Canaan is referenced in the Hebrew Bible, he is said to have been summoned by God to leave Ur of the Chaldeans, not Haran.

Genesis 15:7 NASB*

And he said to him, “I am Yahweh who **brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans**, to give you this land to possess it.”

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Option 2: In Ur of the Chaldeans

The literary sequence of [Genesis 11:27-32](#) and [12:1-5](#) does not necessarily indicate the sequence of events referenced by the narrative. It is not uncommon in biblical narrative for two consecutive narrative units to be placed out of chronological order so that the author can achieve the literary effect of juxtaposition, forcing the reader to compare and contrast the two versions of similar events. This has already happened at key junctures in Genesis 1-11.

Example 1	Gen. 1:1-2:3 Creation of the ordered land out of the dark waters	Gen. 2:4-17 Creation of the fruitful garden out of the barren wilderness
Example 2	Gen. 10:1-32 • Babylon built by Nimrod as he spreads	Gen. 11:1-9 • Babylon built a “name-seeking”

Narrative Versus Event Sequence. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

his empire
• Nations already scattered with many languages

humanity
• Nations not yet scattered and only one language

Narrative Versus Event Sequence. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

In both cases, the literary sequence does not correspond to the event sequence. Rather, it allows the author to portray the same event from two angles, highlighting different themes and ideas as they render the same core event. The same technique is used in the presentation of Terakh's and Avram's journey from Ur to Canaan. And there is another textual clue that makes it clear this is the case.

The Ages of Avram and Terakh

The narrator makes clear that Terakh had his three sons at the age of 70 and then died at the age of 205. Avram, we're told, was 75 when he received God's calling to leave his family and go to Canaan.

Genesis 11:26 NASB*

Terakh lived seventy years, and became the father of Avram, Nakhor, and Haran.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Genesis 11:31-32 NASB*

³¹ Terakh took Avram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Avram's wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there. ³² **The days of Terakh were two hundred and five years; and Terakh died in Haran.**

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Genesis 12:4-5 NASB*

⁴ So Avram went forth as Yahweh had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. **Now Avram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.** ⁵ ... thus they came to the land of Canaan.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The implication of these numbers is very clear. Terakh had his sons at age 70, and his son Avram left for Canaan at age 75. This means that Terakh was still alive at 145 years old when Avram was summoned by God in 12:1. Even though Terakh's death is recorded in 11:32, before Avram leaves for Canaan, the ages given by the narrator show that Terakh is still alive when Avram, Sarai, and Lot leave him.

“Biblical protagonists frequently exit the narrative stage long before their chronological lives are over. For example, Noah dies before the Abraham narrative begins. But a simple calculation shows that Noah dies when Abraham was 58 years old (see Gen. 9:28-29); similarly Isaac was still alive when his grandson Joseph was sold (Gen. 35:28-29). Genesis ... is a sweeping series of portraits that trace a character from birth to death before the next character is introduced ... The spotlight only falls on Abram once Terah has stepped down, despite the fact that the first events in the Abram story occur during Terah’s lifetime ... This narrative style illuminates the correlation between Terah’s journey and God’s revelation to Abram ... It is reasonable to conclude that Terah’s decision to immigrate to Canaan is connected to God’s command to Abram.”

Grossman, Jonathan (2016). [*Abram to Abraham: A Literary Analysis of the Abraham Narrative*](#). Peter Lang. 74-75.

Conclusion

The narrator has separated the single departure of Terakh and Avram from Ur of the Chaldeans into two distinct narrative portraits to highlight the different meanings of their journeys.

Terakh’s journey is associated with death and infertility.

Genesis 11:28 NASB

Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans.

Genesis 11:30 NASB*

Sarai was **infertile**; she had no child.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Genesis 11:32 NASB*

... and Terakh **died** in Haran.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

In contrast, Avram’s journey, which was the same as his father’s, is associated with obedience to God’s calling, followed by blessing and the promise of family and abundance.

Genesis 12:1-2 Instructor’s Translation

¹ ... Go from your land and from your family ... to the land I will show you. ² ... and **I will make you and great nation and I will bless you.**

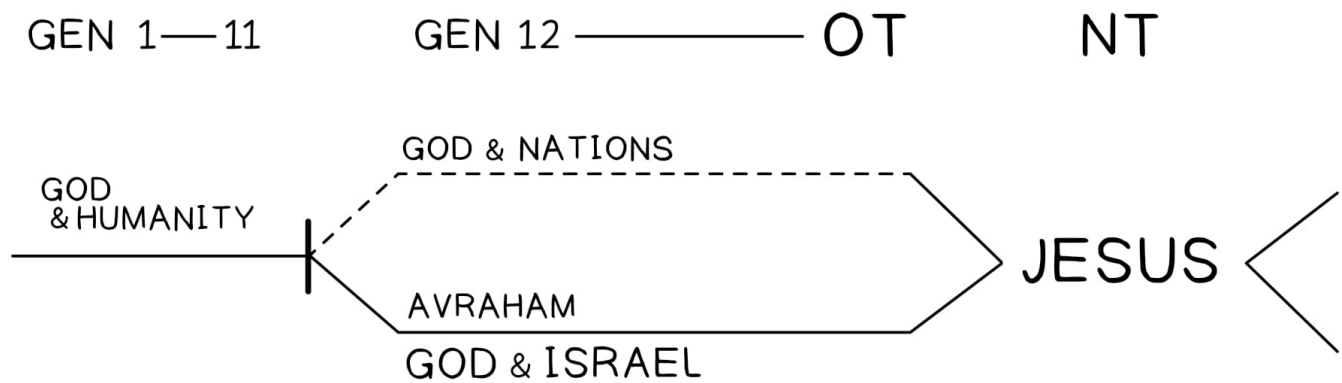
Genesis 12:4 Instructor’s Translation

And Avram went just as Yahweh spoke to him ...

Genesis 12:7 Instructor’s Translation

And Yahweh said to Avram, **“To your seed I will give this land.”**

Narrative Focus of the Hebrew Bible



Narrative Focus of the Hebrew Bible. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Reflection Question

What is the turning point in the story of the journey from Ur to Canaan? How does this recall earlier themes in Genesis?

Session 5: God Calls Avram and Promises Blessing

Key Takeaways

- Avram's call is framed in the language of Genesis 1-2, and it prepares the reader for the themes in the rest of his story—blessing, birth, land, family, and a great name.
- Avram leaving his family echoes Genesis 2:24 and the blessing of fruitful multiplication.
- God promises to make Avram's name great, further developing the theme of names or naming introduced in various stories in Genesis 1-11.

Macro Design of Genesis 12:1-9

Genesis 12:1-3

A - Yahweh's first word to Avram: Blessing and offspring

Genesis 12:4-6

B - Avram's response: Travel to Canaan

Genesis 12:7

A' - Yahweh's second word to Avram: Promise of land for offspring

Genesis 12:8-9

B' - Avram's response: Build an altar and travel to the Negev

Genesis 12:1-9. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Avram Leaves Babylon and Receives God's Blessing

The narrative sequence of two divine calls and promises, each followed by Avram's obedience, creates a clear pattern for the reader. When God's chosen one follows the divine command despite many unknowns, there is a blessing just waiting to be discovered.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 12:1-3

Part 2: Avram's Journey

Blessing and Children in the Promised Land

- 12:1 And Yahweh said to Avram,
a "Get yourself going
b from your land,
b' and from your family,
b' and from your father's house ,
a' to the land which I will show you.
-
- a 2 And I will make you a great nation ,
b and I will bless you,
a' and I will make your name great;
b' and so you shall be a blessing.
a 3 And I will bless
b those who bless you,
b' and the one who treats you as cursed
a' I will curse;
a and in you all the families of the land
b will find blessing."

Genesis 11:27-12:5. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

Get Yourself Going!

The Hebrew phrase for "get yourself going" (לֵךְ לְךָ) in 12:1 is unique, and it's repeated again only at the culmination of Avram's 10 tests in 22:2.

Genesis 12:1 Instructor's Translation

Get yourself going from your land ... to the land that I will show you.

Genesis 22:2 Instructor's Translation

Get yourself going to the land of Moriah, and offer [Yitskhaq] there as a going-up offering on one of the mountains that I will tell you.

Avram's New Family

Avram separates from his family and goes to a new place where God will create a new family. This is a repetition of the Eden pattern where God split the lone human into two humans to create the first chosen family. According to Genesis 2, only God can provide the necessary "help" (עֶזֶר) that can deliver his chosen one from helplessness.

Genesis 2:18 Instructor's Translation

It is not good for the human to be alone. I will make a source of **delivering-help** (עֶזֶר) that corresponds to the human.

Genesis 2:24 Instructor's Translation

For this reason, **a man will leave his father and mother**, and he will be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.

Genesis 12:1 Instructor's Translation

Get yourself going ... from your land, from your birth-family and **from the house of your father** ...

Genesis 12:7 Instructor's Translation

To your **seed** (זֶרַע) I will give this land.

In both narratives, God's promise is to provide what the humans cannot provide for themselves. In Genesis 2, it's the "delivering help" ('ezer, עֶזֶר) without which the human cannot flourish in Eden, and in Genesis 12, it's the "seed" (zera', זֶרַע) without which Avram's family cannot become a blessing to the nations.

Greatness and Blessing

Genesis 12:2 Instructor's Translation

And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you,
and I will make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing.

The two parallel poetic lines contain two promises of greatness and two promises of blessing.

- Great nation / Great name
- I will bless you / You will be a blessing

This first pair of lines highlights what God will do for Avram (make great and bless), while the second item highlights what Avram will become in relationship to others.

- Great name = a significant reputation among the nations
- "Be a blessing" = Avram is summoned to become a conduit of the divine blessing he received as he gives it out to the nations around him

These poetic lines create a vocation for Avram. He is being summoned to a new Eden-like land where God will create him into a new chosen family where he can become a channel of divine blessing to others. This vocation is the focus of the final lines of the poem.

Genesis 12:3 Instructor's Translation

And I will bless
those who bless you,
and the one who treats you as cursed
I will curse;

and in you all the families of the land
will find blessing.”

Here, God marks Avram as his chosen one and commits to protecting him from death. The promise comes in two parts.

1. As a conduit of God’s blessing, those who associate with Avram in a friendly way will receive God’s blessing.
2. On the flip side, those who “treat him as cursed” (מקלל, from קלל “to treat as insignificant”) will receive the opposite, “curse.”

Avram as a New Adam and Noah

The divine promise of blessing corresponds to the divine blessing first given to humanity and then to Noah after the flood.

Genesis 1:27-28 Instructor’s Translation

²⁷ *Elohim* created humanity in his image, in the image of *Elohim* he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ And *Elohim* **blessed** them; and *Elohim* said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Genesis 9:1-2 Instructor’s Translation

¹ And *Elohim* **blessed** Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. ² The fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given.”

Genesis 12:2-3 Instructor’s Translation

² and I will make you a great nation, and I will **bless** you, and I will make your name great; and so you shall be a **blessing**; ³ and I will **bless** those who **bless** you, and the one who treats you as cursed I will curse; and in you all the clan-families of the land will find **blessing**.

The poem of blessing in 12:2-3 has five blessings that interestingly correspond to the five curses in Genesis 1-11, and it has seven poetic lines that correspond to the later blessings given to the patriarchs, which also consist of seven parts (Cassuto, Umberto (2012). [From Noah to Abraham](#). Varda Books. 331).

Genesis 12:2-3 Instructor’s Translation

1. and I will make you a great nation
2. and I will **bless** you,
3. and I will make your name great;
4. and so you shall be a **blessing**;
5. and I will **bless** those who **bless** you,
6. and the one who treats you as cursed I will curse;
7. and in you all the clan-families of the land will find **blessing**.

The five curses of Genesis 3-11

- Gen. 3:14 “**cursed!** are you” (snake)
- Gen. 3:17 “**cursed!** is the ground because of you” (man)
- Gen. 3:14 “**cursed!** are you from the ground” (Cain)
- Gen. 3:14 “the ground which Yahweh has **cursed!**”
- Gen. 3:14 “**cursed!** is Canaan”

“The whole Bible can be portrayed as a very long answer to a very simple question: What can God do about the sin and rebellion of the human race? Genesis 12-Revelation 22 is God’s answer to the problem posed by the bleak narratives of Genesis 3-11. Or ... Genesis 3-11 sets the problem that the mission of God addresses from Genesis 12 onward. Genesis 1-11 poses a cosmic problem to which God must provide a cosmic answer. The problems so graphically spread before the reader in Genesis 1-11 will not be solved just by finding a way to get human beings to heaven when they die. The love and power of the Creator must address not only the sin of individuals, but also the strife and hostility of nations; not only the needs of humans, but also the suffering on animals and the curse on the ground ... The call of Abram is the beginning of God’s answer to the evil of human hearts, the strife of nations, and the groaning brokenness of his whole creation.”

Wright, Christopher (2006). [*The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative*](#). IVP Academic. 195.

Avram

Genesis 12:2-3 Instructor’s Translation

1. and I will make you a great nation
2. and I will **bless** you,
3. and I will make your name great;
4. and so you shall be a **blessing**;
5. and I will **bless** those who **bless** you,
6. and the one who treats you as cursed I will curse;
7. and in you all the clan-families of the land will find **blessing**.

Isaac

Genesis 26:3-4 Instructor’s Translation

1. and I will be with you,
2. and I will bless you,
3. for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands,
4. and I will fulfil the oath which I swore to Avraham your father.
5. I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven,
6. and will give to your descendants all these lands;
7. and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves.

Jacob

Genesis 27:28-29 Instructor’s Translation

1. May God give you of the dew of heaven, etc.
2. Let peoples serve you,
3. and nations bow down to you.
4. Be lord over your brothers,
5. and may your mother's sons bow down to you.
6. Cursed be every one who curses you,
7. and blessed be every one who blesses you!

Relationship to Juxtaposed Sections

Avram's journey to Canaan is actually a completion of what his father Terakh left undone back in 11:31. Avram's actions are clearly set in contrast to his father.

Genesis 11:31 NASB

Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there.

Genesis 12:5 NASB

Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 12:6-9

Avram's Sojourn to Shechem

- a 6 **And Avram passed through (ויעבר)** **in the land**
 b **unto the** place of Shechem
 b' **unto the** oak of Moreh,
 a' and the Canaanite was then **in the land**.

Worship + Altar for Yahweh

- a 7 And **Yahweh appeared to Avram** and he said,
 b "To your seed I will give this land."
 a' And **he built there an altar to Yahweh** **who appeared to him**.

Avram's Sojourn to Bethel

- a 8 **And he moved on (ויעתק)** from there
 b to the hill **from the east** of **Bethel**,

a' and he spread out his tent,
b' **Bethel** on the west
b' and Ai **from the east**;

Worship + Altar for Yahweh

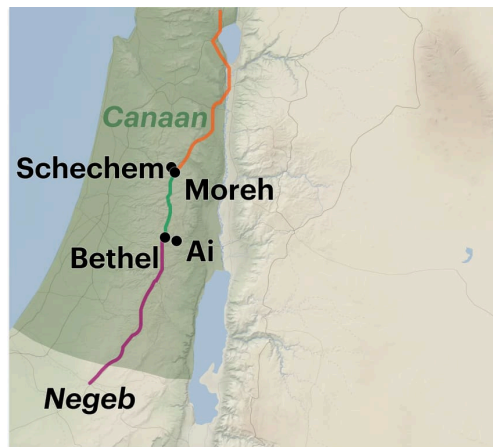
a and **he built there an altar to Yahweh**
a' and **he called upon the name of Yahweh.**

Avram's Sojourn to the Negev

a 9 **And Avram journeyed (ויסע)**,
a' continually **journeying (נסוע)** to the Negev.

Genesis 12:6-9. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

Map of Avram's First Migration in the Land of Canaan



[Openstreetmap.org](https://openstreetmap.org).

Avram enters Canaan from the north, and he passes along the hill country that runs from north to south with the coastal and Jordan River valleys on each side. As he does so, he makes a number of very interesting stops along the way.

Avram the Shepherd and the Canaanite Cities

Avram is portrayed as making three stops, the first two near hilltop towns central to the highway network in Canaan. The narrative highlights how he does not enter the cities populated with Canaanites. Instead, Avram sets up camp near the cities, and he builds new places of worship for the *Elohim* who called him to this land.

The narrative highlights how "the Canaanite was in the land at that time" to show us that Avram isn't integrating into Canaanite culture. Instead, he sets up his own alternative residence with unique places of worship dedicated to his *Elohim*.

Avram's Alternate Society

In this way, Avram is depicted along parallel lines to Abel and Seth, in contrast to Cain and Lemek.

Adam's Sons in Genesis 4	Noah's "Sons" in Genesis 12
Gen. 4:2-4 Abel was a "shepherd of the flock" and made offerings to Yahweh from his flock	Gen. 12:5, 16 Avram (from the line of Shem) leads a migrating shepherd caravan with many flocks
Gen. 4:26 Seth, the seed given in the place of Abel, has his first son, named <i>Enosh</i> (= "human"), when "it was begun, calling on the name of Yahweh."	Gen. 12:6, 8 Avram builds altars in Canaan and "calls upon the name of Yahweh"
Cain was a farmer (Gen. 4:1-4), who, after his murder of Abel the shepherd, went on to build the first city in the Bible and named it after his first son, <i>Khanok</i> (= "dedicated," Gen. 4:17)	Gen. 12:6 The Canaanites (from the line of Ham), in contrast to Avram, live in the cities
Adam's Sons and Noah's Sons. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).	

Avram becomes the new humanity from the line of Yahweh worshippers who are chosen and set apart from their urban siblings who worship manmade things (gods or cities). Avram will establish the worship of the creator God, and he begins by marking the central hill country as the territory of Yahweh.

Avram's Journey as a Foundation Pattern

Avram's three-stop journey through the promised land begins a pattern that is later mirrored by his grandson Yaaqov (Jacob) in Gen. 33-35, and yet again by Joshua and the Israelites (Josh. 7-8).

Avram	Jacob	Joshua (After Stop #1: Jericho)
Stop #1: Shechem Gen. 12:6-7 And Avram passed through in the land until the place of Shechem , unto the	Stop #1: Shechem Gen. 33:18, 20 And Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem , which is in the land	Stop #3: Shechem Josh. 8:30 Then Joshua built an altar to the Lord, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal [just
Avram's Journey Pattern. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).		

Avram	Jacob	Joshua (After Stop #1: Jericho)
Terebinth of Vision ... And he built an altar there to Yahweh who appeared to him.	of Canaan, when he returned from Paddan-Aram, and he camped in front of the city ... And he set up a pillar there, and called it "El, the God of Israel."	outside Shechem, see Deut. 11:29-30]
Stop #2: Bethel Gen. 12:8 And he set out from there to the to the mountain east of Bethel (מקדם לבית אל), and he pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east (מקדם). And he built there an altar to Yahweh and he called on the name of Yahweh.	Stop #2: Bethel Gen. 35:1 And God said to Jacob, "Get up, go up to Bethel and stay there and make there an altar to El who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau. Gen. 35:6-7 So Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan ... And he built an altar there, and called the place El-bethel	Stop #2: Bethel Josh. 7:2 Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel (מקדם לבית אל), and said to them, "Go up and spy out the land." So the men went up and spied out Ai. Josh. 8:9 Joshua sent them away, and they went to the place of ambush and remained between Bethel and Ai (בין בית אל ובין העי), on the west side of Ai (מים לעי); but Joshua spent that night among the people.
Stop #3: The Negev Gen. 12:9 And Avram set out (ויסע) continuing and traveling to the Negev.	Stop #3: The Negev Gen. 35:27 Jacob came home to his father Isaac in Mamre, near Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Avraham and Isaac had stayed. Gen. 46:1 So Israel set out (ויסע) with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.	Stop #4: The Negev Josh. 10:40 Thus Joshua struck all the land, the hill country and the Negev and the lowland and the slopes and all their kings. Josh. 11:16 Thus Joshua took all that land: the hill country and all the Negev, all that land of Goshen, the lowland, the Arabah, the hill country of Israel and its lowland
Avram's Journey Pattern. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).		

“Now we can understand why the Torah stressed, in all their detail, Abram’s journeys on entering the land of Canaan, at first as far as Shekem, and subsequently up to Ai-Bethel. Scripture intended to present us here, through the symbolic conquest of Abram, with a kind of forecast of what would happen to his descendants later. According to this tradition the token was first given to Abram and afterwards repeated to Jacob, and the significance of the duplication is to corroborate and ratify, as the Bible itself makes clear when citing the words of Joseph to Pharaoh (41:32): And the doubling of Pharaoh’s dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass. In conformity with this, the book of Joshua portrays for us the actual subjugation in a manner paralleling the ideal conquest by the Patriarchs—even the wording is similar—as though to say, the possession of the land gained in the days of Joshua was already implied, in essence, in the symbolic conquest that the first patriarchs had effected in their time, and that it was all predestined and foretold from the beginning in accordance with the Lord’s will.”

Cassuto, Umberto (2012). [From Noah to Abraham](#). Varda Books. 305-306.

The Promise of Land

Notice that at the center of 12:6-9 is the promise of land for Avram’s family.

Worship + Altar for Yahweh

- a 7 And **Yahweh appeared to Avram** and he said,
 - b “To your seed I will give this land.”
- a’ And **he built there an altar to Yahweh** **who appeared to him** .

Genesis 12:6-9. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

God’s promise in 12:1-3 focused on the family that God would build from Avram and Sarai’s lineage, and Avram was simply told to “go to the land that I will show you.” Now that Avram has arrived in that land, the next part of God’s promise is revealed: The land itself will become part of Avram’s inheritance. This two-stage presentation of God’s promise creates an important analogy between the two elements of God’s promise.

Genesis 12:1-3

Divine Promise #1

- “Go to **the land** I will show you ... I will bless you and **make you a great nation.** ”

Genesis 12:4-6

Avram Travels to the Land, Sets Up Altars to Yahweh

Genesis 12:7

Divine Promise #2

- "To **your seed** I will give **this land**."

Genesis 12:8

Avram Travels to the Land, Sets Up Altars to Yahweh

Genesis 12:1-8. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

This analogy between the promise of seed and land is foundational for the rest of the Avraham story. These two elements of God's promise become closely intertwined, each involving the other, so they become inseparable from each other. The promise of a family lineage requires a place for that family to live, and the promise of a land to inhabit assumes the existence of a family who will cultivate the land. In this way, the promise resembles the divine blessing given to Adam and Eve, which is certainly why the narrator highlights the fact that Avram makes his altars on high places near trees.

Avram's Sojourn to Shechem

- a 6 **And Avram passed through (ויעבר) in the land**
- b **unto the** place of Shechem
- b' **unto the** oak of Moreh,
- a' and the Canaanite was then **in the land** .

Worship + Altar for Yahweh

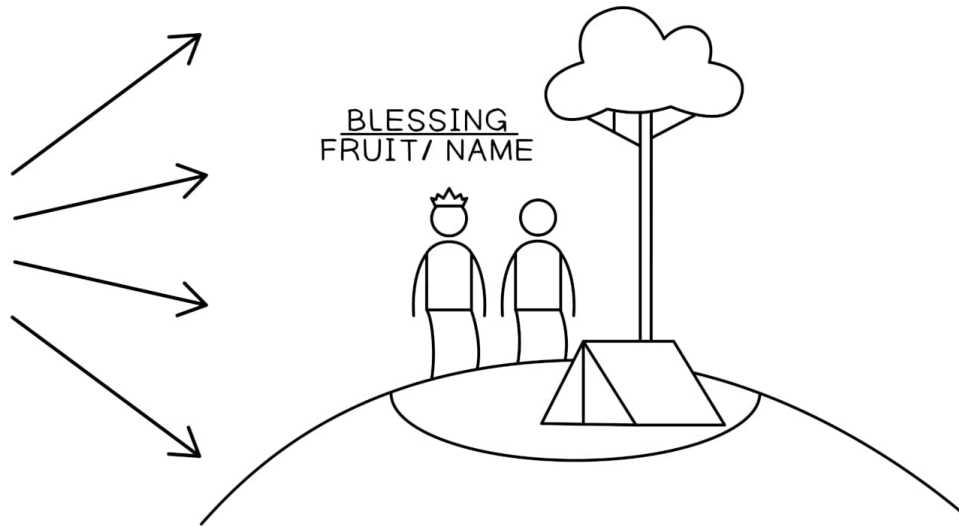
- a 7 And **Yahweh appeared to Avram** and he said,
- b "To your seed I will give this land."
- a' And **he built there an altar to Yahweh** **who appeared to him** .

Genesis 12:6-9. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

All of these words are built from the Hebrew root *ra'ah* (ראה) "to see." It's a not-so-subtle allusion to the trees of Eden, where the humans "saw" and had "their eyes opened" after a great failure to trust Yahweh's wisdom. Here Avram has his eyes opened to see Yahweh after his first act of trust in Yahweh's summons to leave his family and come to Canaan.

Blessing Out of the Scattering

SCATTER



Out of the Scattering. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Reflection Question

Contrast God promising to make Avram's name great with the architects of the tower of Babylon desiring to make a great name for themselves. What does this show us about God's character and what God desires to see in humans?

Session 6: Abram the Snake

Key Takeaways

- Avram does not trust God and instead crafts a scheme that exposes Sarai to risk in order to preserve his own life.
- Rather than bringing blessing to the nations, Avram's schemes bring curses upon the Egyptians.
- This episode is set on analogy to Genesis 3 with Sarai in the role of the tree, Pharaoh and the Egyptians in the role of the humans, and Avram in the role of the snake.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 12:10-20

Introduction: Avram Goes to Egypt Because of a Famine

- a 10 Now there was a **famine in the land** ;
b and Avram went down to Egypt to sojourn there,
a' for the **famine** was severe **in the land** .

Avram Nears Egypt + Avram's Speech to Sarai

- 11 And it came about when he came near to entering Egypt,
and he said to Sarai his wife,
"See now, I know that you are **a woman beautiful of sight** ;
12 and **when the Egyptians see you** , **they will say** , '**This is his wife** ' ;
and they will kill me, but they will let you live.
13 Please **say that you are my sister** so that **there will be good to me on account of you** ,
and that I may live on account of you."

Egyptians See Sarai and Pharaoh Takes Her

- 14 And it came about when Avram came into Egypt,
and **the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful** .
15 And Pharaoh's officials **saw her** and praised her to Pharaoh;
and the woman was **taken** into Pharaoh's house.
16 And **he did good to Avram on account of her** ;
and there was for him sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels.

Plagues on Pharaoh + Pharaoh's Speech to Avram

- 17 And Yahweh plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues on account of Sarai, **Avram's wife**.
- 18 And Pharaoh called Avram and he said,
"What is this you have done to me? **Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?**"
- 19 **Why did you say, 'She is my sister,'** so that I took her for **my wife?**
Now then, here is **your wife**, take her and go."

Conclusion: Avram Sent Away From Egypt by Pharaoh

- 20 And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him;
and they sent him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him.

Genesis 12:10-20. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Genesis 12:10

A - Introduction: Avram Goes to Egypt Because of a Famine

Genesis 12:11-13

B - Avram Nears Egypt + **Avram's Speech to Sarai**

- "I know that you are a woman (אשה) beautiful of sight, very ... Please say that you are my sister (אחות)."

Genesis 12:14-16

C - Egyptians See Sarai and Pharaoh Takes Her

Genesis 12:17-19

B' - Plagues on Pharaoh + **Pharaoh's Speech to Avram**

- "Why did you say 'She is my sister (אחות),' so that I took her to be my wife (אשה)?"

Genesis 12:20

A' - Conclusion: Avram Sent Away From Egypt by Pharaoh

Genesis 12:10-20. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

A Crisis of Faith

God just promised Avram that traveling to the land of Canaan will result in blessing, abundance, and possession of the land, and this blessing will overflow into blessing for the nations. The first story we're told

after Avram’s obedient sojourn to Canaan is about Avram’s lack of trust and his deception of the nations that leads to curse and plagues upon them.

However, Avram’s deception is motivated by an understandable feeling. After going to a land where he was promised abundance, he discovers scarcity in a time of famine. The famine is Avram’s second test of faith. Will he remain in the land and trust God, or will he make up his own plan and attempt to find blessing and abundance by his own wisdom?

Avram’s “Wife-Sister” Plan

There is a cultural reason why Avram would come up with this specific scheme presenting Sarai as his sister. First, it is a half-truth, as Avram admits in 20:12, because Sarai is his half-sister from his father’s side. Marrying one’s step-sister was not uncommon in ancient Near Eastern cultures (in fact, it’s what Avram’s brother Nakhor did, see 11:29). But second, by presenting himself as Sarai’s brother, Avram was using a common cultural convention as an attempt to save his life and Sarai’s.

“In the ancient Near East there was a well-known socio-legal institution of ‘fratriarchy’ that existed over a long period of time. Where there is no father, the brother assumes legal guardianship of his sister, particularly with respect to obligations and responsibilities in arranging marriage on her behalf. Therefore, whoever wished to take Sarai to wife would have to negotiate with her ‘brother.’ In this way, Abram could gain time to plan escape. Of course, this went awry when the Egyptian turned out to be Pharaoh himself.”

Sarna, Nahum M. (2001). [The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis](#). Jewish Publication Society. 95.

From this angle, Avram’s motivations appear both clever and foolish, but not malicious. His initial plan was aimed at preserving his and Sarai’s lives, because any Egyptian who proposed to Sarai would have to respect her brother. If he were known as her husband, he would more likely be the object of jealousy. This helps us see that [Genesis 12:14](#) actually vindicates Avram’s plan, as Egyptians see her. So far so good. But his plan does not account for the possibility that the king of all the land might “see” and “take” Sarai.

Avram the Snake

Genesis 12:10-20 is Avram’s “Eden failure.” The entire episode is set on analogy with the the snake’s deception of Adam and Eve. The analogies are surprising and offer important commentary on the character’s motives and actions.

Avram’s Deception in Genesis 12:10-20	The Snake’s Deception in Genesis 3
Avram relies on his knowledge of what will happen in Egypt instead of trusting God’s promise	Adam and Eve seek their own knowledge of good and bad, instead of trusting God’s command
Gen. 12:11-12 “I know (ידע) that a woman (אשה)	Gen. 3:6 The woman (האשה, Eve [חוה]) saw (ראה)
Avram the Snake. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).	

Avram's Deception in Genesis 12:10-20

beautiful of sight (מראה) you are ... and **they will see you** (ראה) ... and kill me and let you live (חיה)."

Avram's deception results in "good" at the expense of Sarai, resulting in plagues on Pharaoh

Gen. 12:13 "Say you're my sister, so that it may be **good** (יטב), **on account of you** (בעבורך), and I will **live** (חיה)."

Gen. 12:17 And Yahweh sent plagues upon Pharaoh, **on account of Sarai** .

Avram presents his wife as a "tree of testing" to the Egyptians

Gen. 12:14-15 And the Egyptians **saw** (ראה) **the woman** (האשה), **that she was beautiful, very ...** and **she was taken** (לקח) to the house of Pharaoh.

Gen. 12:17 And Yahweh **struck/touched** (נגע) Pharaoh with great **strikes** (נגעים).

Pharaoh holds Avram accountable for his deception

Gen. 12:18 And Pharaoh **called out to** (וִיקְרָא ... לִי) Avram and said **"What is this you have done** (מה זאת עשית) to me? You didn't **tell** (נגד) me that she was your wife."

Pharaoh exiles Avram

Gen. 12:20 And Pharaoh **commanded** (וִיצַו) ... and **sent him away** (שלח).

The Snake's Deception in Genesis 3

) the tree of **knowing** (ידע) good (טוב) and evil, and it was desirable **to the eyes** .

Adam and Eve's actions result in "curse" on the ground

Gen. 3:17 Cursed is the ground **on account of you** (בעבורך).

The snake presents the "tree of testing" to the humans

Gen. 3:6 And **the woman** (האשה) **saw** (ראה) that **good** (טוב) was the tree for eating, and desirable **to the eyes ...** and **she took** (לקח) ..."

Gen. 3:3 "From the tree that is in the middle of the garden we cannot eat from it or **touch it** (נגע)"

God holds Adam and Eve accountable for their action

Gen. 3:9 And Yahweh **called out to** (וִיקְרָא ... אֵלַי) the man ...

Gen. 3:13 And Yahweh said to the woman, **"What is this you have done** (מה זאת עשית)?"

Gen. 3:11 "Who **told** (נגד) you that you were naked?"

God exiles Adam and Eve

Gen. 2:16 And Yahweh **commanded** (וִיצַו) the human ...

Avram the Snake. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Avram's Deception in Genesis 12:10-20

The Snake's Deception in Genesis 3

Gen. 3:23 And Yahweh **sent away** (שלח) the human from the garden of Eden.

Avram the Snake. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Implications of These Analogies

Avram is depicted on analogy to the shrewd snake. He is crafty, and he is able to use his circumstances to his own advantage, but at the expense of others. Avram's decision to lie puts Sarai in danger while also bringing plagues upon Pharaoh. In this scene, Avram's prosperity (= blessing) comes precisely through the suffering of the others.

Sarai's beauty is set in relationship to the beauty of the tree of testing in the garden of Eden. A good thing becomes co-opted by deceivers and used for their own advantage.

Notice that Pharaoh's role in the story activates two analogies.

1. Pharaoh on analogy to Adam and Eve: Pharaoh is innocent, yet he still commits wrong. While his "taking" of a woman is certainly an exercise in patriarchal power and privilege, he is portrayed as faultless in terms of his motives. But his innocent motives don't erase the fact that he's taking another man's wife.
2. Pharaoh on analogy to God: After Pharaoh finds out about Avram's deception, he takes on the divine role of holding Avram accountable.

God's Promise and God's Justice

This story presents an uncomfortable portrait of God's relationship to the nations. God defends the deceiver in this story and brings judgment on someone who has acted wrongly but without wrong motives. This chapter begins a long drama of tension between God's covenant promises to the family of Abraham and the divine character traits of justice and equity.

God just promised to "bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you as cursed." In this story we see God protecting Avram even though he doesn't deserve it. God's promises place him in a morally inconvenient situation.

"[Abram's behavior] would appear to put Yahweh in somewhat of a bind ... Yahweh must decide whether and how to take Abram's side when problems arise with others—even when the conflict arises from Abram's less-than-honest behavior. Pharaoh treats Abram honorably and generously, but Yahweh evidently decides that having a human friend in a wicked world requires a thoroughgoing commitment to the welfare of that individual, even when it works against the welfare of others. Standing with someone inevitably leads to standing against someone else. Yahweh, therefore, strikes Pharaoh and his household, even though the mess was made by Abram ... This first act of divine violence after the flood is momentous, as it is directed toward people who have not, to the best of their knowledge, acted wickedly, for the sake of demonstrating solidarity with the family Yahweh has befriended."

Hawk, L. Daniel (2019). [*The Violence of the Biblical God*](#). Eerdmans. 48-49.

Avram's Egyptian Plunder

This story also sets up a number of themes that will be developed in future episodes.

- Avram's lack of trust in God's protection and promise. This will be addressed again in chapter 15.
- Avram's short-sighted schemes to get or retain God's blessing by his own wisdom. This will replay itself again in chapters 16, 21, and 22.
- Avram's "plunder" consists of animal flocks and slaves, both of which will cause problems in later stories.

Genesis 12:16 Instructor's Translation

And [Pharaoh] did good to Avram on account of her;
and there was for him **sheep and oxen and donkeys** (the source of problems in Gen. 13)
and male and **female servants** (the source of problems in Gen. 16)
and female **donkeys and camels** (the source of problems in Gen. 13).

Reflection Question

How does the Genesis 12:10-20 mirror Genesis 3? How does this help us understand the meaning of this story?

Session 7: Abram and Lot Separate

Key Takeaways

- Avram's ill-gotten wealth becomes the source of conflict, causing him to part ways with Lot.
- Lot is enticed by a false Eden and chooses what is good in his own eyes.
- The separation of Avram and Lot is set on analogy to the failure narratives of Genesis 3, 4, and 6.
- The separation of the brothers motif is the Bible's way of exploring communal sin.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 13:1-4

a ¹ And Avram went up out of Egypt,
b he and his wife
b and **all that belonged to him** ,
b and **Lot** with him,
a' **to the Negev.**

a ² And Avram was very heavy
b with **herds**
b and with **silver**
b and with **gold** ,

a ³ and he went on **his journeys from the Negev** and unto **Beth-El (= house of El)**
b **unto the place** where **his tent** was there **at the first** ,
c **between Beth-El** and between Ai,
b' ⁴ **to the place** of **the altar** which he built **there** **at the beginning** ,
a' and Avram called **there** on **the name of Yahweh** .

Genesis 13:1-4. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Avram's Exodus From Egypt ... With Lot

The scene opens with Avram's ascent (literally "he went up" עלה) from Egypt with much wealth. Multiple links back to [12:5-9](#) show us that Yahweh's deliverance has restored him to his former estate.

Avram's Entry Into the Land

Genesis 12:5, 8-9 Instructor's Translation

⁵ And **Avram** took Sarai **his wife**,
and **Lot** the son of his brother,
and **all the possessions** they came to possess ...
and they went to the land of Canaan.

⁸ And he moved on (ויעתק) from there
to the hill from the east of Beth-El
and **he spread out his tent**
Beth-El on the west
and Ai from the East
and he built there an altar to Yahweh
and he called upon the name of Yahweh.

⁹ And Avram journeyed (ויסע),
continually **journeying** (נסוע) **to the Negev.**

Avram's Reentry Into the Land

Genesis 13:1, 3-4 Instructor's Translation

¹ And **Avram** went up out of Egypt,
he and **his wife**,
and **all that belonged to him**,
and **Lot** with him,
to the Negev.

³ And he went on **his journeys from the Negev**,
even **unto Beth-El**,
unto the place **where his tent was** there at the first,
between Beth-El and between Ai,

⁴ to the place of **the altar which he built** there at the beginning,
and **Avram called there on the name of Yahweh.**

Lot's presence with Avram's company was mentioned back in 12:5, and he remained in the background for all of 12:6-9 and 12:10-20. Lot's problematic presence is reintroduced here because he will play the key role in the narrative to follow.

There is another key difference between Avram's descent and ascent from Egypt. Avram is extremely wealthy now, and that wealth, gained from his deception of Pharaoh, is also going to play a major role in the next narrative.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 13:5-11

⁵ Now, also **belonging to Lot**,
who went with **Avram**,

^u were **flocks and cattle and tents** ,
 b ⁶ and **the land** could not carry them for **dwelling together as one** (יחדו) ,
 a' because **their possessions** were **so many** (רב) ,
 b' and **they were not able to** **dwelt together as one** (יחדו) .
 a ⁷ And there was a **dispute** (ריב)
 b **between** **the shepherds of the herd of** **Avram**
 b' and **between** **the shepherds of the herd of** **Lot**
 c (now, the Canaanites and the Perizzites were then **dwelling** in **the land**).

⁸ And **Avram** said to **Lot** ,
 a "Don't let there be **disputing** (מריבה)
 b **between** **me and** **between** **you** ,
 b' **between** **my shepherds and** **between** **your shepherds** ,
 a' for **we men are brothers!** (אח)
⁹ Isn't **all the land** before you?
 Please, **separate from me** !
 If you go left/north, I will go right/south,
 and if you go right/south, I will go left/north."

a ¹⁰ And Lot **lifted his eyes** ,
and he saw all the **valley of the** **Jordan** ,
that it was entirely **watered**
 b **(this is before Yahweh caused the ruin of Sodom and Gomorrah)**
it was like **the** **garden** of Yahweh,
 a' **like the land of** **Egypt**
as you go to **Zoar** .
 a ¹¹ And Lot chose for himself all **the** **valley of the** **Jordan** ,
 a' and Lot journeyed **eastward** ,
 b and **each man separated from his brother** .

Genesis 13:5-11. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

The Division of the Brothers

The developing conflict between Avram and Lot happens in steps that are carefully marked in the text's progression.

We're told that Lot also has many herds, alongside Avram's many herds. This leads to a problem of capacity. The land simply can't sustain all of their grazing cattle. "It cannot carry them for dwelling together as one."

Notice the additional reason for the land's inability to sustain Avram and Lot's herds: They are not the only ones grazing their cattle in this land. The Canaanites also dwell in the land. The symmetrical design of the paragraph delays the information about the Canaanites while also linking it back up to the inability of Lot and Avram to live together.

However, the land's inability isn't the only reason for the conflict. There is also the matter of their "possessions." There is an important wordplay with the description of the "many" (רב, *rav*) possessions, which leads to a "dispute" (ריב, *riv*) between the brothers. Specifically, the dispute is between the shepherds of each party, i.e., between those who are not brothers.

Avram's Solution and the Promised Land at Risk

Genesis 13:8-9 Instructor's Translation

⁸ And Avram said to Lot,
"Don't let there be disputing
between me and between you,
between my shepherds and between your shepherds,
for we men are brothers!
⁹ Isn't all the land before you?
Please, separate from me!
If you go left/north, I will go right/south,
and if you go right/south, I will go left/north."

Avram's speech is an attempt to avoid escalating conflict, and a subtle wordplay with the preceding paragraph shows the narrative's emphasis.

Genesis 13:6 Instructor's Translation

and the land could not carry them for **dwelling together as one** (יחדו), because their possessions were so many (רב), and they weren't able to **dwelt together as one** (יחדו)

"dwell together as one" = Heb. *yakhdav*

Genesis 13:11 Instructor's Translation

and **each man separated from his brother** (אחיו)

"his brother" = Heb. *'akhiv*

Genesis 13:8 Instructor's Translation

"Don't let there be disputing (מריבה) between me and between you, between my shepherds and your shepherds, for we men are **brothers!**" (אחים)

"brothers" = Heb. *'akhim*

Avram names the sad reality that even though they are brothers, they are not able to dwell together as one because their many possessions have created jealousy, contention, and division. And so his solution is both generous and risky. He lets Lot have his choice of grazing lands first.

Lot Saw That It Was Good ... and He Took

The depiction of Lot choosing his ideal grazing land is full of hyperlinks back to Genesis 1-11, and these links help the reader evaluate his actions.

Genesis 13:10-11 Instructor's Translation

¹⁰ And Lot lifted his eyes,
and he saw all the valley of the Jordan,
that it was entirely watered
(this is before Yahweh caused the ruin of Sodom and Gomorrah)
it was like the garden of Yahweh,
like the land of Egypt
as you go to Zoar.
¹¹ And Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan,
and Lot journeyed eastward,
and each man separated from his brother.

Genesis 3:6 Instructor's Translation

And the woman saw the tree, **that it was good** for eating, that it was desirable to the eyes, and **she took** from its fruit and she ate ...

Genesis 3:24 Instructor's Translation

And [Yahweh] banished the human, and stationed *kheruvim* at the **east of the garden of Eden** ...

Genesis 6:2 Instructor's Translation

And **the sons of elohim saw** the daughter of humanity, **that they were good**, and **they took** for themselves wives, from all that they chose.

Lot and Eve

Lot's decision is set on analogy to Eve's foolish choice to do what was good in her eyes. Just as her evaluation of what was good was faulty and led to death, Lot's choice of what appeared to be Eden also turns out to be misguided. In Eve's case, this led to exile to the east of Eden, and in Lot's case, it leads to a self-imposed "exile" from the Eden-like promised land.

Lot and the Sons of *Elohim*

The sons of *elohim* invert the folly of Eve as they see, take, and choose for themselves what is good in their eyes. Lot does the same thing, but not in relation to women. Rather, what he sees, takes, and chooses is an Eden-like land. And ironically, the place he chooses is the very city where Genesis 6:2 will be inverted! In Sodom, human men will try to have sex with angels, and Lot himself will take his good-looking daughters and try to give them to these men! It's a tragic portrait of how selfish choices have a cascading effect that builds in intensity and scope.

Brothers and Waters Separate Outside of Eden

The use of the word “separate” (Heb. *parad*, פָּרַד) to describe the sibling rivalry and division between Avram and Lot sets up analogies to the earlier story of division between Cain and Abel, and between the sons of Noah, and, surprisingly, between the river of Eden.

Genesis 13:10-11 Instructor’s Translation

¹⁰ And Lot lifted his eyes,
and he saw all the valley of the Jordan,
that it was entirely watered
(this is before Yahweh caused the ruin of Sodom and Gomorrah)
it was like the garden of Yahweh,
like the land of Egypt
as you go to Zoar.
¹¹ And Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan,
and Lot journeyed eastward,
and each man separated from his brother.

Genesis 2:10, 14 Instructor’s Translation

10 Now, a **river went out from Eden** to **water the garden**; and from there **it separated** and became four heads ... ¹⁴ and the name of the third river is Tigris; it goes **east** of Assyria.

Genesis 4:16-17 Instructor’s Translation

¹⁶ and Cain **went out from the face of Yahweh**, and he dwelt in the land of Wandering/Nod, **east of Eden**. ¹⁷
And Cain ... built a city, and called the name of the city “Enoch,” according to the name of his son.

Genesis 9:18 Instructor’s Translation

And the sons of Noah who **went out of the ark**, were Shem and Ham and Japheth.

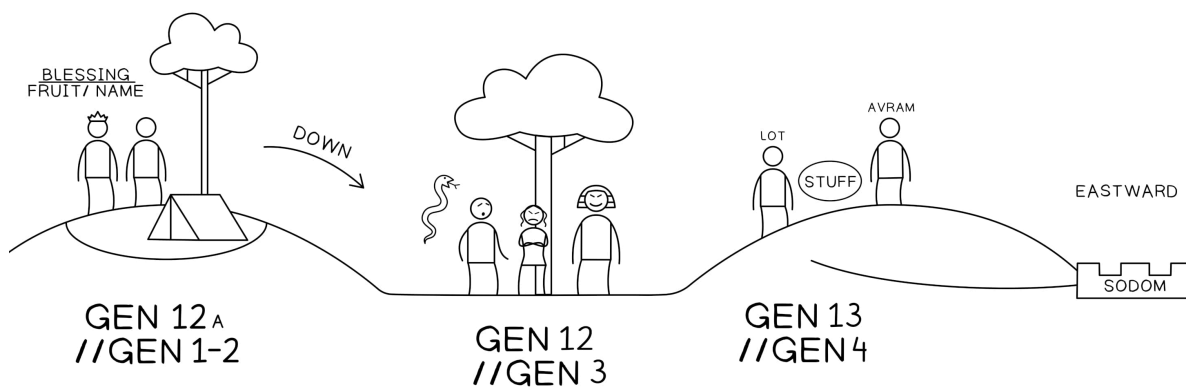
Genesis 10:11-12 Instructor’s Translation

From [Babylon Nimrod] went forth into Assyria and he built Nineveh ... the great city.

Genesis 10:32 Instructor’s Translation

These are the families of the sons of Noah ... and out of these **the nations were separated** on the land after the flood.

Brothers Separate



Avram and Lot Separating. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Reflection Question

How does the narrative tell us that Lot makes a foolish decision?

Session 8: God's Second Promise to Abram

Key Takeaways

- God's promise to make Avram's descendants "like the dust" evokes the creation of the human in Genesis 2.
- God's invitation for Avram to "walk about" the land carries on the theme of the righteous one walking in intimacy with God.
- God provides the land as an ark-like refuge of safety for Avram in the Eden hills while Lot chooses a false Eden down below, which will lead to ruin.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 13:12-18

¹² Avram dwelt in the land of Canaan,
and as for Lot, he dwelt in the cities of the valley ,
and he set up his tent by Sodom .
(¹³ Now, to Yahweh the men of Sodom were bad and moral-failures, very much .)

¹⁴ And Yahweh said to Avram,
after Lot separated from him,
a "Please lift up your eyes and see from the place where you are,
b to the north and to the south/Negev and to the east and to the west ,
a' ¹⁵ because all the land that you see ,
c to you I will give it , and to your seed , forever.
a ¹⁶ And I will make your seed like the dust of the land ,
b which, if one was able to count the dust of the land ,
a' then also your seed could be counted .
a ¹⁷ Arise , walk about in the land ,
b its length and its width ,
a' because to you I will give it ."

a ¹⁸ And Avram set up his tent ,
b and he went and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre ,
b' which are by Hebron ,
a' and he built there an altar to Yahweh.

Genesis 13:12-18. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Brothers Apart in Sodom and Hebron

Here Avram's sojourn into the land that began in [12:6](#) comes to completion when he finally settles in Hebron. The design of this unit highlights the contrast between the locations where Avram and Lot finally settle.

[Genesis 13:12-13](#) contrasts Avram's settlement in Canaan with Lot's settlement outside in the eastern valley of the Dead Sea, by Sodom. We recall from [13:10](#) that this valley is like Eden in Lot's eyes, but it turns out that this garden is full of bad seed. The two words used to describe Sodom echo the key words of the twin failures of the Eden story.

Genesis 13:13 Instructor's Translation

Now, to Yahweh the men of Sodom were **bad** (רע) and **moral-failures** (חטאים), very much.

- Adam and Eve fail at the tree of knowing good and **bad** (רע) because of the snake's deception (Gen. 3:6-7).
- Cain gives into the influence of "sin," that is, **moral failure** (חטאת) and murders his brother (Gen. 4:7).

In contrast, Avram dwells in a new Eden land, and the story concludes with him setting up his tent by the oak tree of Mamre near Hebron. Each element of this location's description ties into the larger symbolism of Eden, a place of tents, trees, divine visions.

Genesis 12:6-9

- Avram journeys through the land and camps near the oak of Moreh (אלון מורה) = "tree of seeing"

Genesis 12:10-13:11

- **12:10-20**
- **13:1-4**
- **13:5-11**

Genesis 13:18

- Avram settles in the land in his tent under the oaks of Mamre (אלני ממרא).

Genesis 12:6-13:18. Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

A Promise Repeated and Expanded

God repeats his promises to Avram from 12:6 but expands both elements of seed and land.

Genesis 13:14-17 Instructor's Translation

¹⁴ And Yahweh said to Avram,
after Lot separated from him,
“Please lift up your eyes and see from the place where you are,
to the north and to the south/Negev and to the east and to the west,
¹⁵ because all the land that you see,
to you I will give it, and to your seed, forever.
¹⁶ And I will make your seed like the dust of the land,
which, if one was able to count the dust of the land,
then also your seed could be counted.
¹⁷ Arise, walk about in the land,
its length and its width,
because to you I will give it.”

These promise expansions echo back to the divine blessings upon Adam and Noah, showing that Avram is the recipient of the Eden promise for all nations.

Seed of the New Humanity

Like humanity in Eden, God will create a seed for Avram that is “like” the innumerable dust of the land.

Genesis 13:16 Instructor’s Translation

And I will make your **seed** like the **dust of the land**, which, if one was able to count the dust of the land, then also your seed could be counted.

Genesis 2:7-8 Instructor’s Translation

⁷ then Yahweh *Elohim* formed the human from the **dust from the ground** ... ⁸ and Yahweh *Elohim* planted a garden in Eden, toward the east, and he placed there the human whom he had formed.

The Land as an Ark of Safety, Avram as a New Noah

God’s speech echoes the language of Noah right before the onset of the flood. He walks with God, so he is summoned to create a floating Eden so that he and the animals can live together in a place of refuge as the violence of humans is met by the powerful waters. The ark, like the land, has a length and width, which will provide safety for any inside.

Genesis 13:17 Instructor’s Translation

Arise, **walk about** (התהלך) in the land, **its length and its width** (לארכה ולרחבה) because to you I will give it.

Genesis 6:8-9 Instructor’s Translation

⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of Yahweh. ⁹ These are the birth-generations of Noah; Noah was a righteous one, blameless in his generation; Noah **walked about** (התהלך) with *Elohim*;

Genesis 6:13-15 Instructor’s Translation

¹³ And *Elohim* said to Noah,
 “The end of all flesh has come before me, because the land is filled with violence because of them, and behold, I am going to cause ruin with the land.

¹⁴ Make for yourself an ark of gopher trees;
 you will make the ark with nests,
 and shall pitch it inside and out with pitch.

¹⁵ This is how you will make it:

- 300 cubits: **the length** (אֶרֶךְ) of the ark
- 50 cubits: **its width** (רָחֵבָה)
- 30 cubits: its height.”

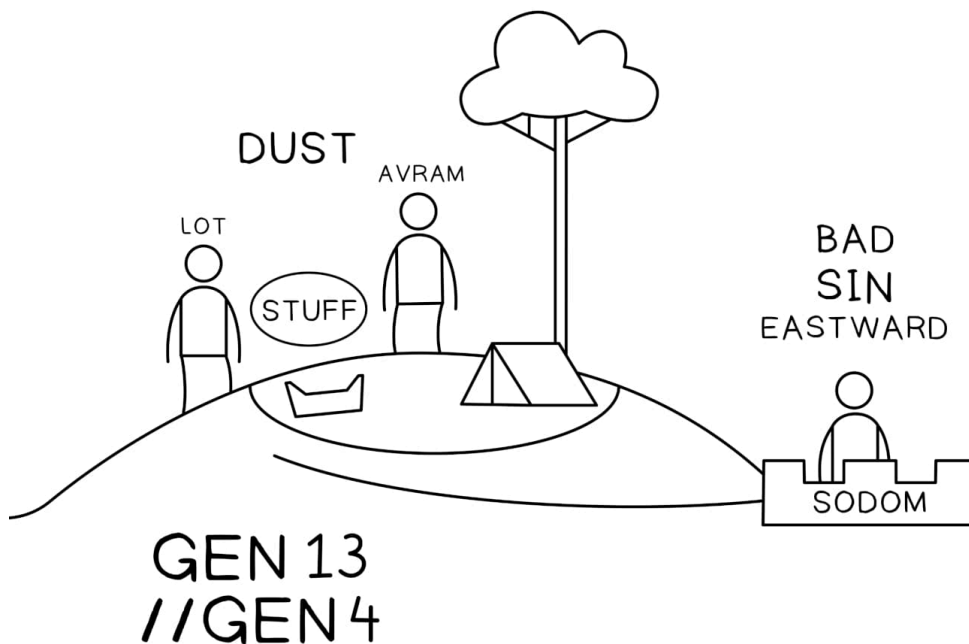
Genesis 12-13 as Replay of Genesis 2-6

Genesis 2 • God’s blessing of fruitful seed • Garden abundance • Sacred space of God’s presence by the tree of life on Mt. Eden	Genesis 3 • Foolish failure at the tree of testing that is “good of sight” • Deception and lack of trust in God’s word • Exile from Eden	Genesis 4-6 • Brothers with abundance • Jealousy and conflict • Brothers “separate” through violence • Non-chosen brother settles in the east, where violence is simmering, leading to a flood of judgment	Violence and Flood!
Genesis 12:1-9 • God’s blessing of abundance and protection • Promise of fruitful seed • God’s presence at tree and mountains	Genesis 12:10-20 • Foolish failure with Sarai who is “beautiful of sight” • Deception and lack of trust in God’s word • Exile from false-Eden (i.e., Egypt)	Genesis 13 • Brother with abundance • Jealousy and conflict • Brothers separate through non-violence! • Non-chosen brother settles in the east, where violence is simmering, leading up to a flood of judgment	Violence and Flood!
Genesis 12-13 as Replay of Genesis 2-6. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).			

In both sequences, God appoints a chosen figure to receive divine blessing and to become a conduit of that blessing to others. Both figures fail in acts of folly that are rooted in a lack of trust in God’s wisdom and word.

Exile results in both cases, though the pattern is more sophisticated with Avram: He first undergoes a self-imposed exile from Canaan and then is exiled from Egypt by Pharaoh. It's only in Genesis 13 that Avram breaks that pattern. Once the conflict with Lot begins, Avram becomes a mediator for peace and avoids a violent conflict between brothers. Lot ends up choosing a place that is similar to Cain's city, a realm of violence (Lemek in Gen. 4:18-24; the violent warriors of Gen. 6:4; the wicked and violent men of Sodom in Gen. 13:13 and 14:1-10).

Avram's Hilltop Refuge



Avram's Hilltop Refuge. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Reflection Question

What themes and key words in Genesis 13:14-20 recall the mountaintop garden of Eden? How have these themes been developed in Genesis 1-11?

Session 9: A Flood of Violence

Key Takeaways

- The kings of Genesis 14:1-10 are portrayed as personifications of evil and corruption through their names and other symbolism.
- The kings eliminated the groups of giants, recalling the Nephillim whose violence ruined the land and brought on the flood.
- Avram's dramatic rescue of Lot is depicted as miraculous, validating Avram's status as God's chosen agent.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 14:1-16

a ¹ And it came about in the days of **Amraphel**, **king** of **Shinar**,
b of **Aryok**, **king** of **Elasar**,
c of **Kedorlaomer**, **king** of **Elam**,
d and of **Tidal**, **king** of Goyyim (= "nations"),
a ² that **they made war** with **Bera** (= "in evil"), **king** of **Sodom**,
a' and with **Birsha** (= "in wickedness"), **king** of **Gomorrah**,
b and with **Shinab** (= "father hater"), **king** of **Admah**,
b' and with **Shemeved** (= "name of destruction"), **king** of **Tsiboyim**,
c and with **the king** of **Bela** (= "devour") [this is Zoar].
³ **All of these joined together** in the **valley of Siddim** [this is the Sea of Salt]

a ⁴ For **twelve years** they had been slaves of **Kedorlaomer**,
a' and in the **thirteenth year** they rebelled,
b ⁵ and in the **fourteenth year** **Kedorlaomer** **went**,
b' and the kings who were with him,
a and **they struck** the **Rephaim** in Ashteroth-Qarnayim (= "Asherah of Twin-Peaks")
a' and the **Zuzim** in Ham,
a" and the **Emim** in Shaveh-Qiryathayim (= "the Plain of Twin-Cities"),
b ⁶ and the **Horites** in the mountains of Seir,
b' unto the Oak of Paran which is by the wilderness.
c ⁷ And they returned and **they went** to Eyn-Mishpat (= "the Spring of Judgment") [this is Qadesh]
and **they struck** all the field of the **Amalekites**,
c'

c' and also the **Amorites** who dwell in Hatzetzon-Tamar (= "Heap of Palms")

- a 8 And **the king of Sodom** went out,
b and **the king of Gomorrah** ,
b and **the king of Admah** ,
b and **the king of Tsiboyim** ,
b and the king **of Bela** [this is Zoar]
a' and they **lined themselves up for war** in the **valley of Siddim** ,
a 9 against **Kedorlaomer, king of Elam** ,
b and **Tidal, king of Goyyim**
b and **Amraphel, king of Shinar** ,
b and **Aryok, king of Elasar** .
c Four kings against five.
a 10 Now, the **valley of Siddim** was full of **many pits** of tar.
b And **they fled**,
c **the king of Sodom, and Gomorrah** ,
b' and **they fell** into there.
a And those **remaining** fled to the **mountains** .

- 11 **And they took**
all the **possessions** of **Sodom and Gomorrah** ,
and all their **food** ,
and **they went away**.
12 And **they took**
Lot and his **possessions** ,
the son of the **brother** of Avram,
and **they went away**.
Now, he was dwelling in Sodom .

- a 13 And a **refugee** came and **reported to Avram the Hebrew** .
b **Now, he was dwelling among the oaks of Mamre** the Amorite,
b the **brother** of Eshkol, and the **brother** of Aner.
b Now, they **were members of a covenant** with Avram.
a' 14 And **Avram heard that his brother** had been taken **captive** .

- a And he brought out **his trained men**,
b **those born of his house**,
b' three hundred and eighteen,
a' **and he chased them** unto Dan.

- a 15 And **he divided himself against them** by night,
 b **he and his servants**
 a' and **he struck them**,
 a'' **and he chased them** unto Khobah, which is north of Damascus,
 a 16 and he returned all the **possessions**,
 a' and also **Lot** his **brother** and his **possessions** he returned,
 b and also the women and the people.

Genesis 14:1-24. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Of Kings and Giants

The story highlights these repeated lists of kings. The lists are arranged in symmetrical patterns, and the names of the kings are loaded with sarcastic wordplays.

Mesopotamian Kings: 1st List	Mesopotamian Kings: 2nd List
A Amraphel, king of Shinar B Aryok, king of Elasar C Kedorlaomer, king of Elam D Tidal, king of Goyyim	C Kedorlaomer, king of Elam D Tidal, king of Goyyim A Amraphel, king of Shinar B Aryok, king of Elasar
Canaanite Kings: 1st List	Canaanite Kings: 2nd List
A Bera, king of Sodom B Birsha, king of Gomorrah C Shinab, king of Admah D Shemeved, king of Tsiboyim E The king of Bela [this is Zoar]	A The king of Sodom, B The king of Gomorrah C The king of Admah D The king of Tsiboyim E The king of Bela [this is Zoar]

Mesopotamian and Canaanite Kings Lists. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

The list of nine kings is repeated two times, but not identically. The order of the four Mesopotamian kings is inverted so that the king of Shinar is number one in the first list, and the king of Elam is number one in the second list.

This seemingly random variation becomes meaningful when the story is mapped out in its literary sequence.

A - Amraphel, king of Shinar
B - Aryok, king of Elasar

C - Kedorlaomer, king of Elam
D - Tidal, king of Goyim

A - Bera king of Sodom
B - Birsha, king of Gomorrah
C - Shinav, king of Admah
D - Shemeved, king of Tsevoyim
E - the king of Bela [this is Zoar]

Kedorlaomer and the Kings With Him Strike the Giant Clans

- Rephaim / Zuzim / Emim
- Horites / Amalekites / Amorites

A - the king of Sodom
B - the king of Gomorrah
C - the king of Admah
D - the king of Tsevoyim
E - the king of Bela [this is Zoar]

C - Kedorlaomer, king of Elam
D - Tidal, king of Goyim

A - Amraphel, king of Shinar
B - Aryok, king of Elasar

Genesis 14:1-10 Kings. Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

The names have been listed in symmetrical pattern, which places the Mesopotamian kings at the outer locations and highlights the giant clans in the center position. Each of these design features seems intentional and communicates something significant.

The inverted Mesopotamian kings: The two kings highlighted are the rulers of Shinar and Elam. Both kingdoms play a significant role in the larger biblical story.

Shinar

Shinar was last mentioned in [Genesis 11:1-2](#), in the genealogy of Ham, son of Noah: "And all the land ... journeyed east and found a plain in the land of Shinar and they settled there" and began building Babylon.

Shinar is a rare term used to describe the flood plain in which Babylon and its ziggurats were built. Every time it appears in the Hebrew Bible, it is ominous:

- "The beginning of Nimrod's kingdom was Babylon ... in the land of Shinar" ([Gen. 10:10](#))
- "On that day, Yahweh will a second time with his arm restore the remnant of his people from Assyria, Egypt ... Elam, Shinar ... and from the islands of the sea." ([Isaiah 11:11](#))
- "[Nebuchadnezzar] brought the vessels of the temple of *Elohim* to the land of Shinar, into the treasury of his *elohim*." ([Daniel 1:2](#))

Elam

"Elam" is the Hebrew word for "Persia," and was last mentioned in the genealogy of Shem, son of Noah: "The sons of Shem: Elam, Ashur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram" ([Gen. 10:22](#)).

Interestingly, Elam/Persia is the nation that topples Babylon and becomes the instrument of God to restore the exiled Israelites back to the promised land (see [Ezra 1:1-11](#)).

Later, the king of Babylon (descendant of Ham) will exile Avram's descendants to the land of Shinar, and Elam (son of Shem) is the nation that will restore those exiles back to their homeland.

The list of Canaanite kings is repeated identically, and most of the names come from the genealogy of Ham in Genesis 10.

Genesis 10:6, 19 NASB

⁶ The sons of Ham were Cush and Mizraim and Put and Canaan. ... ¹⁹ The territory of the Canaanite extended from Sidon as you go toward Gerar, as far as Gaza; as you go toward **Sodom** and **Gomorrah** and **Admah** and **Zeboiim**, as far as Lasha.

This precise linking of the kings to the list of Noah's sons in Genesis 10 is intentional. The author is trying to show that this battle is an outworking of the sibling rivalry that Noah anticipated in Genesis 9:25-26.

Genesis 9:24-26 NIV

²⁴ When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, ²⁵ he said, "Cursed be Canaan!
The lowest of **slaves**
will he be to his brothers."
²⁶ He also said,
"Praise be to the LORD, the God of Shem!
May Canaan be the **slave** of Shem."

Genesis 14:4-5 Instructor's Translation

⁴ For twelve years [the sons of Ham] had been **slaves** of Kedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled, ⁵ and in the fourteenth year Kedorlaomer came, and the kings who were with him [sons of Shem]

The Mesopotamian Kings Versus the Giants

The eastern kings come to Canaan and strike the giant clans associated with the Nephilim, the giant warriors from the time of the flood.

Rephaim in Ashteroth Qarnaim

The Rephaim were a clan of giants, with a king named Og who ruled in Ashteroth, in the region of Bashan on the east side of the Jordan River.

Deuteronomy 3:8-11 ESV

⁸ So we took the land at that time out of the hand of the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, from the Valley of the Arnon to Mount Hermon ... ¹⁰ all the cities of the tableland and all Gilead and all Bashan ... cities of the kingdom of Og in Bashan. ¹¹ (For only Og the king of Bashan was left of the remnant of the Rephaim. Behold, his bed was a bed of iron. Is it not in Rabbah of the Ammonites? Nine cubits was its length, and four cubits its breadth, according to the common cubit.)

Joshua 13:12 ESV

all the kingdom of Og in Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth and in Edrei (he alone was left of the remnant of the Rephaim); these Moses had struck and driven out.

The Greek Septuagint translators of Genesis rendered the Rephaim of [Genesis 14:5](#) with the Greek word *gigantas* (γίγαντας) = “giants,” the same word they use to translate “Nephilim” in [Genesis 6:4](#).

The Zuzim (זוזים) in Ham

The Zuzim, also known as the “Zamzummim” (זמזומים), lived in the region later inhabited by the Ammonites, who were actually part of the Rephaim giant clans.

Deuteronomy 2:19-21 ESV

¹⁹ ... I will not give you any of the land of the people of Ammon as a possession ... ²⁰ It is also counted as a land of Rephaim. Rephaim formerly lived there—but the Ammonites call them Zamzummim— ²¹ a people great and many, and **tall as the Anakim**; but the LORD destroyed them before the Ammonites, and they dispossessed them and settled in their place

The Emim in Shaveh-Qiryataim

The Emim were also actually part of the Rephaim giant clans.

Deuteronomy 2:10-11 ESV

¹⁰ The Emim formerly lived there, a people great and many, and tall as the Anakim. ¹¹ **Like the Anakim** they are also counted as Rephaim, but the Moabites call them Emim.

All of these tribes are connected to the Anakim and the Nephilim from the time of the flood.

Numbers 13:27-33 ESV

²⁷ And they told him, "We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. ²⁸ However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. ²⁹ The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan." ... ³² "The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. ³³ And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them."

This entire list of the inhabitants of Canaan and the Transjordan provides an accounting for all the regions that the Israelites will later enter in Numbers 20 onward. These regions were filled with earlier inhabitants, clans of giants who were dealt with by God's providential justice long before Israel entered into the land.

Deuteronomy 2:9-11, 18-23 ESV

⁹ And the LORD said to me, "Do not harass Moab or contend with them in battle, for I will not give you any of their land for a possession, because I have given Ar to the people of Lot for a possession." ¹⁰(The **Emim** formerly lived there, **a people great and many, and tall as the Anakim**. ¹¹Like the **Anakim** they are also counted as **Rephaim**, but the Moabites call them **Emim**. ¹²The **Horites** also lived in **Seir** formerly, but the people of Esau dispossessed them and destroyed them from before them and settled in their place, as Israel did to the land of their possession, which the LORD gave to them.)

¹⁸"Today you are to cross the border of Moab at Ar. ¹⁹And when you approach the territory of the people of Ammon, do not harass them or contend with them, for I will not give you any of the land of the people of Ammon as a possession, because I have given it to the sons of Lot for a possession." ²⁰(It is also counted as a land of **Rephaim**. **Rephaim** formerly lived there—but the Ammonites call them **Zamzummim**— ²¹**a people great and many, and tall as the Anakim**; but the LORD destroyed them before the Ammonites, and they dispossessed them and settled in their place, ²²as he did for the people of Esau, who live in Seir, when he destroyed the Horites before them and they dispossessed them and settled in their place even to this day. ²³As for the Avvim, who lived in villages as far as Gaza, the Caphtorim, who came from Caphtor, destroyed them and settled in their place.)

Moses' speech in Deuteronomy 2 assumes a backstory of God's judgment on the giant clans on the east side of the Jordan, and Genesis 14 supplies that narrative. The point of Moses' speech is that just as God providentially gave other lands to the non-chosen descendants and relatives of Avraham (Lot or Esau), so also he will use the Israelites to dispossess the Canaanites. Genesis 14 provides the providential backstory, implying that God used the eastern kings led by Babylon as a divine instrument of judgment on the giant clans of Canaan and Transjordan. However, because of Babylon's over-assertion in the capturing of Lot, the seed of Avraham, God then delivers the coalition over to Avraham.

This chapter, then, makes Avram the superior to the eastern kings, the Canaanites, and all the giants of the ancient time. It also qualifies Avram to be the true inheritor of these very lands, because he was their deliverer.

This all seems aligned with a strategy that sets the returnees from exile on analogy with Avraham. They too (re)entered “Canaan” (= Persian *Yehud*) after God had used Babylon to judge the previous inhabitants (the Israelites and Judean kingdoms along with the non-Israelite population), and found themselves called to inherit it according to God’s promise.

A Flood of Violence

Recall that Genesis 11-14 retraces the thematic sequence of Genesis 1-9, and Genesis 14 comes at the precisely the moment we are expecting a flood/re-creation moment. The story is filled with unique connections to the onset of the flood narrative.

Genesis 6-8

The mighty violent warriors (Heb. *gibborim*), also called “**Nephilim, men of the name**” (notice the prominence of names in this chapter) spill much blood on the land, filling it with violence.

Gen. 6:4 The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of the name.

Gen. 6:13 Then God said to Noah, “The end of all flesh has come before me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and behold, I am about to cause their ruin them with the land.

The flood-waters are called “mighty and strong” (Heb. *gavar*, גבר), from the same root as “mighty warrior” (Heb. *gibbor*, גבור).

Gen. 7:18-20

¹⁸ The water was **mighty** (Heb. *gavar*, גבר) and increased greatly upon the land ...

Genesis 14:1-24

- The Mesopotamian kings strike the Rephaim and other giant clans (**Gen. 14:5**, LXX γιγαντας), connected to the Anakim (**Deut. 2:10-11, 3:11-13**) and the Nephilim (**Num. 13:33**).

- The Mesopotamian kings become a flood of divine judgment that consists of warriors (*gibborim*) sweeping through the land promised to Avram, clearing out its previous inhabitants.

Mesopotamian Kings As a Flood of Violence. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Genesis 6-8

¹⁹The water was **mighty** (Heb. *gavar*, גבר), very very much upon the land, and all the high hills under the skies were covered.
²⁰The water was **mighty** (Heb. *gavar*, גבר) fifteen cubits higher, and the mountains were covered.

Gen. 7:11 The flood happens as the “fountains of the deep abyss” split open, and the “windows” (Heb. *’arubbot*, ארבת) open up.

Gen. 11:3 The tower and city of Babylon, which were scattered in a flood-like judgment, were built by “tar” (חמר) used as mortar.

After the flood, Noah and his family are a remnant (נשאר/שאר), and they escape and are placed upon the “mountains of Ararat.”

Gen. 7:23 “Only Noah, together with those with him in the ark, was left remaining (נשאר).”

Gen. 8:4 “In the seventh month ... the ark rested upon the mountains (הר) of Ararat”

Gen. 8:21 After the flood, God refers to the waters as a “strike” upon the land (נכה) — “I will never again **strike** (נכה) the land as I have done.

God makes a covenant promise to Noah, that he will provide a refuge for him and his family in the ark built of trees (עץ), where he can live in safety with the animals and plenty of food.

Gen. 6:14 “Make for yourself an ark of gopher trees (עץ) ...

Gen. 6:18-19 “But I will set up my covenant (ברית) with you and so you will enter the ark, you and

Genesis 14:1-24

The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fall into pits of pitch.

Gen. 14:10 Now, the valley of Siddim has pits, pits (בארות בארת) of tar (חמר).

After the flood-like attack of the kings, the survivors flee to the mountains.

Gen. 14:10 ... and those left remaining fled to the mountains (הר).

The Mesopotamian kings come and “strike” (נכה) the giant clans.

Gen. 14:5, 7 Khedorlaomer came ... and **struck** (נכה) the Rephaim ... and they **struck** (נכה) the field of the Amalekites.

Gen. 14:13 While the battle rages around Avram, he sits in peace among the oak trees of Mamre.

Gen. 14:13 While corrupt Canaanites are being struck all around, a group of Canaanites who are in a covenant (ברית) with Avram, sitting with him, are perfectly safe

Gen. 14:11-12 The Mesopotamian kings come and

Mesopotamian Kings As a Flood of Violence. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Genesis 6-8	Genesis 14:1-24
your sons and your wives and your sons wives and every living thing of all flesh ... in order to keep them alive with you.” Gen. 6:21 “And take (לקח) for yourself food (מאכל) that you will eat (אכל) and gather it for yourself.”	“take” (לקח) both the “food” (אכל) and Lot from Sodom.
Gen. 5:21, 28-29 Noah is the great-grandson of Enoch (חנוך) Gen. 5:29 Noah (נח) ... “this one will comfort us (ינחמנו) us” Gen. 6:8 But Noah (נח) found favor (חן) in the eyes of Yahweh	Gen. 14:14 Avram prepares his “dedicated men” (חנכי).
<i>Mesopotamian Kings As a Flood of Violence. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).</i>	

These hyperlinks establish Avram, the seed of Noah, as a new Noah who is delivered from the Mesopotamian kings’ flood of violence and who becomes the agent of God’s deliverance and judgment.

Avram is the agent of God’s deliverance because the Canaanites who are in a covenant with him are delivered and safe from the Mesopotamian attack.

Avram is the agent of God’s judgment because he and the Canaanites with him strike back against the Mesopotamian kings, overcoming them and rescuing the captives of Sodom.

In this story, the cursed Canaanites are struck by wicked kings of the east, who are depicted as a flood of wickedness. While God’s providence is not explicitly evoked, it does appear to be a judgment on the Canaanites, who, by extension from Sodom and Gomorrah’s “great evil and sin” ([Gen. 13:13](#)), deserve divine justice. But, in contrast to the flood, the violent kings of the east come led by Babylon. This prepares us for the portrait of Babylon as God’s “servant” in [Jeremiah 25](#), who will be used for a time (paralleling [Gen. 14:1-10](#)) until he oversteps his bounds (paralleling [Gen. 14:11-24](#)) and becomes the object of God’s judgment instead of its instrument.

Avram the Hebrew and His Covenant With the Canaanites

The Canaanites are portrayed in two ways.

1. The Canaanites unconnected to Avram are swept away in the battle of the kings who come, strike, and return. Their “wicked” status is indicated by the names of the kings: “In Evil,” “In Wickedness,” “Father

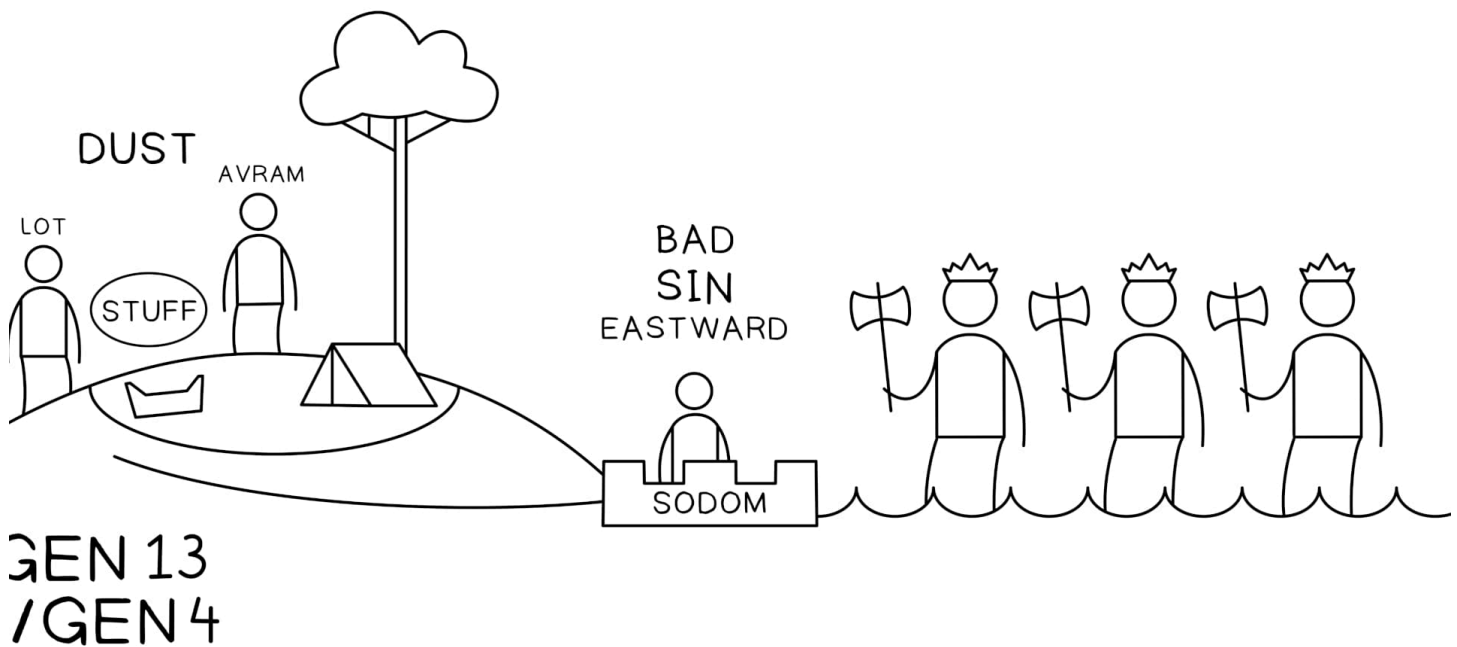
Hater," "Name of Destruction," and "Devoured." These are the Canaanites associated with Avram and Lot.

2. The good Canaanites (Mamre, Aner, Eshkol) hanging out with Avram in his mini-Eden are associated with Avram by covenant. Not only are they spared, but they go with Avram and defeat the violent nations themselves, chasing them all the way "unto Dan" (עד דן), which sounds like the Hebrew for "unto Eden." Note that Eshkol (אשכול) means "Grape Cluster," which is a garden image.

Avram the Commando King-Slayer

This portrait of Avram as the guerrilla warrior is unique in the Avram stories because he is usually peaceable and non-violent in his relationships with the Canaanites. His fighting force of 318 is an odd detail, explained by its relation to Eliezer in the next story.

A Flood of Warrior Kings



Flood of Warrior Kings. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Reflection Question

How do the violent kings of Genesis 14 replay the flood theme? How does this help us understand the importance of this episode in Avram's story?

Session 10: Melchizedek the Royal Priest

Key Takeaways

- This narrative offers us the first picture of Avram's transformation as he more faithfully reflects God's image.
- The kings of Salem and Sodom stand in stark contrast to one another. The king of Salem comes with feast and blessing, whereas the king of Sodom comes to take.
- Biblical authors hold up Melchizedek as an ideal, untainted royal priest.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 14:17-24

a 17 And **the king of Sodom** **went out to meet him**,
b after he returned from **striking** Kedorlaomer, and the kings with him,
a' into the valley of the plain [this is the valley of the king].

18 Now (just then), **Melchizedek, king of Shalem**, **brought out bread and wine**.
A Now, he was the **priest** of **El-Most High**
19 And he **blessed** him, and he said:
May Avram be **blessed** by **El-Most High**,
B the **possessor of skies and land**.
20 And may **El-Most High** be **blessed**,
who has delivered your adversaries into your hand.
A **And he gave to him** (נתן) **a tenth** (עשר) **of everything**.

21 And **the king of Sodom** **said to Avram**,
A **"Give to me** (נתן) **the people**,
and the possessions, **take** (לקח) **for yourself**."

22 And **Avram said to the king of Sodom**,
"I lift up my hand to Yahweh, **El-Most High**,
possessor of skies and land:
B 23 Not from a strap or sole of a sandal
will I **take** (לקח) from all that is yours,
so that you can't say,

'I made Avram **wealthy (עשר)**!'

a 24 Only what the **young men** have eaten,

b and **the portion (חלק)** of the men who went with me,

A

a' **Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre,**

b' they can **take (לקח)** their **portion (חלק)**."

Genesis 14:1-24. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

A Tale of Two Kings

This story needs to be understood from multiple perspectives, like a concentric circle with each layer moving outward and getting larger: Genesis 14:17-24 within Genesis 14:1-24, within 11:27-14:24, within 11:27-25:18, within Genesis as a whole, within the Torah as a whole, and in relationship to the Prophets and Writings.

With Melchizedek, we come to the 10th king in the story! In contrast to the king of Sodom, whose name is "Evil" (ברע), we now have the "King of Righteousness" (מלכי־צדק)! The contrast in their names symbolizes their characters and what they want for or from Avram.

Bera King of Sodom

- Sodom / Evil
- He demands that Avram give (נתן) him the war captives, but Avram can take (לקח) the plunder.
- He wants to have Avram in his debt by making him wealthy (עשר).

Mekhizedeq King-Priest of Salem

- Salem (= Jerusalem) / Righteousness
- He offers food and blessing to Avram and demands nothing in return.
- He gives generously to Avram, so Avram happily gives (נתן) one-tenth (מעשר) as a gift in return.

Bera and Melchizedek represent two ways that the rulers of nations relate to God's chosen one, who was selected to be the conduit of God's blessing to the nations. Recall God's promise to Avram in Genesis 12:3.

Genesis 12:3 Instructor's Translation

Those who bless you will be blessed,
those who treat you as insignificant will be cursed
and through you, all the families of the land will find blessing.

“It is perfectly natural that a returning hero, whose victory has also benefited the entire region, should be officially greeted by a distinguished personage. But the intrusive nature of the report here, interrupting the smooth sequence of verses 17 and 21, is obvious, and was noted by Rashi, Abravanel, and Hizkuni. Its position, which is original and not a later insertion, heightens the tension produced by the sudden appearance of the king of Sodom, whose very name is redolent of evil. It also transforms into a spiritual experience what was up to now a secular incident. Victory in war is not attributed to Abram’s skill and valor but to the will of God, who is the ultimate arbiter of human destiny. It is inconceivable that the biblical Narrator would not have introduced such a note into the story. The artfulness with which the Melchizedek episode is integrated into the narrative is proven by the priest-king’s mention of Abram’s victory and by reference to the ‘Valley of the King’ (v. 17), which smooths the way for the appearance of the ‘king of Salem,’ the first element of whose name—Melchizedek—also means ‘king.’ There is a subtle contrast in the uses of the verb *y-ts-*, ‘to go out.’ The king of Sodom ‘came out’ empty-handed to meet his benefactor, and the first word he uttered was ‘give!’ The king of Salem ‘brought out’ bread and wine and offered a blessing, even though he may have come to collect his tithe. The name of Melchizedek’s city—Salem (Heb. *shalem*)—is suggestive of shalom, the peace that Abram’s intervention brought to the region. Finally, the extraordinary title of God used by Abram in his colloquy with the king of Sodom is the name just used twice by Melchizedek.”

Sarna, Nahum M. (2001). [*The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*](#). Jewish Publication Society. 109.

A Royal Priest Who Blesses the Blessed One

Melchizedek is the first explicit “royal priest” in the book of Genesis. Adam and Eve are implicitly royal priests, but Melchizedek is clearly a royal priest, and not from the line of Seth, Noah, or Shem (or at least, not in the text).

He rules Salem (lit. *shalem* / שלם), which later in the Hebrew Bible is identified as JeruSALEM (see [Ps. 76:1-2](#), where “God’s tent is in Salem, his dwelling is in Zion”). It will later be called “Jebus” when it is in the possession of the Canaanites ([Josh. 18:28](#); [Judg. 19:10-11](#); [2 Sam. 5:6-7](#)).

Melchizedek pronounces a blessing on Avraham in the name of El-Elyon, the creator/possessor of skies and land. This divine title, and Avraham’s statement in [14:22](#) that El-Elyon is Yahweh, links Melchizedek’s God to “Yahweh *Elohim*” of [Genesis 1-2](#). He is a genuine priest of the God of Israel, but before Israel ever existed, and before Yahweh was known by that name (see [Exod. 3:12-15](#)). This connects him to the line of genuine worship that stems back to Seth in [Genesis 4:26](#).

Melchizedek’s blessing on Avram links back to God’s promise in [Genesis 12:1-3](#). Thus, we can expect that Melchizedek and the city he rules will experience God’s blessing some time in the future.

Genesis 14:19-20 NASB

- ¹⁹ He **blessed** him and said,
 “**Blessed be Abram** of God Most High,
 possessor of heaven and earth;
²⁰ And **blessed be God Most High**,

who has delivered your enemies into your hand.”
And he gave him a tenth of all.

Genesis 12:2-3 NASB

² And I will make you a great nation,
and I will **bless** you,
and make your name great;
and so you shall be a **blessing**;
³ and **I will bless those who bless you**,
and the one who curses you I will curse.
And in you all the families of the earth will be **blessed**.

Notice how Melchizedek’s blessing develops God’s own blessing on Avram. God has promised seed and land, and now Melchizedek adds deliverance from enemies. God will bless Avram with abundant descendants and a promised land, and he will deliver Avram’s descendants from their enemies.

God’s Promise of Blessing

An important theme at work in Genesis 14 is the blessing of God upon Avram, and how the various characters in the story relate to Avram.

Genesis 14:13-14 NASB*

¹³ Then a fugitive came and told Abram the Hebrew. Now, he was living by the oaks of **Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner, and these were in a covenant with Abram**.
¹⁴ When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he led out his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

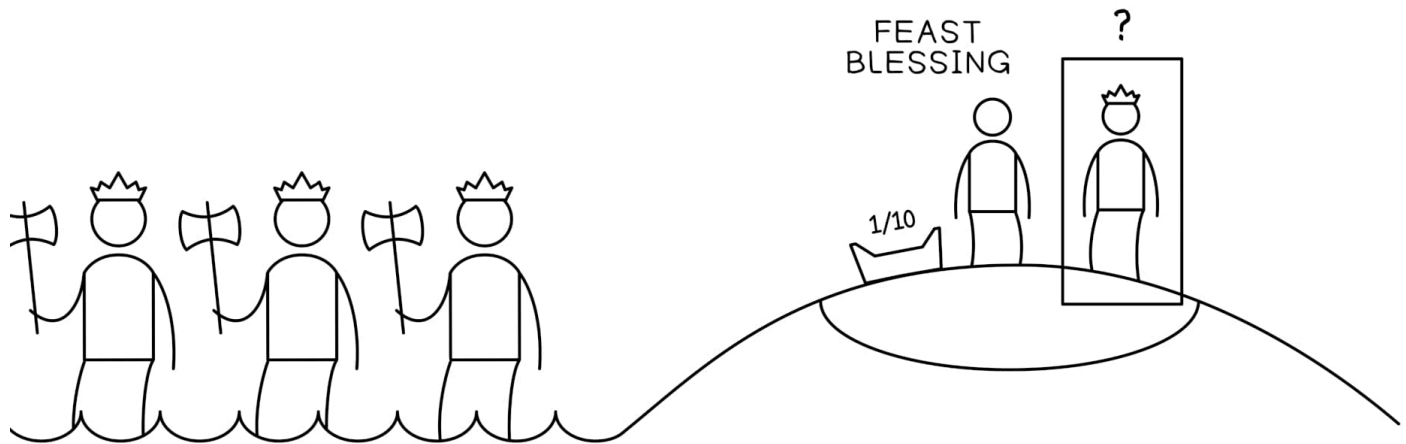
These Amorites who had made a covenant with Avram, God’s chosen one, experienced the blessing of God’s protection and also shared in the victory of Avram. In contrast, the gentile kings who oppose God’s chosen one are defeated despite the odds in their favor. This contrast bears an important message: God’s blessing upon Avram can be experienced by the nations if they relate peaceably with God’s chosen one, like Mamre and his crew, or like Melchizedek.

Genesis 14 shows the outworking of God’s promise in Genesis 12:2-3. Avram becomes a blessing to the nations as he fights against violent, pagan kings and rescues the innocent. And those who “cursed” him (by kidnapping his nephew) find themselves cursed.

Melchizedek blesses Avram, and so we expect God will bless Melchizedek in return. The payment of a tithe to Melchizedek shows that Avram honors him as a superior. The sudden introduction and disappearance of Melchizedek leaves a great impression on the reader.

The reader is unsurprised when, much later in the story, David is made king of Israel and establishes this same city as Israel’s sacred capitol. David moves the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem and assumes the role of a royal priest just like Melchizedek! See 2 Samuel 5-8.

Avram and Melchizedek



Avram and Melchizedek. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Reflection Question

How does Genesis 14:17-24 begin to demonstrate a transformation in Avram's character?



Module 3: The Seed and the Covenant

SESSIONS 11-15

The Abraham story zooms in on God's promise to make Abraham the father of many nations. Will Abraham trust God? See how Abraham faces his test.

Session 11: The Genesis 1-11 Melody Repeats

Key Takeaways

- The Avraham story is built on the structure of the repeating melody of Genesis 1-11. Knowing this structure helps us understand when the authors are making intentional shifts to emphasize or subvert expectations.
- The story cycle pivots on the de-creation/new creation note of the melody.
- Just like the dry wilderness at the beginning of Genesis 2, sometimes the “flood” note of the melody is about not enough water instead of too much.

Complementary Portraits of Creation

GEN 1
CREATION
TOO MUCH WATER
WATER-MASTER

GEN 2:5...
CREATION
NOT ENOUGH WATER
WATER-PROVIDER

Complementary Portraits of Creation. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).



Reflection Question

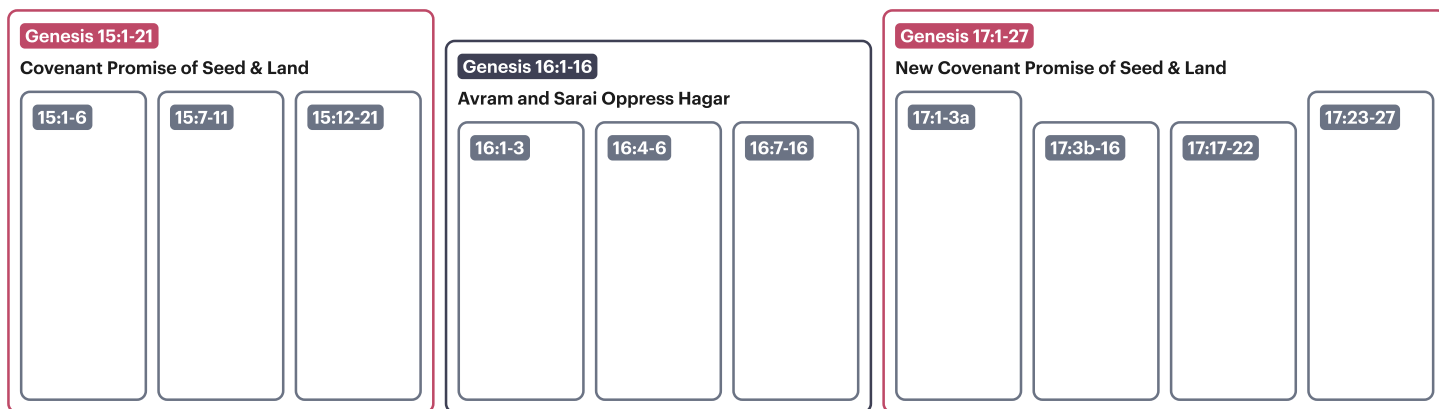
How does knowing the Genesis 1-11 melody help us understand the Avraham story?

Session 12: Seed Like Stars

Key Takeaways

- Like the human in the garden, Avram is naked with only God as his source of delivering help.
- God credits Avram as righteous—in right relationship—when Avram ceases his scheming and simply trusts God’s promise.
- God’s promise to make Avram’s descendants like the stars evokes both their vast quantity and glorious destiny.

Macro Design of Genesis 15-17



Genesis 15:1-17:27. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Genesis 15

- God’s first promise to Avram
 - “Don’t be afraid Avram,
I am your deliverer,
your very numerous (הרבה מאד) reward.”
- Avram’s belief and unbelief → God makes a covenant

Genesis 16

- Avram and Sarai’s failure to believe in God’s promise
- They abuse Hagar in order to produce seed

Genesis 17

- God's renewed promise to Avram
 - “Walk before me and be blameless!
I will make my covenant with you
and **make you very numerous**(אֲרַבְהָ ... מְאֹד)
- Avram's belief and unbelief → God renews the covenant **with a sign: circumcision**

Genesis 15:1-17:27 (Repeated Words). Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

In this section, the focus of the narrative turns to God's promise of the seed and Avram and Sarai's failure to trust God's generosity. Notice the symmetrical design that highlights the role of God's covenant with Avram. The sequence of the three stories is significant.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 15:1-21

Yahweh Makes a First Promise of Protection and Reward

¹ After these things,
the word of Yahweh was to Avram in a vision, **saying** :
 “Don't be afraid, Avram!
 I am a delivering-shield for you.
 Your reward is great, very much!”

Avram Responds With a Doubt-Filled Question

a ² **And Avram said** ,
 b “ **Master Yahweh, what will you give to me** ?
Now, I am going on naked/without children
 c **and a son of Mesheq of my house** [this is Damascus] **is Eliezer**.

Avram Responds With His Own Plan

a' ³ **And Avram said** ,
 b' “ **Look at me! You have given to me no seed** ,
 c' **and so look! A son of my house will inherit me!**”

Yahweh Makes a Second Promise of a Son

⁴ And look! **The word of Yahweh was to Avram, saying** :
 a “This one will not **inherit** you.
 b Rather, one who comes out from your innards,
 a that one will **inherit** you.”

Yahweh Speaks

⁵ And he brought him outside,

and he said :

“Stare, please, at the skies,
and **count** the stars,
if you are able to **count** them.”

Yahweh Speaks a Promise of Abundant Seed

And he said to him :

“Such will be your **seed**.”

Avram Responds: Trust and Righteousness

⁶ And he trusted in Yahweh,
and he attributed this to him as right-relationship.

Yahweh Makes a Third Promise of Land

- a ⁷ **And he said to him** ,
b “I am Yahweh, who brought you out from Ur of Kasdim,
to give to you this land, to **inherit** it.”

Avram Responds With a Doubt-Filled Question

- a' ⁸ **And he said** ,
b' “ **Master Yahweh, with what can I know** that I will **inherit** it?”

Yahweh Orders Avram To Get Animals

- ⁹ **And he said to him** ,
“ **Take** for me a three year old calf,
and a three year old goat,
and a three year old ram,
and a dove and a pigeon.”

Avram Obeys and Gets Animals

- ¹⁰ And he **took** for himself **all of these**,
and he **halved** (ויבתר) them in the middle,
and he set each **half** (בתרו) so it met its neighbor,
and the **birds** he did not **halve** (בתר).
¹¹ And **birds of prey** came down upon the corpses,
and Avram blew at them.

- a 12 **And as the sun was going** ,
 b then a **deep-stupor-sleep** **fell upon Avram** ,
 b' and look: **a terror, a darkness** , a great one, **fell upon him** .

- 13 And **he said to Avram** ,
 a "You must know that your **seed** will be immigrants in **a land** not their own,
 and they will **serve** them,
 and they will **oppress** them for **four hundred years** ;
 b 14 and also, **that nation** which they **serve**, I will judge,
 and after that, they will go out with great possessions.
 15 And as for you, you will go to your fathers,
 in completeness you will be buried, at a good old age.
 a' 16 And **the fourth generation** will return here,
 because the crookedness of the **Amorite** isn't complete unto here."

- a 17 **And the sun was going** ,
 b and there was **gloomy darkness** ,
 b' and look: **a furnace of smoke and fiery flame**
 that was passing in between these pieces.

- 18 On that day, **Yahweh cut a covenant (ברית)** with **Avram, saying** :
 a " **To your seed** **I have given this land** ,
 b from the river of **Egypt** unto the great river Euphrates,
 a' 19 along with the Cainite, and the Qenizzite, and the Qadmonite
 a" 20 and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Rephaim
 a'" 21 and the **Amorite** , and the Canaanite, and the Girgashite, and the Jebusite.

Genesis 15:1-21. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Promise of Seed and Land

There is an important progression in this chapter as it unfolds in a sequence of dialogues between Yahweh and Avram that lead up to the making of the covenant.

Scene 1: A Dialogue About Seed (Genesis 15:1-6)

1. The first dialogue (Gen. 15:1-3)

- **Yahweh's promise about reward**
- **Avram responds with doubt**

Scene 2: A Dialogue About Land (Genesis 15:7-21)

1. The first dialogue (Gen. 15:7-11)

- **Yahweh's promise about land**

Dialogue About Seed and Land. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Scene 1: A Dialogue About Seed (Genesis 15:1-6)	Scene 2: A Dialogue About Land (Genesis 15:7-21)
	• Avram responds with doubt • Yahweh takes Avram outside at night
2. The second dialogue (Gen. 15:4-6) • Yahweh's promise about seed • Yahweh takes Avram outside at night • Avram responds with trust • Yahweh considers him righteous	2. The second dialogue (Gen. 15:12-21) • Yahweh's promise about seed and land • Avram cannot respond (he's passed out!) • Yahweh makes a covenant
Faith → Right-standing with Yahweh	Doubt → Covenant
Dialogue About Seed and Land. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).	

Notice how both scenes follow a parallel progression. Scene 1 focuses on Yahweh’s promise of future seed for Avram. This seems ridiculous, so Avram not only questions how Yahweh could do this, but he also proposes his own alternate plan. Yahweh’s response is to take him outside at night and repeat the promise. This scene closes positively, with Avram finally trusting Yahweh’s promise, resulting in Avram’s “right relational standing” with Yahweh.

Scene 2 focuses on Yahweh’s promise of a land for Avram’s future seed. This also seems ridiculous, so Avram again questions how Yahweh will pull this off. Yahweh again takes Avram outside and engages him in an ancient covenant ritual where Avram passes out and does not pass between the animal pieces. It’s as if Avram’s continued lack of trust (with the brief exception of Gen. 15:6) compels Yahweh to do something more drastic that will make his promise formal and concrete: He will make a covenant. While the covenant is positive in one sense, when we contrast scenes 1 and 2, we can’t help but feel that something has been lost. Avram’s radical trust in the promise of God results in righteousness, whereas his doubt leads to a covenant. No longer does God’s promise rest on his word, but on the basis of a sacrifice and oath of loyalty that formalizes the relationship. This is a similar portrayal of the covenant to what we find in Genesis 8-9, where the covenant is a ceasefire mechanism that is positive but not ideal.

The Re-Creation of Avram After the Flood of Kings

Just as Noah emerged from the ark and received God’s blessing and a covenant after his sacrifice, so now Avram emerges from the flood of the kings, and he receives a blessing in Jerusalem over a sacrificial meal.

Noah After the Flood	Avram After the Battle
Gen. 8 • Noah emerges safely from the flood onto a mountain • On the high place of Ararat, Noah offers a sacrifice • God blesses Noah	Gen. 14 • Avram emerges safely from the flood onto a mountain • On the high place, Avram gives up the plunder • Melchizedek gives God's blessing to Avram
Gen. 9 God makes a covenant with Noah	Gen. 15 God makes a covenant with Avram
Recreation of Avram After the Flood. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).	

Links Between Genesis 14 and 15

While there appears to be little connection between these two chapters, there are in fact many deep links between the stories. Many consist of subtle wordplays and hyperlinks.

Genesis 14	Genesis 15
Gen. 14:20 “Blessed be El-Elyon, who delivered (מגן) your enemies into your hand.”	Gen. 15:1 “Don’t be afraid, Avram, I am your shield (מגן), and your great reward (שכר)”
Gen. 14:21 “Give me the people and take the plunder (רכש) for yourself!”	
Gen. 14:15 And [Avram] struck them and chased them unto Khovah, which is north of Damascus (דמשק).	Gen. 15:2 “But I am exposed, and a son of Mesheq (משק) of my house [this is Damascus (דמשק)], Eliezer is my heir.”
Gen. 14:14 And [Avram] rallied his dedicated men, those born into his house, three hundred and eighteen ...	Gen. 15:2 “Eliezer” (אליעזר) = 318 in Hebrew numbers
Gen. 14:5 the Rephaim	Gen. 15:16 the sin of the Amorite
Gen. 14:7 the Amorites	Gen. 15:20-21 and the Rephaim ... and the Amorite
Links Between Genesis 14 and 15. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).	

These hyperlinks show that [Genesis 15](#) is in fact the thematic continuation of [Genesis 14](#).

God's First Speech: Reward and Protection

Genesis 15:1b Instructor's Translation

Don't be afraid, Avram!
I am a delivering-shield for you.
Your reward is great, very much!

God's opening words are the direct response to the events of chapter 14.

- "a delivering shield"—Avram just declared war on an alliance of Mesopotamian kings.
- "your reward"—Avram just forfeited all of the war plunder in an act of trust in God's blessing.

Avram's response, then, is a perfectly reasonable one. He has been acting on the assumption that he would begin having children with Sarai to build a family that could inherit the land. So far, they have no biological children, and the only heir he has was a guy from Damascus, Eliezer.

Avram, Noah, and Adam and Eve

Just as Noah emerged from the flood and was blessed by God and invited into a covenant, this story is also interacting with a more distant thematic parallel: the garden of Eden stories.

Avram in Hebron: Genesis 15

Genesis 15:2 Instructor's Translation

I am going on exposed (עירי),
and a son of Mesheq of my house, is Eliezer (אליעזר)
Look, you have not given me any seed (זרע)

- Avram divides the animals in half and lays them down (15:10-11).
- God sends a "deep sleep" (תרדמה) that falls (נפל) upon Avram (15:12).

Adam and Eve in the Garden: Genesis 2

- The human is naked (ערום, 2:25).
- "It is not good that the human is alone, I will make a delivering-help (עזר) counterpart to him" (2:18).
- God sends a "deep sleep" (תרדמה) that falls (נפל) upon the human (2:21).
- God divides the human in half, taking one of his sides, from which God builds a woman (2:22).

Both stories are about how humans, by their own resources, cannot fulfill the calling that God has placed upon them. This impossibility requires trust in the divine promise to provide "delivering-help" (עזר). To emphasize that the humans are powerless to do what God requires of them, the "deep sleep" becomes an image of their helplessness and total dependence upon God's plan and power.

For Adam, the deliverance is עזר/ezer, for Avram the deliverance is זרע/zera'.

Trust and Right Relationship With God

This is an important moment in the Avraham narrative, and it's the first occurrence of the word "trust/believe" in the biblical story.

Trust

Hebrew *'amen* (אמן) or *ne'eman* (נאמן) = "to be true, trustworthy"

- "their water will be trustworthy" (i.e., reliable and continuous, [Isa. 33:16](#))
- "let your words be proven trustworthy" (i.e., true and reliable, [Gen. 42:20](#))
- "your house and your throne will be trustworthy" (i.e., enduring and reliable, [2 Sam. 7:16](#))

Hebrew *he'emin* (האמין) = "to consider someone trustworthy, to trust/believe"

- "The gullible consider anything believable/trustworthy" ([Prov. 14:15](#))
- "Jacob did not consider their words trustworthy/true" ([Gen. 45:26](#))

In this moment, Avram considers God's promise of a huge family with innumerable descendants to be a reliable, trustworthy promise. Notice he doesn't just "trust in" the word; he trusts in *Elohim* himself.

Righteousness

In Hebrew, righteousness (*tsedakah*, צדקה) refers to a standard of right relationship: actions that create and maintain healthy, whole, and equitable relationships between two parties.

For example, when Yaaqov's (Jacob's) fair management of Laban's flocks is to be inspected, he says "my *tsedakah* will testify on my behalf, when you check on the flocks" ([Gen. 30:33](#)).

Jeremiah 22:3 Instructor's Translation

Do justice and *tsedakah*, by rescuing those robbed from the hand of their oppressor.

Genesis 38:26 Instructor's Translation

[Tamar] has shown more *tsadeqah* (verb) than I have, because I didn't give her to my son as a wife.

Job 29:14-17 NIV*

¹⁴ I put on *tsedeq* as my clothing; justice was my robe and my turban. ¹⁵ I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. ¹⁶ I was a father to the needy; I took up the case of the stranger. ¹⁷ I broke the fangs of the wicked and snatched the victims from their teeth.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

“In order for an individual to be righteous, it means that of necessity he or she must exist and live in a manner which allows him or her to respond correctly in the values of the relationship (spouse, parent, judge, neighbor, etc.) ... In essence ‘righteousness’ is not simply an objective norm which is present within a society and which must be kept, but rather it is a concept which derives its meaning from the relationship in which it finds itself. Right judging, right governing, right worshipping, and generosity are all covenantal activities and so righteous, despite their diversity.”

Gossai, Hemchand (1993). [*Justice, Righteousness and the Social Critique of the Eighth-Century Prophets*](#). Peter Lang. 55-56.

In this story, Avram’s trust in God’s promise is considered by God to be an act of “doing right by” him.

Reflection Question

Beyond sheer quantity, what significance do stars have in the Hebrew Bible?

Session 13: God's Covenant with Abram

Key Takeaways

- In the narrative logic, faith leads to right standing with God, and doubt leads to covenant. A covenant, though a beautiful expression of God's mercy, is not the ideal.
- Yahweh seals the covenant alone, binding himself to bear the responsibilities of both parties.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 15:7-21

A

⁷ And he said to him,
"I am Yahweh who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans,
to give you this land, to possess it."

⁸ And he said,
"O Lord God, how may I know that I will possess it?"

B

⁹ So he said to him,
a "Bring me a three year old heifer,
b and a three year old female goat,
c and a three year old ram,
and a turtledove,
and a young pigeon."

a ¹⁰ And he brought all these to him
b' and **he halved them** in the middle,
and **he laid each half to meet its neighbor**,
c' but the birds he did not halve.

¹¹ And there came down birds of prey upon the carcasses,
and Avram blew them away.

B'

¹² **And it came about as the sun was going down**,
a **a deep-sleep**
b fell upon Avram;
a' and behold, **terror and great darkness**
b' fell upon him.

A'

13 And God said to Avram,
 “Know for certain that **your seed will be immigrants in a land** that is not theirs,
 and they will be enslaved to them,
 and they will oppress them **four hundred years**.
 14 But also that I myself will judge the nation whom to which they are slaves,
 and afterward they will come out with many possessions.
 15 And as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace;
 you will be buried at a good old age.
 16 Then in **the fourth generation** they will return here,
 for the iniquity of the Amorite is not complete until this point.”

B''

17 **And it came about as the sun went down**,
 that there was **a deep-darkness**,
 and behold, **an oven smoking**,
 and **a torch of fire**,
 passed **between these pieces**.

A''

18 On that day the Lord made a covenant with Avram, saying,
 “**To your seed I have given this land**, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river
 Euphrates:
 19 the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite
 20 and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim
 21 and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite.”

Genesis 15:7-21. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Notice the structural emphasis on the three divine speeches; each one focuses on the divine blessing promises of “seed” and “land.” Unit A has the promise of land for Avram personally, Unit A' has the promise of his future seed being enslaved in a land not their own, and Unit A'' has the combined promise that the seed who leaves and comes back will possess the land promised to Avram.

Also notice how the sacrificial birds play a prominent role in the setting of the apocalypse and the covenant. Each one is described with language that will be activated later on in the design patterns of apocalypse and covenant narratives.

Cutting the Pieces of the Covenant: Genesis 15 and Jeremiah 34

Genesis 15:9-11, 17 Instructor's Translation

9 So he said to him,
 “Bring me a three year old heifer,
 and a three year old female goat,
 and a three year old ram,

and a turtledove,
and a young pigeon."

¹⁰ And he brought all these to him
and **he halved them** in the middle,
and **he laid each half to meet its neighbor**, but the birds he did not halve.

¹¹ And there came down birds of prey upon the carcasses, and Avram blew them away.

¹⁷ ... and a torch of fire passed **between these pieces**.

Jeremiah 34:13, 18-20 NASB*

¹³ Thus says the LORD God of Israel, "I cut a covenant with your forefathers in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, saying ...

¹⁸ I will give the men who have transgressed my covenant, who have not fulfilled the words of the covenant which they made before me, when they cut the calf in two and passed between its pieces— ¹⁹ the officials of Judah and the officials of Jerusalem, the court officers and the priests and all the people of the land who passed between the pieces of the calf— ²⁰ I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life. And their dead bodies will be food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth."

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The meaning of this covenant ceremony is elaborated further by Jeremiah. The animal halves represent the consequence of breaking the covenant. Those who walk between the pieces are then obligated to fulfill their covenant obligations. If they don't, their fate will be like these severed animals.

It is supremely important, then, that God does not allow Avram to walk through the pieces. Instead, God incapacitates him, making him pass out on the sidelines, while God alone passes through the pieces. The symbolism has a clear and powerful message: God alone will be responsible for the fulfillment of his promise, and he will carry the consequences of the failure and success of both parties.

The Apocalypse of Avram

God's appearance to Avram is the first time that fire and smoke are associated with the divine presence. This imagery will continue to develop throughout the biblical story and will come to a high point in the appearances of Yahweh on top of Mount Sinai.

Genesis 15:12, 17 Instructor's Translation

¹² And it came about as the sun was going down, a deep-sleep fell upon Avram; and behold, **terror and great darkness** (חשכה / *hashekah*) fell upon him ...

¹⁷ And it came about as the sun went down, that there was a **deep-darkness**, and behold, an **oven smoking** (תנור עשן / *tannur 'ashan*), and a **torch of fire** (לפיד אש / *lappid 'esh*) passed between these pieces.

Exodus 19:16-18 NIV*

¹⁶ On the morning of the third day there was **thunder and lightning**, with a **thick cloud** over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. ¹⁷ Then Moses led the people out of the

camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.

¹⁸ Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in **fire** (אש / 'esh). The **smoke** (עשן / 'ashan) billowed up from it **like smoke from a furnace**, and the whole mountain trembled violently.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Exodus 20:18, 21 NIV*

¹⁸ When the people saw the **thunder** and **lightning** (לפיד / lappid) and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in **smoke** (עשן / 'ashen), they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance ...

²¹ The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the **thick darkness** where God was.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Deuteronomy 4:11-12 NIV

¹¹ You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain while it **blazed with fire** to the very heavens, with **black clouds and deep darkness**. ¹² Then the LORD spoke to you out of the **fire**. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice.

Psalms 18:9-12 NIV*

⁹ He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds (ערפל / 'araphel) were under his feet.

¹⁰ He mounted the cherubim and flew; he soared on the wings of the wind.

¹¹ He made darkness (חשך / khoshek) his covering, his canopy around him—rain clouds of darkness (חשכה / khashekah) in the sky.

¹² Out of the brightness of his presence clouds advanced, with hailstones and coals of fire (גחלי אש / gakhale 'esh).

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The Cosmic Promised Land

The boundaries of the promised land, which take up the promises of [Genesis 12:7](#) and [13:14-18](#), offer the first rough description of the land promised to Avram.

Genesis 15:18-21 Instructor's Translation

¹⁸ On that day the LORD made a covenant with Avram, saying,

“To your seed I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates:

¹⁹ the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite

²⁰ and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim

²¹ and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite.”

This passages invites us to explore a long-standing puzzle that involves two distinct mapping patterns found in biblical descriptions of the promised land.

Promised Land Mapping Pattern 1

In the first mapping pattern, the promised land is bordered on the west by the Mediterranean Sea and on the east by the Jordan River, with the north-eastern boundary going up into Syria and Lebanon.

Numbers 34:2-12 NIV

² Command the Israelites and say to them: "When you enter Canaan, the land that will be allotted to you as an inheritance is to have these boundaries:

³ Your **southern side** will include some of the Desert of Zin along the border of Edom. Your southern boundary will start in the east from the southern end of the Dead Sea ... and [eventually] join the Wadi of Egypt and end at the Mediterranean Sea.

⁶ Your **western boundary** will be the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. This will be your boundary on the west.

⁷ For your **northern boundary**, run a line from the Mediterranean Sea to Mount Hor

⁸ and from Mount Hor to Lebo Hamath. Then the boundary will go to Zedad,

⁹ continue to Ziphron and end at Hazar Enan. This will be your boundary on the north.

¹⁰ For your **eastern boundary** ... along the slopes east of the Sea of Galilee.

¹² Then the boundary will go down along the Jordan and end at the Dead Sea.

This will be your land, with its boundaries on every side."

Other examples of this boundary pattern: [Joshua 15:1-63](#); [Ezekiel 47](#)



[Openstreetmap.org](https://www.openstreetmap.org).

Promised Land Mapping Pattern 2

Exodus 23:31 NIV

I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, and from the desert to the Euphrates River. I will give into your hands the people who live in the land, and you will drive them out before you.

Deuteronomy 11:24 NIV

Every place where you set your foot will be yours: Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea.

Joshua 1:4 NIV

Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west.

1 Kings 4:20-21 NIV

²⁰ The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy.

²¹ And Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. These countries brought tribute and were Solomon's subjects all his life.

Other examples of this boundary pattern: [Deuteronomy 1:7-8](#); [Genesis 2:10-14](#)



[Openstreetmap.org](https://www.openstreetmap.org).

These two maps seem to have different symbolic value, so they communicate different things.

Pattern 1 is smaller and more historically realistic to the actual proportions of Israel's territory. The boundaries shrank throughout time, as they lost more and more land to their neighbors. You could call this the "realistic map."

Pattern 2 is much larger and more historically idealistic. For a brief period of Solomon's reign, it seems he had influence over this region, but it quickly ended when he died. This map, however, has symbolic value connected to the garden of Eden, which was itself the source of these two rivers.

There is also significance in the fact that the two rivers on each side of this description are the life sources of Israel's two greatest imperial enemies in the biblical story: Egypt and Babylon.

"The two maps reflect Israel as conceived in relation to the two great empires that it was engaged by Egypt and Babylonia. The first mapping pattern encompasses the boundaries of province of Canaan under Egyptian rule. In the symbolism of the exodus story, God liberated Israel from slavery in Egypt and then gave them the land of Canaan ... The borders of map 1 are the Egyptian-defined border, rather than a description of Israel's exact borders at any specific moment in its history. The map expresses Israel's resistance to Egyptian rule. The second mapping pattern presents Israel as a power reaching up to the river that sources Babylon. Babylonian propoganda considered all the land west of the Euphrates as conquered territory. The biblical map turns this around. The land west of the Euphrates is the land of promise for Israel. Thus, both maps represent one way in which Israel resisted the imperial powers, as they symbolically push their enemies back behind the rivers from which they came."

Parry, Robin (2014). [*The Biblical Cosmos: A Pilgrim's Guide to the Weird and Wonderful World of the Bible*](#). Cascade Books. 67.

Visualizing the Covenant Scene



God's First Covenant With Avram. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Reflection Question

What meaning can we infer from God alone passing between the animals in the covenant scene of Genesis 15:7-21?

Session 14: The Oppression of Hagar

Key Takeaways

- In tragic irony, Avram and Sarai's oppression of Hagar, whose name means "the immigrant," comes right after God tells Avram that his descendants will be oppressed immigrants.
- Sarai's desire to be "built up" through Hagar is a distorted echo of God "building" the woman in Genesis 2.
- The text links Avram and Sarai's actions to the failure narratives of Genesis 3, 4, and 6.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 16:1-16

a ¹ Now, **Sarai the wife of Avram** had not **given birth** for him,
b but she had **a slave-girl, an Egyptian one**,
b' and her name was **Hagar** (= "The Immigrant").

² And **Sarai** said to **Avram**,
a "Look, please! Yahweh has restrained me from **giving birth** .
b Please, **go into** **my slave-girl** .
a' Perhaps I can be **built up** by means of her."

a ³ And **Sarai, the wife of Avram** **took** **Hagar, her Egyptian slave-girl** ,
b at the end of twenty years of Avram dwelling in the land of Canaan,
a' and **she** **gave** her to **Avram** her husband **as a wife**.

⁴ And **he went into** **Hagar** and she became **pregnant** ,
and she saw that she was **pregnant** ,
and her mistress **became cursed in her eyes** .

⁵ And Sarai said to Avram,
"May the violence done to me be upon you!
I gave **my slave-girl** into your lap,
and she saw that she became **pregnant** ,
and I **became cursed in her eyes** .
May Yahweh bring justice between me and between you!"

⁶ And Avram said to Sarai,
"Look, **your slave-girl** is in your hand;
do to her **what is good in your eyes**."
and Sarai **oppressed** her, and so she fled from before her face.

⁷ **And the messenger of Yahweh** found her,
at **a spring of waters** in the wilderness,
at **a spring** on the way to Shur,
⁸ **and he said**,
"**Hagar, slave-girl** of **Sarai**,
Where is it you come from?
And to where are you going?"
And she said,
"From before the face of **Sarai my mistress** I am fleeing."

⁹ **And the messenger of Yahweh said to her**,
"Return to **your mistress**,
and **oppress** yourself under her hand."

¹⁰ **And the messenger of Yahweh said to her**,
"**Multiplying I will multiply** your **seed**,
so it cannot be counted, because of its **multiplication**."

¹¹ **And the messenger of Yahweh said to her**,
"Look, you are **pregnant** and will **give birth to a son**,
and **you will call his name Yishmael (=El Will Hear)**
because Yahweh has heard your **oppression** .

¹² And as for him, he will be a donkey of a human.
His hand will be against everyone,
and everyone's hand will be against him.
And against the face of all his brothers he will reside."

¹³ And **she called the name** of Yahweh who spoke to her,
"You are **El-Roi (=El Who Sees Me)**
because she said,
"Have I also seen here the back of **the one who sees me** ?"

¹⁴ Therefore, **she called the well**,
Beer Lakhai-**Roi** (= " **Well** of the Living **One Who Sees Me.** ")
Look, it's between Qadesh and between Bered.

15 And Hagar **gave birth to a son** for Avram,
 and Avram **called the name of his son**,
 the one whom Hagar **birthed**, **Yishmael**
 16 Now, Avram was a son of eighty-six years,
 when Hagar **birthed** **Yishmael** for Avram.

Genesis 16:1-16. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

The Crisis of God's Promise: No Seed

Now that the promises of both seed and land have been repeated to Avram (first in [Gen. 12](#), then [chapter 13](#), and again in [chapter 15](#)), the story returns its focus to the problem of Sarai's infertility introduced back in [Genesis 11:30](#): "And Sarai was infertile, and she had no child."

In contrast to [chapter 15](#), which focuses on Avram's struggle to trust God, [chapter 16](#) turns to Sarai's struggle.

The Hagar Incident and Genesis 1-6

Avram and Sarai acquired Egyptian plunder, including slaves, back in [Genesis 12:10-20](#), as a result of Avram's deception of Pharaoh. This plunder eventually divides the brothers, and Avram and Lot part ways because of too many possessions. Lot's settlement in Sodom leads to his capture in the flood-like battle of the kings. This entire sequence in Genesis 12-14 is set on analogy with Genesis 1-9, and so we expect the same here. This story in [Genesis 16](#) is riddled with allusions, wordplays, and hyperlinks to Genesis 2-9, all of which are crucial to interpreting of the story's details.

Hyperlinks to Genesis 2-3

Genesis 16:1-16	Genesis 2-3
Gen. 16:2 "Yahweh has restrained (עצר) me from giving birth." Gen. 16:10 "I will greatly multiply your seed (זרע)."	Gen. 2:18-25 Yahweh provides a woman for the human as a delivering-help (עזר), so that they can reproduce.
Gen. 16:2 "Go into my slave-girl, perhaps I can be built (בנה) from her."	Gen. 2:22 "and Yahweh built (בנה) the side which he had taken from the human into a woman."
Gen. 16:2b "and Avram listened to the voice of Sarai" (שמע + לקול)	Gen. 3:17 "because you listened to the voice of your wife" (שמע + לקול)
<i>Links Between Genesis 2-3 and 16. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).</i>	

Genesis 16:1-16	Genesis 2-3
Gen. 16:3-3 "and Sarai took (ותקח) Hagar ... and she gave (ותתן) her to Avram her husband (אִישָׁהּ) as a wife (לְאִשָּׁה) ... And he went into her."	Gen. 3:6 "and the woman (הָאִשָּׁה) ... took (ותקח) the fruit ... and she gave (ותתן) also to her husband (לְאִישָׁהּ), and he ate."
Gen. 16:4 "and she [Hagar] saw that (ותרא כי) she was pregnant, and her master was cursed in her eyes (בעיניה)."	Gen. 3:6 "and the woman saw that (ותרא כי) the tree was good (טוב) for food, and desirable to the eyes " (לעֵינַיִם)
Gen. 16:6 "Avram said to Sarai, 'Behold, your slave-girl is in your hand , do to her what is good (טוב) in your eyes (בעיניך).'"	
Gen. 16:7 God visits Hagar by a spring of water in the wilderness	Gen. 3:8 God visits Adam and Eve by the tree in the middle of the garden (from which the river is sourced, see Gen. 2:10-14)
Gen. 16:8 "And [the angel] said to Hagar ... 'From where (אי מזה) have you come, and to where do you go?'"	Gen. 3:9 "And Yahweh God called to the human and said, ' Where are you (איכה)?'"
Gen. 16:10-11 "And the angel of Yahweh said to her [Hagar]: ' I will great multiply (הרבה ארבה) your seed ... You are pregnant (הרה), will give birth (ילד) to a son.'"	Gen. 3:16 "To the woman he said, ' I will greatly multiply (הרבה ארבה) your grief and pregnancy (הרינג), and in grief you will give birth (ילד).'"
<i>Links Between Genesis 2-3 and 16. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).</i>	

Analogies with Genesis 3 are dynamic in this story.

- Sarai and Eve: She doesn't trust the divine promise, so she comes up with an alternative plan to secure seed (זרע) for herself.
- Hagar and the tree of knowing good and bad: Hagar, through no fault of her own, was given to this family by Pharaoh, and now finds herself the object of desire for both Sarai (as a surrogate womb) and Avram (for sexual pleasure). Hagar's existence presents Avram and Sarai with a test of faith: Will they trust God to provide a child from their bodies or will they come up with their own plan to secure blessing and seed on their own?
- Avram and Adam: A passive, complicit figure who gets to benefit from the difficult situation of both women in this story.

Hyperlinks to Genesis 4

Genesis 16:1-16	Genesis 4
Gen. 16:3 “from the end of ten years (מקץ ... שנים) of Avram dwelling in the land” Gen. 16:4 “and he went into Hagar and she became pregnant”	Gen. 4:1 “And the human knew his wife and she became pregnant” Gen. 4:3 “and at the end of days (מקץ ימים)”
Gen. 16:4 “When [Hagar] saw that she was pregnant, her mistress became cursed in her eyes.”	Gen. 4:4-5 “and Yahweh gazed at Abel and his offering, but at Cain and his offering he did not gaze.”
Gen. 16:5 “May the violence done to me be upon you!” Gen. 16:6 “And Sarai oppressed her.”	Gen. 4:8 “and Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and he murdered him.”
Gen. 16:6-7 “and she fled from before her face, and a messenger of Yahweh found her”	Gen. 4:14 “you have banished me today ... and from before your face I will be hidden, and anyone who finds me will murder me!” Gen. 4:16 “and Cain went out from before the face of Yahweh”
Gen. 16:8 “From where (אי) are you coming, and to where do you go?”	Gen. 4:9 “Where (אי) is Abel your brother?”
Gen. 16:11 “You are pregnant and will give birth to a son and you will call his name Yishmael because Yahweh heard of your oppression.”	Gen. 4:10 “The sound of your brother’s blood is crying out to me.”
Gen. 16:12 “He will be a wild-donkey of a man, his hand against all ... and he will dwell against the face of his brothers”	Gen. 4:16 And Cain [the murderer of his brother] “went out ... and he dwelt in the land of wandering, east of Eden.”
<i>Links Between Genesis 4 and 16. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).</i>	

While Avram and Sarai’s abuse of Hagar is portrayed on analogy to the folly of Adam and Eve in [Genesis 3](#), this story also portrays the division of Sarai and Hagar (rival wives) on analogy with the division of Cain and Abel (rival brothers). Notice how both sets of hyperlinks are overlaid and overlapping in the exact same story.

The story of the sibling rivalry in [Genesis 4](#) is here developed into a story of rival wives.

Hyperlinks to Genesis 6

Genesis 16	Genesis 6
Gen. 16:3-4 Of the covenant partners of Elohim, Sarai schemes to produce seed, so she “takes” (לקח) a wife (אשה) of her choosing for Avram.	Gen. 6:2 The sons of Elohim “see” (ראה) the daughters of humanity and “take” (לקח) for themselves whatever wives (אשה) they choose.
Gen. 16:4, 8-9 Sarai is called the “mistress” (גבירה, <i>gevirah</i>), feminine form of <i>gibbor</i> (גבור).	Gen. 6:4 "The Nephilim were in the land in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of Elohim went into the daughters of humanity, and they bore children for them; these are the mighty warriors (גבור, <i>gibbor</i>) who are from ancient time, men of the name."
Gen. 16:5 “May the violence (חמס) done to me be upon you!” Gen. 16:6 And she [= Sarai] oppressed her [= Hagar]	Gen. 6:11 “Now the land was ruined before God, and the land was filled with violence (חמס).”
Gen. 16:11 “Yahweh has heard your oppression.”	Gen. 6:13 “An end of all flesh has come up before me, because the land is filled with violence (חמס).”
Gen. 16:7, 14 Yahweh meets Hagar by a life-giving spring in the wilderness, called the “Well of the Life (חי) of My Seeing.”	Gen. 6:14, 19-20 God reveals the coming flood to Noah, and instructs him to build the ark, so he can keep alive (חיה) all flesh that comes to him.
<i>Links Between Genesis 6 and 16. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).</i>	

Reflection Question

What words and themes link [Genesis 16:1-6](#) to [Genesis 3](#), [4](#), and [6](#)?

Session 15: The Covenant of Circumcision

Key Takeaways

- Hagar plays out an an inverted prelude to the exodus. As an Egyptian slave fleeing oppression at the hands of Avram and Sarai, she meets God's mercy and blessing in the wilderness.
- Both Hagar and Avram face a de-creation and re-creation moment in this narrative—Hagar in wilderness and blessing, and Avram in circumcision and a new name.
- The covenant of circumcision reflects the language of God's covenant with Noah in Genesis 9. It is a sign both of God's judgment and his grace.

Yahweh Hears the Cry

The story of Yahweh hearing the cry of the oppressed and intervening to deliver and judge violent evil is an important template at work in Genesis 16. The hyperlinks to Genesis 4 and 6 portray Hagar among the righteous sufferers whose outcry reaches up to God.

At the spring (עין), Yahweh hears of the oppression (עני) of Hagar, and sends his messenger to deliver the righteous ([Gen. 16:7, 11](#)).

Genesis 4:10 Instructor's Translation

... What have you done? The voice of the shed-blood of your brother is crying out (צעק) to me from the ground.

Genesis 6:13 Instructor's Translation

An end of all flesh has come (קץ ... בא) up before me ...

Genesis 18:20-21 Instructor's Translation

The outcry (זעקה) against Sodom and Gomorrah is great ... the outcry (צעקה) has come up (באה) before me.

And in [Genesis 19:1](#), Yahweh sends his messengers to deliver the righteous.

This theme of the outcry of the oppressed rising up to God is at work in this story as well. Avraham and Sarai are portrayed as “doing violence” and “oppression” to their Egyptian slave. In each case of this design pattern, Yahweh enacts some kind of judgment against human evil.

Yahweh Hears the Cry

This story is remarkable because it follows the first mention of the future Egyptian enslavement of Israel in Genesis. The wordplay linkages are significant.

Genesis 15:13-14 Instructor's Translation

¹³ Know for certain that your seed will be **immigrants** (Heb. *ger* / גֵּר) in a land that is not theirs, and they will be enslaved to them, and they will **oppress** (Heb. *'anah* / עָנָה) them four hundred years. ¹⁴ But also that I myself will judge the nation whom to which they are slaves, and afterward they will come out with many possessions.

Genesis 16:1, 6 Instructor's Translation

¹ Now, Sarai ... had a slave-girl ... named **Hagar** (Heb. *ha-gar* / הַגֵּר = "The Immigrant")

⁶ And Sarai **oppressed** (Heb. *'anah* / עָנָה) her, and she fled.

Exodus 1:11 Instructor's Translation

And [the Egyptians] set over [the Israelites] captains of slave-labor, in order to **oppress** (עָנָה) them.

Long before the Egyptians deceived the Israelites and oppressed them, Avraham deceived Pharaoh and Sarai oppressed an Egyptian. The fact that this story precedes the exodus story means that the Egyptian slavery of Avraham's descendants becomes a tragically ironic reversal: Egypt does to Israel what Israel first did to Egypt.

There is some connection here to the laws about the treatment of immigrants in the covenant code, and the relationship to the Cain story (see [Exod. 22:21-23](#)).

Exodus 22:21-23 Instructor's Translation

²¹ You shall not wrong an immigrant (גֵּר) or oppress him, for you were immigrants in the land of Egypt. ²² You shall not oppress (עָנָה) any widow or orphan. ²³ If you intensely oppress (עָנָה תַעֲנֶה) him, and if he does cry out (צָעַק) to me, I will surely hear his outcry (צָעָקָה); ²⁴ and my anger will be hot (חַרָּה אֲפִי), and I will kill you (הָרַג) with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.

Here are more links to the divided brothers pattern.

- [Genesis 16:12](#) "He will be a donkey of a man (פֶּרָא אָדָם)" which recalls the "divided" (פֶּרֶד) motif of Noah's sons from [Genesis 10:5, 32](#).
- [Genesis 16:12b](#) "He will dwell against the face of all his brothers" is recalled in [Genesis 25:18](#), when Yishmael (Ishmael) settles in the east.

There is an important foundation being laid here for the "righteous non-elect" of the covenant family who dwells in the east. Just as many of the non-elect peoples in [Genesis 10](#) will later turn up as righteous gentiles or wicked gentiles, the same is true here with Yishmael. He and Hagar are the recipients of divine blessing ([Gen. 16:10](#) inverts [Gen. 3:16](#) and restates [Gen. 15:5](#), but now applied to Yishmael!). And while future conflict between Yishmael's descendants and Avraham's other future sons is anticipated, the oracle isn't entirely negative. Yishmael is included in the blessing of Avraham nonetheless.

Genesis 15-16 Replays Genesis 2-11 and 12-14

Genesis 2 • God's blessing of fruitful seed • Garden abundance • Sacred space of God's presence by the tree of life on Mt. Eden • Deep sleep and the provision of the delivering-help (עֲזָרָה)	Genesis 3 • Foolish failure at the tree of testing that is "good of sight" • She saw ... and took and gave • Deception and lack of trust in God's word • Exile from Eden	Genesis 4-6 • Brothers with abundance • Jealousy and conflict • Brothers "separate" through violence • Non-chosen brother settles in the east, where violence is simmering, leading to a flood of judgment	Violence, Flood, Remnant, Covenant (Gen. 6-9a)
Genesis 9:18-20 • Human blessing and abundance in a garden	Genesis 9:21-29 • Human folly in the garden • Sexual abuse in the tent • Family division and curse	Genesis 10:1-32 • Family, brothers divide and separate • Building of Babylon in east • Rebellion is simmering	Rebellion, Scattering, Remnant, Promise (Gen. 11)
Genesis 12:1-9 • God's blessing of abundance and protection • Promise of fruitful seed • God's presence at tree and mountains	Genesis 12:10-20 • Foolish failure with Sarai in Egypt who is "beautiful of sight" • Deception and lack of trust in God's word • Exile from false-Eden (i.e., Egypt) results in getting a slave	Genesis 13 • Brother with abundance • Jealousy and conflict • Brothers separate through non-violence! • Non-chosen brother settles in the east, where violence is simmering, leading up to a flood of judgment	Violence, Flood, Remnant, Covenant (Gen. 14)
Genesis 15:1-21 • God's blessing and promise of seed and land • Deep sleep and the provision of the seed (זָרַע)	Genesis 16:1-6 • Foolish failure with Hagar the Egyptian slave • Sarai takes and gives to her husband • And she saw ... • "Do what's good in your eyes"	Genesis 16:7-16 • Yahweh meets non-chosen rival wife in the wilderness • Promise of a son whose hand will be against all his brothers	Violence, Flood, Remnant, Covenant (Gen. 17)
<i>Genesis 15-16 As a Replay.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).			

The story has portrayed both Avram and Sarai as humans who repeat their folly. Now, as the sequence of Genesis 15-16 replays the key elements of Genesis 12-13, both Avram and Sarai replay the folly of humanity

from Genesis 1-11. And so, for the second time, we expect there to be some kind of divine judgment that confronts the sin of foolish, violent humans and stems the tide of their destructive choices. This is precisely the theme of Genesis 17.

Covenant #2 With Avraham: Sign of Circumcision

This is the longest and most complicated speech so far in the book of Genesis. Before diving into its details, it's helpful to get an overview of its main content and literary organization.

Macro Design of Genesis 17

At its most basic, the chapter is designed in a simple three-step progression.

Genesis 17:1-16

A - God's Speech to Avraham: Covenant, **Promise of Seed**, Summons to **Circumcise Every Male**

Genesis 17:17-22

B - God and Avraham Dialogue about the **Promise of Seed**

Genesis 17:23-27

A' - Avraham **Circumcises Every Male** in His House

Genesis 17:1-27 (3-Step). Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Genesis 17:1-3

Speech 1, Initial Statement: Yahweh Will Make a Covenant With Avram

- a - When Avram was a son of ninety-nine years,
- b - and Yahweh became visible to Avram, and said to him
- c - "I will give **my covenant** between me and between you
- d - **I will multiply you very very much** "
- e - **And Avram fell upon his face**

Genesis 17:4-16

17:4-8

A - Speech 2, The Covenant: New Name Blessing, Royal Seed, Land

- "And Elohim spoke to him saying ..."

As for me [Yahweh] ...

My covenant is with you

No longer will your name be called Avram, but "Avraham" will be your name

I will make you a multitude of nations
I will make you fruitful, very very much
and kings will come from you

17:9-14

B - Speech 3, Sign of the Covenant: Circumcision, Cut Off Foreskin

- "And Elohim said to Avraham ..."

As for you [Avraham] ...

This is my covenant that you will keep: Circumcise every male ...

Any son of eight days will be circumcised, every male of your generations ...

The foreskin of a male that is not circumcised ... he will cut off from his people ...

17:15-16

A' - Speech 4, The Promise: New Name Blessing, Son, Royal Seed

- "And Elohim said to Avraham ..."

As for Sarai ...

Her name will not be called Sarai, but "Sarah" is her name

And I will bless her

and she will become nations

kings of peoples will be from her

Genesis 17:17-22

Yahweh's Appeal to Israel: Turn to Me and Live!

e - And Avram fell upon his face

d - "Will there be a birth for a son of one-hundred years?!"

c - "I will establish my covenant with Yitskhaq ..."

b - "I will multiply [Yishmael] very very much"

a - And he finished speaking to him, and Elohim went up from Avraham

Genesis 17:23-27

Narrative: Fulfillment of the Circumcision Command

- And Avraham took Yishmael ... everyone born of his house, every male ...
and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskin just as God said.

Genesis 17:1-27 (Detailed). Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

This literary organization highlights a number of key themes in the chapter.

The narrative of a divine command (Gen. 17:1-22) followed by a narrative of Avraham fulfilling the divine command exactly (Gen. 17:23-27) highlights Avraham's obedience and trust in Yahweh. Even though it must have been a painful experience, Avraham circumcised himself and every male in his household out of obedient trust in God's word.

The five speeches are designed in a symmetrical order, and each one has a distinct main point and rhetorical thrust.

Genesis 17:1-3

Speech 1

- Avram is summoned to be faithful to Yahweh
- Initial statement: I will set up a covenant between you and me and bless you

A- Genesis 17:4-8

Speech 2

- Avram re-created into Avraham: father of many nations, including kings
- Yahweh will be the *Elohim* of Avraham and his **seed** and they will inherit **land**

B- Genesis 17:9-14

Speech 3

- Avraham's covenant obligation: circumcision as covenant sign

A'- Genesis 17:15-16

Speech 4

- Sarai is re-created into Sarah: blessing, son, kings will come from her

Genesis 17:17-22

Dialogue + Speech 5

- Avraham proposes Yishmael
- God chooses Yitskhaq through Sarah as the chosen son

Genesis 17:1-22. Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 17:1-27

Genesis 17:1-3

¹ And Avram was ninety nine years old,
and Yahweh became seen to Avram,
and he said to him,
 "I am El-Shaddai.
 Walk before my face,
 and be blameless;
² then I will give a **covenant** **between me and between you**,
 and **I will multiply you very, very much**."
³ And Avram fell down upon his face.

Genesis 17:4-16

And Elohim spoke to him, saying:
⁴ " **As for me**, look, **my covenant** **is with you**,
and you will become a father of a multitude of nations,
⁵ **and no longer will your name be called, 'Avram,'**
but your name will be 'Avraham,'
because I will give you to be a multitude of nations,
⁶ and **I will make you fruitful, very very much**,
and I will give you to become nations,
and **kings will come from you**,
⁷ and I will **establish my covenant**
between me and between you,
and between your seed after you for their generations,
as **an eternal covenant**,
to be Elohim for you,
and for your seed after you
⁸ and I will give to you and to **your seed after you**,
the land of your sojourning,
all **the land** of Canaan,
for **an eternal possession**,
and I will be Elohim for them."

⁹ And Elohim said to Avraham,
 "**And as for you**, **you will keep** **my covenant**,
 you and **your seed after you** for their generations.
¹⁰ This is **my covenant** that **y'all will keep**,
 between me and between y'all,
 and between your seed after you:
 circumcise for yourselves **every male**.
¹¹ And y'all will **circumcise** **the flesh of your foreskin**,
 and that will be as a symbol of **the covenant**,

B

between me and between y'all.

- 12 When there's a son of eight days,
he will be **circumcised** for you, **every male** for your generations;
one born of the house or purchased with silver,
from any son of a foreigner who is not from your **seed**;
- 13 he will certainly be **circumcised**,
that one born of the house or purchased with silver;
and **my covenant** will be **in your flesh**,
for **an eternal covenant**.
- 14 And a foreskinned male that is not **circumcised** in **the flesh of his foreskin**,
that person will be cut off from his people,
he has violated **my covenant**.

A'

- 15 And Elohim said to Avraham,
" **As for Sarai** your wife,
you will not call her name 'Sarai';
because her name is 'Sarah.' [= "Queen"]
- 16 And I will **bless** her,
and also, I will give to you from her a son,
and I will **bless** her,
and she will become nations,
kings of people groups will be from her."

Genesis 17:17-22

- 17 And Avraham fell on his face,
and **he laughed (= yitskhaq)** and said in his heart,
"Will there **be a birth** for a son of a hundred years?!"
Or Sarah, a daughter of ninety years, she will **give birth?!"**
- 18 And Avraham said to Elohim,
"If only **Yishmael** could live before your face!"

A

- 19 And Elohim said,
"Nonetheless, Sarah your wife will **birth** for you a son,
and you will call his name, '**Yitskhaq**' [= "Laughter"],
and **I will establish my covenant** with him,
for **an eternal covenant** for his **seed** after him.

- 20 And as for **Yishmael**, I have **heard** you.
look, I have **blessed** him,
and I will make him **fruitful**,

R

and I will make him **multiply**, very very much.
Twelve princes he will **cause to be born**,
and I will give him to be a **great nation**.

A' 21 But **I will establish my covenant** with **Yitskhaq**,
whom Sarah will **birth** for you at this appointed time in the year after."

22 And he finished speaking to him,
and Elohim went up from Avraham.

Genesis 17:23-27

23 And Avraham took **Yishmael** his son,
and all those born of his house,
and all those purchased with silver,
every male among the men of Avraham's house,
and he **circumcised** the flesh of their foreskin,
on that very day,
just as Elohim had spoken to him.

a 24 And Avraham was **a son of ninety nine years,**
b when he was **circumcised** in **the flesh of his foreskin,**
a' 25 and Yishmael his son was **a son of thirteen years,**
b' when he was **circumcised** in **the flesh of his foreskin.**

26 **On that very day,**
Avraham was **circumcised**, and **Yishmael** his son,
27 **and all the men of his house,**
those born of the house
and those purchased with silver from a foreigner,
they were **circumcised** with him.

Genesis 17:1-27. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

The De-creation and Re-creation of Avram and Sarai

This complex narrative is designed to culminate the themes at work so far in all of Genesis 1-17, and especially the earlier patterns of creation and Eden and of flood and covenant.

Numerous details in this chapter only make sense based on our ability to track the hyperlinks and analogies with these earlier narratives.

Avraham and Noah, Circumcision and Flood

Avraham	Noah
Gen. 17:1 “ Walk (התהלך) before me and be blameless (תמים)”	Gen. 6:9b “Noah was a righteous man, blameless (תמים) in his generations, he walked (התהלך) with God.”
Gen. 17:4-5 “You will become the father of a multitude of nations (אב ... גוים)”	Gen. 6:10 “Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth” who become the patriarchs of the 70 nations in Genesis 10.
Gen. 17:7 “And I will establish my covenant (והקמתי את בריתי between you and between you and between your seed after you (זרעך אחריך) for generations, as an eternal covenant.”	Gen. 6:18 “And I will establish my covenant (והקמתי את בריתי with you” Gen. 9:9 “And I will establish my covenant (מקים את בריתי with you and with your seed after you (את זרעכם אחריכם)”
Gen. 17:11 “And you will circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and it will be for a sign of the covenant between me and between you.” Gen. 17:13 “And my covenant will be in your flesh (בבשרכם) for an eternal covenant ” (ברית עולם)	Gen. 9:12 “This will be a sign of the covenant between me and between you” Gen. 9:17 “This is the sign of the covenant which I am establishing between me and between all flesh (בשר)”
Gen. 17:26 “on that very day (בעצם היום הזה), just as God spoke to him”	Gen. 7:13 “On that very day (בעצם היום הזה) Noah went ... into the ark.” + Gen. 7:16 “just as God commanded him”
Avraham and Noah, Circumcision and Flood. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).	

This linking of Noah and Avraham creates a clear set of similarities and contrasts between the two characters and God’s covenant with them.

While Noah simply was “blameless” when God initiated the conversation, Avram, on the other hand, has just participated in a great sin against Hagar (on analogy with Gen. 3 and 6), resulting in the oppression of the immigrant, so he now has to be commanded: “be blameless.”

The “sign” of the covenant for Noah and Avraham is crucial for understanding the nature and purpose of circumcision. In Genesis 9:12-17, the “sign” of the covenant is the rainbow which shines when the rain clouds come. Rain was the instrument of divine judgment, and so the rainbow is a reminder of humanity’s evil that brought the flood. But rain was also the divine response of judgment combined with covenant love that

spared a remnant. In a similar way, in [Genesis 17:11, 13](#), the “sign” of the covenant marks the instrument of human failure, that is, Avraham’s genitals (this seems hinted at in the design pattern of [Gen. 9:17](#) “covenant with flesh”). But the judgment is on the part of Avraham’s body that will become fruitful for the nation.

Rainbow	Circumcision
A symbol of God's judgment and mercy that brought a remnant safely through death to new life before God.	A symbol of God’s judgment on Avraham’s penis, which he used to abuse Hagar. But also a symbol of mercy, for his future seed will come from his “cut off” genitals that belong to God alone.
Gen. 9:9 God is going to “establish my covenant with you and your seed after you” (הקים + ברית + זרע)	Gen. 17:7 God is going to “establish my covenant with you and your seed after you” (הקים + ברית + זרע)
Gen. 9:12 The bow in the skies is the “sign of the covenant” (אות הברית)	Gen. 17:11 Circumcision is the “sign of the covenant” (אות ברית)
Gen. 9:10-12 The flood (המבול) “cut off all flesh” (בשר + כרת), and so God’s covenant is with Noah and “all living beings” (כל נפש), that they will not be “cut off by the flood” (המבול + כרת).	Gen. 17:10-14 Circumcision (המול) involves cutting off “flesh” (בשר) from “every male” (כל זכר), and every “living-person” (נפש) who is not circumcised will be “cut off from” (מן ... כרת) his people.
<i>Rainbow and Circumcision. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).</i>	

Just as the flood ([המבול](#)) was a judgment of cutting off ([יכרת](#)) all flesh ([בשר](#)) in [Genesis 9:11](#), so now circumcision ([המול](#)) is a "local flood" of judgment that cuts off ([נכרתה](#)) the flesh ([בשר](#)) of the foreskin of Avraham’s family in [Gen. 17:10-14](#). It is as if Avraham’s sin “cuts off” all hope except for an Yitskhaq-remnant (Isaac-remnant) that God will miraculously bring into the world through Sarah’s womb // the Noah-remnant that God miraculously saves through the ark. Both events happen “on the very day” ([בעצם היום הזה](#)) in [Gen. 7:13](#) and [Gen. 17:24, 26](#)) of the command.

⁸ **And Elohim said to Noah** and to his sons **with him** , saying,

⁹ “And I myself, behold, **I set up my covenant with y’all,**
and with your seed after you;

¹⁰ and **with every living creature** that is **with you** ,
the birds, the beasts, and every **living creature** of the land **with you** ;
from everything that comes out of the ark,
even every **living creature** of the land.

¹¹ And **I set up my covenant with y’all;**
and never again will **all flesh** **be cut off by the waters of the flood** ,

and never again will there be a flood to ruin the land.”

12 And Elohim said,

“This is **the sign of the covenant** which I am giving
between me and between you
and between every living creature that is **with you**, for everlasting generations;

¹³ I give **my bow in the cloud**,
and it will be for **a sign of a covenant**
between me and between the land;

¹⁴ and it will come about when **I cloud a cloud** over the land,
that **it will be seen**, **the bow in the cloud**,

¹⁵ and **I will remember my covenant**,
which is **between me and between you**
and between every living creature of all flesh;
and never again will the waters become a flood to ruin all flesh.

¹⁶ And **the bow is in the cloud**,
then **I will see it**,
to remember **the everlasting covenant**
between Elohim and between every living creature,
with all flesh that is on the land.”

17 And Elohim said to Noah,

“This is **the sign of the covenant which I have set up**
between me and all flesh that is on the land.”

Genesis 9:8-17. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Both covenants with Avraham and Noah have a universal scope. Noah’s sons produce all the nations of Genesis 10, and Avraham will become the father of many nations. This aligns well with the fact that Yishmael is the first to be circumcised in Genesis 17, and that circumcision is associated with the inclusion of the nations into God’s covenant with Avraham.

The blessed sons: Just as two of Noah’s three sons found blessing and fruitfulness after the flood (Japheth and Shem), so also Avraham’s two sons Yishmael and Yitskhaq (Isaac) will be blessed and become great nations. In both cases, only the younger of the two will become the line of the covenant (Shem and Yitskhaq), while the older (Japheth and Yishmael) will be blessed, but not as the carrier of covenant blessing.

The role of Sarah in this story is like the ark (תבה). She is the vehicle of the future seed, but her distorted efforts to build her own Eden-blessing (remember “build” בנה in [Gen. 16:2](#)) have also replayed the fall and introduced division into Avraham’s family. Her role in this way also recalls the ark’s role as an analogy to the woman in Genesis 2 ([Gen. 2:22](#) בנה). Note how Sarah here ([Gen. 17:17](#)) is also called “a daughter of 90 years” which is an anagram of the word “ark” ([Gen 6:14](#) תבה // הבת [Gen. 17:17](#))

Avraham and Sarah, Adam and Eve

The analogies to the Eden story are also important. God’s covenant with Noah was a kind of re-creation of his identity, and God also remakes Avraham and Sarah’s identity in a way similar to Adam and Eve.

God's blessing on Avraham and Sarah Gen. 17:2 “I will multiply (רבה) you very very much” Gen. 17:6 “I will make you fruitful (פרה) very very much” Gen. 17:16 “I will bless [Sarah]”	God's blessing on humanity, male and female Gen. 1:28 And Elohim blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful (פרה) and multiply (רבה), fill the land and subdue it ...”
God re-names Avram and Sarai Gen. 17:5 “No longer will your name be called, ‘Avram,’ but your name will be ‘Avraham,’ because I will make you a father of a multitude of nations.” Gen. 17:15 “Sarai your wife, you will not call her name ‘Sarai,’ because her name is ‘Sarah.’”	Humanity is named, then renamed Gen. 1:26 “Let us make ‘human’ (אדם) in our image ... let them rule ...” Gen. 2:23 “She shall be called Woman (אשה), because she was taken out of man (איש).” Gen. 3:20 Now the man called his wife’s name “Khavvah”(חווה) because she was the mother of all living (חי).
<i>Avraham and Sarah, Adam and Eve. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).</i>	

In Adam and Eve’s story, she is named before their folly, and her name symbolizes the “two-in-one” union of man/woman. After the folly, she is named based on her reproductive function in their relationship, “Mother of All Living.”

In Avraham and Sarah’s story, both are renamed after their shared folly with Hagar. God will maintain his promise to them, but only after “cutting of flesh” from Avraham’s genitals and marking them as belonging to God. The new names signify the new, God-given identity that Avraham and Sarah now have. Their lives and reproductive abilities belong wholly to God, and from them God will create a nation of seed and kings. Their new names reflect this: Avraham means Father of a Multitude; Sarah means Queen (i.e., mother of kings).

Father and Mother of Many Nations: Yishmael and Yitskhaq

This chapter carries forward the pattern of Yahweh selecting one chosen lineage from among a larger set of siblings. Now that Avraham and Sarah have abused Hagar and produced Yishmael, they will become the parents of a family made up of many nations, starting first with Yishmael.

This is one step in a larger design pattern that starts back with Cain and Abel.

Chosen for Covenant	Not Chosen	Resulting People Group
Abel + Seth	Cain	Kenites
Shem	Japheth, Ham	The island nations, Canaanites
Avraham	Nakhor, Lot	Moabites, Ammonites
Yitskhaq	Yishmael, sons of Qeturah	Ishmaelites, Midianites, eastern tribes
Yaaqov	Esau	Edomites
Judah	11 brothers	Northern tribes
David	Saul	Benjaminite
Family of Judah	Northern tribes	Samaritans
<i>Father and Mother of Many Nations. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).</i>		

Notice, however, that even though Yishmael is not chosen as the lineage of the covenant and royal seed, God affirms that he will bless him and his family in precisely the language of the Eden blessing, but also in anticipation of the later 12 sons of Yaakov (Jacob).

Genesis 17:20 Instructor’s Translation

Look, I am going to bless [Yishmael], and I will make him fruitful, very very much. He will become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation.

Reflection Question

How is circumcision both an act of God’s judgment and and act of grace?



Module 4: The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah

SESSIONS 16-19

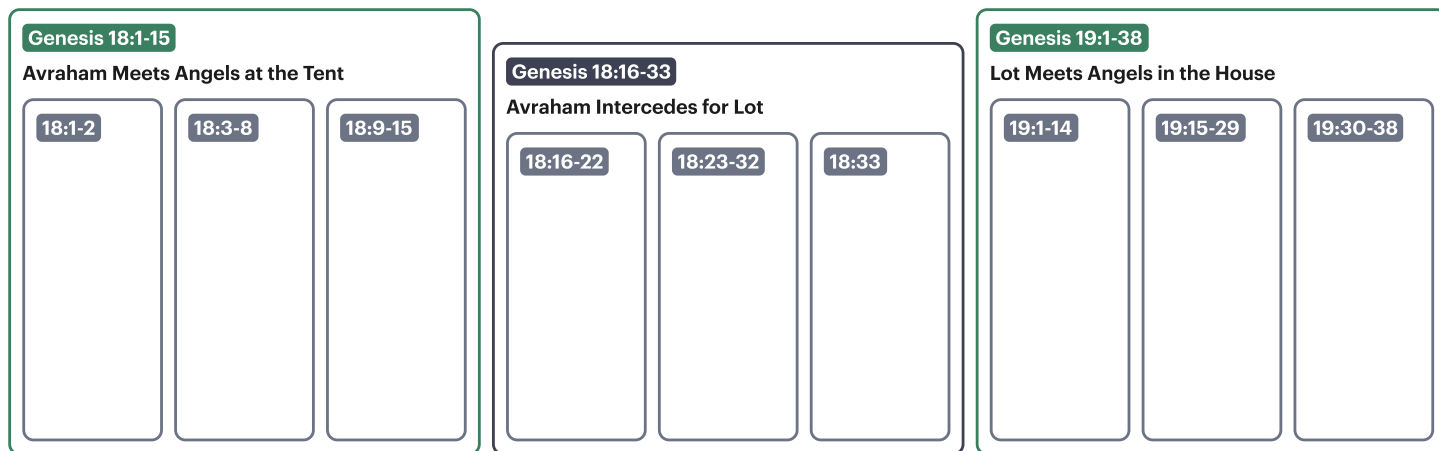
In the culmination of the Abraham and Lot drama, Abraham intercedes for Lot in the face of looming judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. Study these crucial chapters.

Session 16: Abraham, Sarah, and Yahweh at the Tent

Key Takeaways

- Avraham's meal with God and the two men puts a redemptive twist on the seeing, taking, and eating of Genesis 3.
- Sarah's womb is compared to Eden, which expands a growing network of related images—including the ark, the garden, and the tent—and points to God making new life possible where it seems impossible.

Macro Design of Genesis 18-19



Genesis 18:1-19:38. Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

The drama between Avraham and Lot began in [Genesis 11:27-12:5](#), when Avraham disregarded God's command to leave his family and brought Lot with him. His choice resulted in the conflict between Avraham and Lot's shepherds ([Gen. 13:5-11](#)), and in the capture of Lot by the Babylonian alliance ([Gen. 14:1-24](#)). That tension culminates in this series of stories.

The symmetrical design invites the reader to make a number of comparisons and contrasts.

- Avraham and Lot's matching receptions of the divine messengers ([Gen. 18:1-8](#) and [Gen. 19:1-14](#)).
- The pregnancy of Sarah and Avraham giving birth to the chosen seed // The pregnancy of Lot's daughters giving birth to the non-chosen seed
- Sarah's unbelief at God's promise // Lot's in-laws' unbelief at his warning

In addition to this large scale bundling of the literary units in [Genesis 18-19](#), the entire sequence has been composed as a large scale symmetry. This design invites the reader to compare and contrast the various parts.

These four larger sections consist of 13 scenes that have been arranged as a large symmetrical chiasm.

Genesis 18:1-15

A - The Future of Abraham's Seed

- **Gen. 18:1** "And he was dwelling (ישב) at the entrance of the tent"
- **Gen. 18:11** "Abraham and Sarah were old (זקן) ... and the way according to women had ceased for Sarah"
- Setting: From under a tree to inside the tent

Genesis 18:16

Part B

- "And the men arose and looked over on the face of Sodom (וישקפו על פני סדם), and Abraham went with them ..."
- Setting: Overlooking Sodom

Genesis 18:17-21

C - Divine Reflections on Abraham's Role in the Fate of Sodom

- "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do ...?"
- Setting: Not marked

Genesis 18:22-33

D - Abraham Intercedes on Behalf of the Righteous in Sodom and Gomorrah

- **Gen. 18:30, 32** "No please, Lord!" (אל נא) / **Gen. 18:31** "Behold, please!" (הנה נא)
- **Gen. 18:24** "Will you sweep away (ספה), and not forgive (lit. "lift up" נשא)?"
- **Gen. 18:26** "I will forgive" (נשא)
- Setting: Overlooking Sodom

Genesis 19:1-3

E - The Angels (המלאכים) Arrive in Sodom

- **Gen. 19:1** Setting: In the gate of Sodom in the evening

Genesis 19:4-11

F - Lot is Rejected by the Men of Sodom as They Assault the Angels

- **Gen. 19:6-7, 9** "And Lot went out (ויצא) to them ... and spoke (ויאמר) ... and they said, 'Has this immigrant come to assert his judgment?!'"
- Setting: Outside Lot's house

Genesis 19:12-13

G - The Men Announce the Destruction of Sodom

- **Gen. 19:13** “We are about to destroy (שחת) this place for its outcry is great”
- Setting: Inside Lot’s house

Genesis 19:14

F' - Lot Is Rejected by His In-Laws From Sodom

- **Gen. 19:14** “And Lot went out (ויצא) and spoke (וידבר) to his in-laws ... but in their eyes he was playing”
- Setting: Outside Lot’s house

Genesis 19:15-16

E' - The Angels (המלאכים) Force Lot To Leave Sodom

- **Gen 19:16** Setting: Through the gate of Sodom in the morning light

Genesis 19:17-22

D' - Lot Selfishly Pleads That Zoar Be Spared

- **Gen. 19:18** “No please, Lord!” (אל נא) / **Gen. 19:19, 20** “Behold please” (הנה נא)
- **Gen. 19:17** “Escape, lest you be swept away (ספה)” + **Gen. 19:21** “I have lifted up (נשא) your face”
- Setting: Outside the gates of Sodom

Genesis 19:23-26

C' - Divine Judgment on Sodom

- “Yahweh overthrew these cities and all the valley ...”
- Setting: Not marked

Genesis 19:27-29

Part B'

- “And Abraham woke early to the place where he had stood ... and he looked over on the face of Sodom (וישקף על פני סדם) ... and he saw the pillar of smoke.”
- Setting: Overlooking Sodom

Genesis 19:30-38

A' - The Future of Lot’s seed

- **Gen. 19:30** “And he dwelt (ישב) in a cave”
- **Gen. 19:31** “Our father is old (זקן), and there’s no man to come to us like the way of the land”

- Setting: From Zoar to inside a cave

Genesis 18:1-19:38 (Wenham). Genesis 18:1-19:38 (Wenham). Adapted from Wenham, Gordon (2015). [Genesis 16-50, Volume 2 \(Word Biblical Commentary\)](#). Zondervan Academic.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 18:1-15

A ¹ And Yahweh became **seen (ראה)** to him among **the oaks of Mamre**,
and he was dwelling at **the door of the tent** at the heat of the day,
a ² and he lifted his eyes and he **saw (ראה)**,
B b and look, **three men standing by him**,
a' and **he saw (ראה)**
A and **he ran** from **the door of the tent** to meet them,
and he bowed to the ground.

³ And he said,
"My master, please, if I have found favor in your eyes,
a please don't **pass on (עבר)** from **your servant**.
b ⁴ Let him please **take a little water**,
c **so you can wash your feet**,
d and **recline under the tree**;
b' ⁵ that I may **take a bit of bread**,
c' **so you can sustain your hearts**.
a' Then you can **pass on (עבר)**,
for this reason you have **passed by (עבר)** your servant!"

And they said,
"So do as you have spoken."

⁶ And Avraham **hurried** **into the tent** to Sarah,
and he said,
"**Hurry!** Three measures of wheat flour!
Knead it and make cakes!"
⁷ Then Avraham **ran** to the cattle,
and he took **a calf**, good and tender,
and he gave it to the young man,
and **he hurried** **to make it**.
⁸ **And he took** curds and milk and **the calf he made**,
and he gave it before them.
Now, **he was standing by them under the tree**,

and they ate.

⁹ And they said to him,
“Where is **Sarah**, your wife?”

And he said,

A “Look, **in the tent**!”

¹⁰ And he said,

“**I will surely return to you at the time of life
and look, a son for Sarah your wife!**”

a Now, Sarah was hearing this **at the door of the tent**, and it was behind him.

b' ¹¹ Now, Avraham and Sarah were **old**,
going on in years.

B a' There had stopped for Sarah the way of women,
¹² and Sarah **laughed** within herself, saying,
“After I have become **worn out**,
will I have Eden (= ‘delight’),
and my master, being **old**?”

¹³ And Yahweh said to Avraham,
A “What is this, that Sarah **laughed**, saying,
‘Will I really, actually, **give birth**,
even as I am **old**?!’

B ¹⁴ Is anything too wondrous for Yahweh?

A' **At the appointed time I will return to you, at the time of life,
and for Sarah, there will be a son.”**

A'

¹⁵ And Sarah acted with deceit, saying,
a “I did not **laugh**!”
b because she was afraid.

a' And he said,
“No. You really did **laugh**.”

Genesis 18:1-15. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Avraham, Sarah, and the Eden Tent

After the flood of judgment and the covenant mercy on Avraham in Genesis 17, we expect the story to return to the thematic melody of the garden, and that is precisely what happens. The story of Avraham welcoming the angelic messengers is portrayed as a reversal of Adam’s folly while, in contrast to her husband, Sarah replays Eve’s failure.

Genesis 18:1, 8 Instructor’s Translation

¹ Yahweh became seen to him **at the oaks of Mamre** ... and he was dwelling **at the door** of the **tent** (האהל).
⁸ ... And Avraham was standing by [the angels] **under the tree**.

- The woman and man commit their folly in the presence of a spiritual being, **at the tree** in the center of Eden. (Gen. 3:1-7)
- Cain murders his brother after giving his offering **at the door of Eden**. (Gen. 4:7-9)
- Noah consumes the fruit of his Eden-like garden, and becomes naked **inside his tent**. (Gen. 9:20-21)

Avraham is among the “oaks of Mamre” where he camped in Genesis 13:18, which evokes the “oak of vision/Moreh” from Genesis 12:7. At these oak trees, Avraham had visions of God’s covenant blessing appearing to him.

Note the pairing of “under the tree” (תחת העץ, Gen. 18:4, 8) and “the door of the tent” (פתח האהל, Gen. 18:1, 2, 10). The tree and the door are both Eden images (door in Gen. 4:7-8) replayed in the ark as well. A man and woman meet with God under a tree and at the door of a tent, and they talk about a fruitful womb. This is all Eden imagery!

Avraham’s Generosity, Sarah’s Folly

In Genesis 16, both Avraham and Sarah acted foolishly, harming Hagar and doing what was good in their eyes. In this story, Avraham reverses course and acts as a generous host to the angelic figures. Sarah, on the other hand, replays her own foolish failure from chapter 16, and she also mirrors the failure of Eve in Genesis 3.

Genesis 18	Genesis 2-3
Gen. 18:1 “Yahweh became seen to him at the oaks of Mamre, and he was dwelling at the entrance of the tent (האהל)”	Gen. 2:9 “Out of the ground Yahweh Elohim caused to grow every tree that is desirable to see, and good for eating; the tree of life also in the middle of the garden , and the tree of knowing good and bad.”
Gen. 18:2 “And Avraham saw (וירא) ...”	Gen. 3:6 “And the woman saw (ותרא) ...”
Avraham’s Generosity, Sarai’s Folly. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).	

Genesis 18	Genesis 2-3
Gen. 18:4 “Be refreshed under the tree (תחת העץ) ”	Gen. 3:6 “... that the tree was good ” (טוב העץ)
Gen. 18:7-8 “And [Avraham] took (ויקח) a son of a cow, tender and good (רך וטוב) and he gave (ויתן) to them ... under the tree (תחת העץ), and they ate (ויאכלו)”	Gen. 3:6-7 “And the woman took (ותקח) from the fruit [of the tree of knowing good and bad ((טוב ורע)] and she ate (ותאכל) and she gave (ותתן) to her husband and he ate (ויאכל)”
Gen. 18:9: “Where (איה) is Sarah your wife?” + “She’s in the midst of the tent (באהל)”	Gen. 3:9: “And Yahweh called to the human, ‘Where are you (איכה)?’”
Gen. 18:10-12 “And Sarah was listening (שמע) behind the entrance of the tent ... and she laughed, saying, ‘After I’m worn out, shall I have Eden (עדנה)?’”	Gen. 3:10 “I heard (שמע) your voice in the garden (גן) [of Eden (עדן)].”
Gen. 18:13 “And Yahweh said, ‘Why this (למה זה) did Sarah laugh?’”	Gen. 3:13 “What is this (מה זאת) you have done?”
Gen. 18:15 “But Sarah lied (כחש), saying ‘I did not laugh.’ Because she was afraid (ירא).”	Gen. 3:10 “I heard (שמע) your voice in the garden, and I was afraid (ירא), so I hid.” Gen. 3:1-2: The snake (נחש) lies to the woman.
<i>Avraham’s Generosity, Sarai’s Folly. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).</i>	

Avraham runs out to meet Yahweh, who appears in the form of three humans, and he persuades them to eat with him under the tree. The food under the tree, however, is a reversal of the forbidden food of the tree in Eden. He is generous and shares what he has with the very person who gave it all to him, his God!

Instead of God providing food for the humans, in this story the man and woman provide food for Yahweh and two angels. This explains the allusions to the priestly preparation of offerings in the food-prep scene in [Genesis 18:6-8](#) (see [Lev. 2:1-7](#)) and the emphasis on “the entrance of the tent” where the sacrifices were offered in the priestly ordination ([Exod. 28-29](#)).

Exodus 29:32-33 NIV

³² At the entrance to the tent of meeting, Aaron and his sons are to eat the meat of the ram and the bread that is in the basket. ³³ They are to eat these offerings by which atonement was made for their ordination and consecration. But no one else may eat them, because they are sacred.

Leviticus 2:1-2 NASB*

¹ Now when anyone presents a grain offering as an offering to the LORD, his offering shall be of **fine flour**, and he shall pour **oil** on it and put frankincense on it. ² He shall then bring it to Aaron's sons the priests [**at the entrance of the tent of meeting**, see Lev. 1:3]; and shall take from it his handful of its fine flour and of its oil with all of its frankincense. And the priest shall offer it up in smoke as its memorial portion on the altar, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Instead of the humans taking the forbidden food in Genesis 3, here the humans take of the food that God has already provided and they offer it as a gift to God.

Notice how all of the images of fruitfulness are coordinated here.

- Tent, flock, food, spring, life (עת חיה), and womb
- The actual word "Eden" is used of Sarah's womb in 18:12, which activates the entire Eden complex that covers all these images

Reflection Question

How is Avraham's meal with God and the two men a redemption of the Genesis 3 garden melody?

Session 17: Abraham Intercedes for Lot

Key Takeaways

- When Yahweh enlists a covenant partner, he consistently chooses to limit himself to act in and through his covenant partners.
- Sodom and Gomorrah are described with vocabulary from all the previous stories of violence and injustice, and they become emblematic of these themes throughout the rest of the Bible.
- Avraham assumes that God doesn't share his concern for justice, but he misunderstands God's judgment and underestimates God's mercy.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 18:16-22

- a 16 **And the men arose from there,**
b **and they looked down upon Sodom.**
c **Now, Avraham was going with them, to send them off,**

17 **and Yahweh said,**

"Should I hide from Avraham **what I am about to do**?"

18 For Avraham will certainly become **a nation great** and powerful,
and **all nations** of the land will discover **blessing** through him;

19 Indeed, **I have known** him,

so that he would command his sons and his house after him,

that they should **keep the way of Yahweh,**

by **doing what is right and just**

so that Yahweh will bring upon Avraham what he has spoken about him."

20 **And Yahweh said,**

"**The outcry (זעקה)** against Sodom and Gomorrah, it is huge,
and their failure, it is heavy, very much.

21 I should go down,

so I can see if **the outcry (זעקה)** that has come before me,

is **what they have completely done**,

and if not, then **I will know**."

- a 22 **And the men turned from there,**
b **and they went to Sodom.**

Genesis 18:16-33. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Avraham, the Noah-Like Remnant

God's internal speech in [Genesis 18:17-21](#) is similar to the divine speeches of [Genesis 6:5-7](#) and [Genesis 11:5-7](#), where God deliberates about what he should do given the outbreak of human violence ruining the land.

Notice how in [Genesis 18:22](#), we're told Avraham is standing right next to Yahweh as Yahweh talks to himself. Even though Yahweh is "asking" himself the question, it seems obvious that he wants to include Avraham in the conversation, which is what happens when he speaks up in [Genesis 18:23](#).

Genesis 6:8-9 NASB

⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. ⁹ These are the records of the generations of Noah. Noah was **righteous, blameless** in his generation; Noah **walked with God**.

Genesis 7:1 NASB

Then the LORD said to Noah, "Enter the ark, you and all **your house**, for you alone I have seen to be **righteous before me** in this generation."

Genesis 15:6 NASB

Then he believed in the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as **righteousness**.

Genesis 17:1 NASB

Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; **walk before me**, and be **blameless**."

Genesis 18:19 NASB

I have known him, so that he would command his sons and **his house** after him, that they should keep the way of the LORD, by doing **righteousness** and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what he has spoken about him.

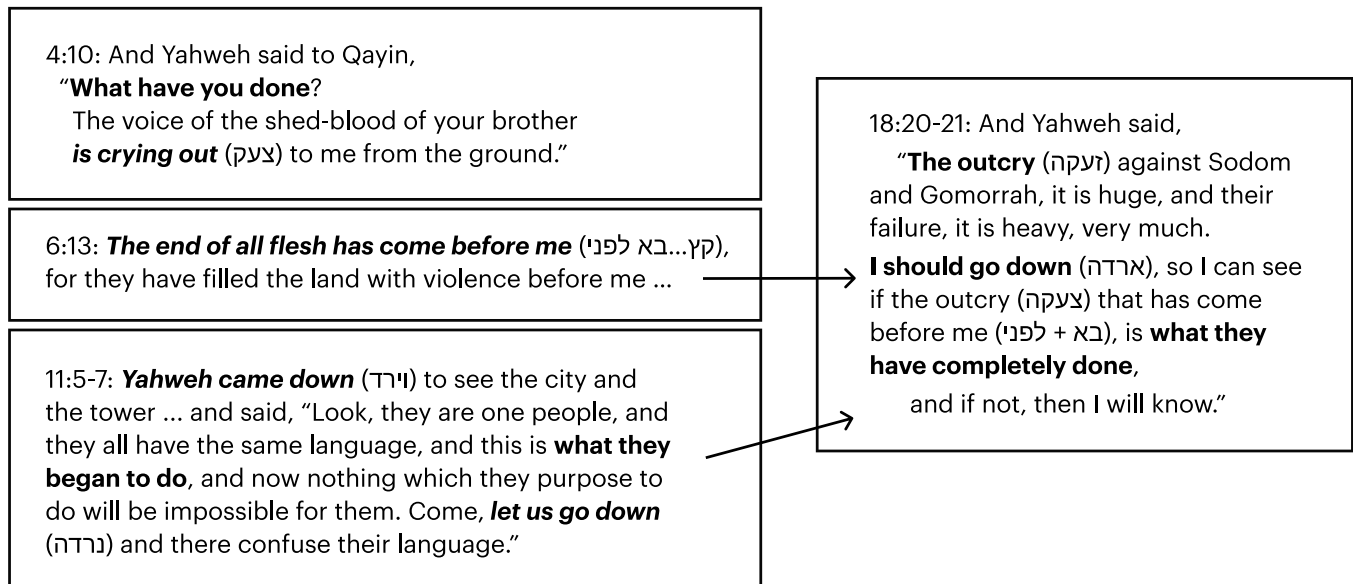
God chose Noah and spared his family because of Noah's righteousness ([Gen. 6:8-9](#); [7:1](#)). Also, it was after Noah's deliverance that he made a going-up offering that atoned for humanity's evil and compelled God to bring about a new creation ([Gen. 8:20-22](#)). So now God includes Avraham, who is also righteous before God ([15:6](#)). However, different from Noah, Avraham must speak up and ask for his family (i.e., Lot and his family) to be spared from the ruin of Sodom.

Sodom, Cain, the Flood, and Babylon

This introduction to the Sodom story begins with a combination of motifs that are gathered from previous stories in the same thematic slot: the moment that human evil begins to increase so much that Yahweh

cannot ignore it.

Yahweh's words, spoken to himself (just like in [Gen. 6:5](#) and [Gen. 11:6-7](#)), use all the key words from the divine speeches about Cain's murder, the violence before the flood, and the building of the city and tower of Babylon.



Sodom, Qayin, the Flood, and Babylon. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

The result of these analogies is that Sodom and Gomorrah become an amalgamation of Cain's city of blood, the generation of the flood, and the hubris of Babylon. It's an icon of the human city of idolatry and violence, where the innocent suffer and cry out to God.

Ezekiel's portrait of Sodom seems to be based on this entire network of analogies, not just the story in [Genesis 19](#).

Ezekiel 16:48-50 ESV*

⁴⁸As I live, declares the Lord God, your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done. ⁴⁹Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had **pride**, they were **overfilled with food**, and **calm ease**, but **did not strengthen the hand of the poor and needy**. ⁵⁰They were **haughty** and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Avraham's Justice and Righteousness

Yahweh's speech ([Gen. 18:17-19](#)) about Avraham (which he apparently says out loud, standing next to him!) is revealing, and gives the reader new, developed insight into God's purpose in selecting Avraham.

17 **and Yahweh said,**

“Should I hide from Avraham **what I am about to do** ?

18 For Avraham will certainly become **a nation great** and powerful,
and **all nations** of the land will discover **blessing** through him;

19 Indeed, **I have known** him,

so that he would command his sons and his house after him,

that they should **keep the way of Yahweh,**

by **doing what is right and just**

so that Yahweh will bring upon Avraham what he has spoken about him.”

Genesis 18:16-33. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Yahweh is not hiding the divine purpose from Avraham, even as he asks the question. He clearly means to include Avraham in the deliberations of the divine purpose, and so Avraham becomes here a true “image of God,” a human who’s invited into the divine council and who can influence Yahweh’s governance of the cosmos.

Yahweh refers back to his words in Genesis 12:3 where he chose Avraham and his family to become a conduit of divine blessing to the nations. This very story gives a concrete application of what that vocation truly entails. Avraham will stand before Yahweh and intercede on behalf of the innocent.

The Hebrew syntax of Genesis 18:19 is intentionally complex, revealing God’s dual purpose.

God chose Avraham in order to create a family that lives in alignment with the will of God, referred to by two descriptions: “the way of Yahweh” and “doing righteousness and justice.” Both of these phrases are introduced here for the first time in the Hebrew Bible, and will go on to become significant themes throughout the biblical story.

God chose Avraham’s family to do what is right so that God can fulfill his promise to Avraham, which links back up to God’s quotation of his own promise in Genesis 12:3.

The fulfillment of God’s promise to Avraham is conditional upon the faithful obedience of Avraham’s family. But, as Avraham himself has already started to show, that condition is going to create serious problems, both for Avraham’s family and for God too!

The selection of Avraham “to do justice and righteousness” (Gen. 18:19) gives us categories for what Avraham is about to do, which is demand that God operate according to his own “way” by doing what is right and just in his dealings with Sodom and Gomorrah.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 18:23-33

23 **And Avraham drew near, and he said,**

a “Are you really about to **sweep away** the **righteous** along with the **wicked** ?

- b What if there are **fifty righteous people** in the middle of the city ?
- a' Would you really **sweep away** ?
- b' **Wouldn't you forgive** that place, on account of the **fifty righteous** which are **within it** ?
- a 25 **Far be it from you** to do such a thing,
- b to put to death the **righteous** along with the **wicked** ,
- b' so that the **righteous** and **wicked** become alike!
- a' **Far be it from you!**
- c Shouldn't the **justice-bringer** of all the land do **justice** ?
- 26 **And Yahweh said,**
- "If I find in Sodom **fifty righteous** ones **in the middle of the city** ,
- then **I will forgive** the entire place on account of them .

27 **And Avraham answered and said,**

- A " **Look, please, I have attempted to speak to my master,**
- and I am but dust and ashes.
- B 28 Perhaps that **fifty righteous** lacks **five**,
- would you **cause the ruin** of **the entire city because of those five**?
- C And he said,
- " **I would not cause ruin** if I find there **forty five**."

- A 29 **And he further spoken again to him, and said,**
- B "Perhaps there are found there **forty**."
- C And he said,
- " **I would not do it** on account of **forty** . "

- A 30 **And he said,**
- "**Please don't let my master burn with anger, as I speak.**
- B Perhaps there are found there **thirty**."
- C And he said,
- " **I would not do it** if I find there **thirty**."

- A 31 **And he said,**
- "**Look, please, I have attempted to speak to my master,**
- B but perhaps there are found there **twenty**."
- C **And he said,**
- " **I would not cause ruin** on account of the **twenty**."

- A 32 **And he said,**
- "**Please don't let my master burn with anger, as I speak, just this time.**
- B Perhaps there are found there **ten**."
- And he said,**

“I would not cause ruin on account of the ten.”

³³ And Yahweh went away,
when he finished speaking to Avraham,
and Avraham, he returned to his place.

Genesis 18:16-33. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Does Avraham Haggle With God?

This story is cleverly designed to subvert the reader's expectations, and a second, more careful reading overturns a number of impressions made upon a first reading.

On a first reading, God announces that he is going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Avraham knows that his nephew lives there, presumably with many other righteous folks, and he's afraid Yahweh's judgment will be too sweeping. So Avraham "haggles" with God, bargaining him down to a lower number of righteous people. Yahweh agrees, but on this interpretation Avraham becomes Yahweh's teacher.

There are problems with this interpretation. Avraham sets up the conversation as a bartering exchange, but Yahweh's responses subvert Avraham's assumptions.

- Avraham presents himself as "the buyer," starting at a low number, expecting that God would raise the numbers, so they can meet in the middle, say, 105.
- God unhesitatingly responds "yes" to every number Avraham proposes. This is not how you barter!

Avraham is the one who stops at 10 people, and he's the one who stops the conversation. [Genesis 18:33](#) does say that "Yahweh finished speaking to Avraham," but this is God's response to Avraham saying "one last time" (אך הפעם), before asking for 10. God follows Avraham's lead here.

"To the question, then, of whether there is haggling in Genesis 18, one might, perhaps, say yes, but haggling seems to be the intention of only one of the participants. ... It is [Avraham's] language that is extravagant; he is the one who requires Yhwh's justice to be quantifiable ... On the other hand, Yhwh refuses to participate in this game. Yhwh uses simple language and acquiesces in a straightforward manner. To every bid that Abraham makes there is only a divine yes and never a no. ... [So then] it might be better to speak of Yhwh's subversion of the pattern of haggling. Yhwh's opening speech (18:17-19), in which he emphasizes that he will not hide from Abraham his intent toward Sodom and Gomorrah ... Abraham, however, acts as though this significant move has not been taken. He continues to work within parameters that are obsolete, and it is perhaps this confusion that leads him to conclude at the perplexing figure of ten. If one were to search for a parallel other than haggling, comparison might be made to a child persistently testing parental boundaries, whether real or imagined."

MacDonald, Nathan (2004). "Listening to Abraham, Listening to Yhwh: Divine Justice and Mercy in Genesis 18:16-33." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (vol. 66). 40-41.

On a second, more careful reading, God invites Abraham into the divine council to begin teaching him “the way of Yahweh,” which means “doing justice and righteousness.” Abraham is unacquainted with Yahweh’s way and so assumes he has to haggle mercy out of Yahweh. Then, Yahweh subverts Abraham’s assumption in an attempt to teach him how to be a faithful partner, and Abraham only partially succeeds, stopping with the number 10.

Righteousness, Justice, and the Way of the Lord

There is an important contrast between what Yahweh says about his calling of Abraham, and what Abraham assumes about Yahweh’s character.

This is what Yahweh says about his “way.”

Genesis 18:19 Instructor’s Translation

Indeed, I have known him, **so that he would** command his sons and his house after him, that they should **keep the way of Yahweh**, by **doing righteousness and justice so that Yahweh will** bring upon Abraham what he has spoken about him.

This is what Abraham assumes about Yahweh’s “way.”

Genesis 18:25 Instructor’s Translation

Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put to death the **righteous** along with the wicked, so that the **righteous** and wicked become alike! **Far be it from you!** Shouldn’t the **justice-bringer** of all the land do **justice**?

The phrase “do righteousness and justice” is an idiom used to describe the actions of a leader done on behalf of his people to confront the forces of injustice and inequity, to deliver the poor and vulnerable in order to improve their quality of life. It is often synonymous with “mercy.”

2 Samuel 8:15 NASB

So David reigned over all Israel; and David **did justice and righteousness** for all his people.

Isaiah 9:6-7 NASB

⁶For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us, and the government will rest on his shoulders; and his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ ... On the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it **with justice and righteousness** from then on and forevermore.

Jeremiah 22:3 NASB

Thus says the LORD, "**Do justice and righteousness**, and deliver the one who has been robbed from the power of his oppressor. Also do not mistreat or do violence to the stranger, the orphan, or the widow; and do not shed innocent blood in this place."

Jeremiah 22:15-16 NIV*

¹⁵ “Does it make you a king to have more and more cedar? Did not your father have food and drink? He **did righteousness and justice**, so all went well with him. ¹⁶ He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?” declares the LORD.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Ezekiel 18:5-8 NIV*

⁵ Suppose there is a righteous man who **does justice and righteousness** ... ⁷ He does not oppress anyone, but returns what he took in pledge for a loan. He does not commit robbery but gives his food to the hungry and provides clothing for the naked. ⁸ He does not lend to them at interest or take a profit from them.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

For more examples of people doing this for other people, see: [1 Kings 10:9](#); [Isaiah 32:16-18](#), [58:24](#); [Jeremiah 23:5](#), [33:15](#); [Amos 5:10-12](#), [24](#); [Psalm 72:2-4](#).

If the above is what it means for humans to do justice and righteousness, what does it mean to say that righteousness and justice characterize “the way of Yahweh” ([Genesis 18:19](#))?

Psalms 103:6-12 NIV

- ⁶ The LORD **works righteousness and justice** for all the oppressed.
⁷ He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel:
⁸ The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.
⁹ He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever;
¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.
¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him;
¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

The “ways of Yahweh” here are linked to not only righteousness and justice for the vulnerable but also to compassion, mercy, and patience that are displayed in forgiving people and not treating them as their sins deserve.

[Psalm 103](#) is packed with hyperlinks to the golden calf narrative, where Moses ascends Mount Sinai to intercede for Israel in much the same way that Abraham does for Sodom. But Moses does not barter; he is much more bold as he asks for Yahweh’s mercy. In contrast, Abraham asks Yahweh a different question.

The phrase “to judge” and “justice” ([שפט/משפט](#)) can also be combined into “to judge with justice,” an idiom that primarily refers to judicial procedure and reward or punishment.

Deuteronomy 16:18 NASB

¹⁸ You shall appoint for yourself judges and officers in all your towns which the LORD your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall **judge** the people with **righteous judgment**.

Ezekiel 18:8 NIV*

He withholds his hand from doing wrong and he **does justice** truthfully between people.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Isaiah 1:17 NASB

Learn to **do** good; seek **justice**, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

The phrase "do justice" or "judge with justice" adopts a courtroom framework and assumes the judge is fair, which means the results could go two ways.

The results may be positive.

Psalms 9:4 Instructor's Translation

For you have **done justice** for me and for my cause, you have sat on the throne **judging with righteousness**.

Psalms 140:12 Instructor's Translation

Know that Yahweh acts for the cause of the afflicted, **doing justice** for the poor.

The results may be negative and result in punishment.

Exodus 12:12 NASB*

For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt **I will do justice**—I am the LORD.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Ezekiel 5:8 NASB*

therefore, thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I, even I, am against you, and **I will do justice** among you in the sight of the nations."

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalms 9:16 Instructor's Translation

Yahweh is known as one who **does justice**, by the work of his hands the wicked are trapped ...

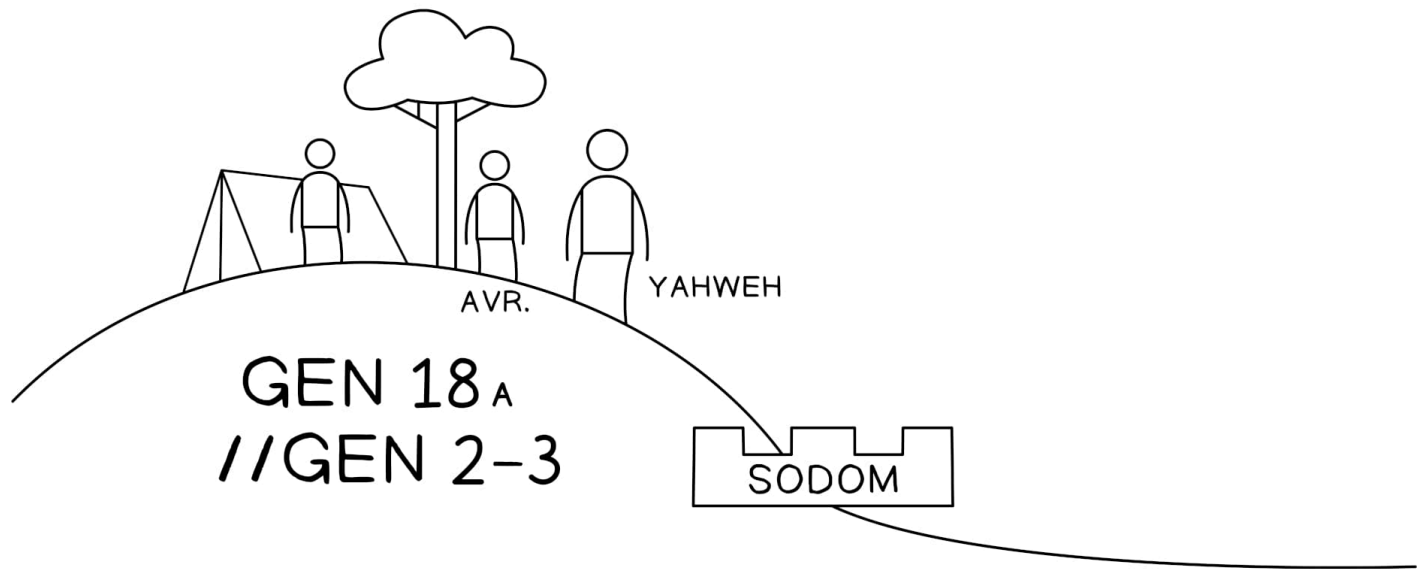
"The dialogue begins with Yhwh's indication that he is about to go down to discover the truth about Sodom's deeds. Punishment is by no means certain, but it is a distinct possibility. Abraham is given the opportunity to intercede for the city; he is treated as Yhwh's partner and told of Yhwh's plans, and he is then allowed to make his own contribution. Unlike Moses, Amos, and the other prophets, however, Abraham does not appeal to the mercy of God and ask for full forgiveness; instead, presuming Yhwh to be a harsh judge, he prepares to barter with him. His strategy is undone by Yhwh's persistent acceptance of Abraham's offer; Yhwh turns out to be far more merciful than Abraham imagines. Drawing the line at ten indicates not only the depth of Sodom's sin but also that Abraham has not plumbed the depths of Yhwh's grace ... Yhwh has become Abraham's teacher, and the dialogue at Mamre is an important moment in the moral education of Abraham. It is the moment when Yhwh seeks to instruct Abraham about 'his way,' and the dialogue is an interactive lesson in which Abraham learns the extent of Yhwh's mercy toward his creation, so that Abraham and his descendants may follow in that same way."

MacDonald, Nathan (2004). "Listening to Abraham, Listening to Yhwh: Divine Justice and Mercy in Genesis 18:16-33." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (vol. 66). 40-41.

"It is a consistent aspect of the biblical portrayal of the relationship between God and human beings that human response is crucial. Genesis 19:29 affirms that Abraham has genuinely been made party to Yhwh's decisions and may have a role in shaping them. The tragedy is that, in comparison with the intercessions of other biblical prophets, Abraham's for Sodom and Gomorrah might have saved the cities had he asked for mercy. The irony is that Abraham gains what he requests: the righteous are not treated as the wicked."

MacDonald, Nathan (2004). "Listening to Abraham, Listening to Yhwh: Divine Justice and Mercy in Genesis 18:16-33." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (vol. 66). 41.

Avraham Pleads for Sodom



Avraham Pleads for Sodom. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Reflection Question

How does this passage show us that Sodom and Gomorrah are emblematic of violence and injustice?

Session 18: Lot Delivered from Destruction

Key Takeaways

- Lot imitates his uncle's righteous hospitality but from a compromised location. The text paints an ambivalent portrait of Lot's character.
- In their sexual violence, the men of Sodom mirror and invert the illicit union of Heaven and Earth from Genesis 6.
- The biblical authors craft this scene as a prelude to the flood theme in the melody, with Lot's house playing the role of the ark as the place of divinely provided refuge.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 19:1-3

¹ And the two messengers went to **Sodom** in the evening.

Now, Lot was sitting **in the gate** of **Sodom**,
and Lot saw

and he arose to meet them,
and he bowed face-down on the ground,

² **and he said**,

"Look, **please**, my masters,
Please turn aside to the house of your servant,
and **stay the night**, and wash your feet,
and rise in the morning and go your way."

And they said,

"No, because we will **stay the night** in the town center."

³ And he pressured them very much,

and **they turned aside** to him,
and they went **into his house**,
and he made them drinks and he baked bread,
and they ate.

Genesis 19:1-14. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

A Tale of Two Hosts: Avraham and Lot

The narrative begins with a scene set in clear parallel to Avraham's welcome of the angelic men in Genesis 18:1-8.

Genesis 18:1-8 Instructor's Translation

¹ And Yahweh became seen to him among the oaks of Mamre,
and he was **sitting at the entrance of the tent ...**

² and he lifted his eyes and he saw,
and look, three men standing by him,
and he saw and **he ran from the entrance of the tent to meet them**, and he bowed to the ground.

³ And he said,
"My master, please, if I have found favor in your eyes,
please don't pass on from your servant.

⁴ Let him please take a little water,
so you can wash your feet,
and recline under the tree;

⁵ that I may take a bit of bread,
so you can sustain your hearts,
then you can pass on;
for this reason you have passed by your servant!"

And they said,
"So do as you have spoken."
...
⁷ Then Avraham ran to the cattle,
and he took a calf, good and tender,
and he gave it to the young man,
and he hurried to make it.

⁸ And he took curds and milk and the calf he made,
and he gave it before them.
Now, he was standing over them, under the tree,
and they ate.

Genesis 19:1-3 Instructor's Translation

¹ And the two messengers went to Sodom in the evening.
Now, Lot was **sitting in the gate of Sodom**,
and Lot saw and **he arose to meet them**,
and **he bowed face-down on the ground**,

² and he said,
"Look, **please, my masters**, please turn aside to the house of your servant,
and stay the night, and wash your feet,
and rise in the morning and go your way."

And they said,
"No, because we will stay the night in the town center."

³ And he pressured them a lot,
and they turned aside to him,

and they went into his house,
and **he made them drinks as he baked bread,**
and they ate.

The narrator clearly wants us to compare Lot's reception of the "angels unaware" with Avraham's reception of Yahweh and these same two angels.

The majority of the links are similarities. At every point Lot imitates the behavior of his uncle: sitting at the gate, he sees, goes to meet, bows down, invites into house for lodging, food, and rest.

There is only one substantial difference between the angels' response. With Avraham, the angels quickly accept his offer and wait under the tree. With Lot, the angels play hard to get, not accepting Lot's first offer of hospitality. This actually reflects positively on Lot's character, as it shows that his hospitality is genuine and purposeful, not simply a meaningless gesture.

The narrative begins with a positive portrayal of Lot, showing how he's like his uncle, the righteous and chosen Avraham. Even though Lot made a foolish choice to live in Sodom, prioritizing the land's Eden-like qualities while ignoring the moral corruption of the city (Gen. 13:10-13), he is himself not an evil guy. His uncle's best qualities have influenced him, and so he imitates the righteous Avraham.

It is likely this analogy between Avraham and Lot that led later interpreters to the conclusion that Lot was righteous like Avraham.

2 Peter 2:7-9 ESV

⁷ and if he rescued **righteous Lot**, greatly **distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked** ⁸ (for as **that righteous man** lived among them day after day, he was tormenting **his righteous soul** over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); ⁹ then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from tests ...

But this initial similarity does not guarantee that Lot will imitate Avraham in every way, nor does it make him the chosen one. Rather, Lot will benefit from the intercession of his uncle in the previous scene, even though he displays a clear lack of trust in the divine word of the angels (Gen. 19:17-22).

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 19:4-14

Men of Sodom Gather "From Young to Old"

⁴ Before they laid down,
then **the men of the city**,
the men of Sodom,
surrounded **the house**,
from young to old,
all the people, completely.

Men of Sodom's Speech

5 And they called out to Lot
and they said to him ,

"Where are **the men** who came to you at night?

Make them go out to us,

so that **we can know** (נִדְעָה) **them** !"

Lot's Speech

6 And Lot went out to them at **the entrance** ,
and as for **the door** , **he closed it** behind him.

7 And he said ,

"Please, my brothers, **don't do this evil** (תַּרְעוּ) !

8 Look, please, I have two daughters who **have not known** (יָדְעוּ) a man,

let me please **make them go out** to you all,

and **do** to them **what is good in your eyes** .

Just **don't do** anything to these men,

because this is the reason they came into **the shelter of my beamed-roof** !"

Men of Sodom's Speech

9 And they said ,

"Get away!

And they said ,

"This one has come as an immigrant,

and he's bringing justice as a judge?!

Now **we're going to do evil** (נַרְעוּ) **to you** , more than them!"

Men of Sodom Struck "From Little to Big"

And they brought pressure against **the man** , against Lot, very much,

and they drew near, to break down **the door** .

10 And **the men** sent out their hand,

and they brought Lot in to them, into **the house** ,

and **they closed** **the door** .

11 And as for **the men** at **the entrance** of **the house** , they struck them with blindness,

from the littlest to the biggest ,

and they struggled to find **the entrance** .

12 And the men said to Lot,

"How many here are yours?

Sons-in-law or your sons or your daughters or anyone who's yours in **the city** ,

make them go out from **this place** ,

¹³ because **we are about to cause the ruin** of **this place**,
 because the outcry against them is great before the face of Yahweh,
 and **Yahweh sent us to cause its ruin**."

¹⁴ And **Lot went out** and he spoke to **his sons-in-law who had taken his daughters**,
 and he said,
 "Get up! **Go out from this place**,
 because **Yahweh is about to cause the ruin** of **the city**!"
 But in the eyes of **his sons-in-law**, he was trying to make them laugh.

Genesis 19:1-14. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

The Men of Sodom and the Generation of the Flood

The men of Sodom are depicted in curious ways that clearly compare them to the generation of the flood, which includes the depiction of Cain's city in [Genesis 4:17-26](#), the sons of *elohim* in [Genesis 6:1-4](#), and the generation of the flood in [Genesis 6:5-22](#). In this last story, the corruption of the land is contrasted with Noah, who listens to God's command and builds the ark as a place of refuge. Also remember that the story of [Genesis 6](#) was itself set on analogy with [Genesis 3-4](#), so this episode contains hyperlinks to both earlier stories.

Genesis 19:1-14	Genesis 2-4 & 6-9
Gen. 19:1-3 A human and spiritual beings rest together "in the house"	Gen. 2 Humanity rests with Elohim in the garden
The men of Sodom surround the house: • Gen. 19:4, 9 "from young (מנער) to the old" + "we will do bad (רעע) to you!" • Gen. 19:5 "bring them out that we may know (ידע) them"	The generation of the flood: • Gen. 8:21 (also 6:5) is "bad (רע) from youth" (מנערי) • Gen. 4:17 "Cain knew (ידע) his wife..."
Sex between humans and spiritual beings: Gen. 19:8 The men of Sodom want to gang-rape spiritual beings, but Lot offers his daughters (בנות): "do to them what is good in your eyes" (טוב בעיניכם))"	Sex between human and spiritual beings: Gen. 6:2 The sons of Elohim see the human daughters (בנות), that they are "good" (טוב), and they take them as they choose
<i>Men of Sodom and the Generation of the Flood.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).	

The men of Sodom are depicted on analogy to the rebel sons of *elohim* who violated their proper assigned realm and took wives for themselves. This inappropriate linking of Heaven and Earth and their respective creatures is the primary focus of the narrative's critique.

The flood narrative and the Sodom narrative both begin and end with stories of illicit sexual encounters that violate the proper boundaries of Heaven and Earth and family relationship (This observation was made by Yair Zakovitch in *Introduction to Inner-Biblical Interpretation*, page 49).

	Flood	Sodom
Before:	Angels (בני אלהים) → Humans (בנות האדם) Males Females	Humans (אנשי סדם) → Angels (המלאכים) Males Males
After:	Son (חם) → Father (נח) Male Male	Daughters (בנות לוט) → Father (לוט) Females Male

The Men of Sodom and the Sons of Elohim. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Lot's House, the Ark, and the Coming Flood

In contrast to the corrupt men of Sodom, righteous Lot and his family are protected and safe inside the refuge of the house, which is an Eden image combined with language about the ark.

Lot, his daughters, and the angels take refuge in his house.

- The words "the house" (הבית) and "into the house" (הביתה) are the word "ark" backward (התיבה, with the י representing the long e vowel).
- The men gather at "the entrance" (פתח) of the house, by the "shut door" (הדלת סגור, [Gen. 19:6, 9-10](#)).
- "they have taken shelter under the shadow of my beam-roof" (בצל קרתי, [Gen. 19:8](#)).

Noah, his family, and the animals take refuge in the ark.

- The word "the ark" (התיבה) is the word "the house" (הבית) backwards.
- The ark is designed with an "entrance" (פתח, [Gen. 6:16](#)) in the side, that is "shut" (סגור, [Gen. 7:16](#)) behind him.
- The ark is built with a roof (צהר, [Gen. 6:16](#)).

The angels announce that a flood of judgment is coming on Sodom.

- "go out (יצא) from this place" ([Gen. 19:12](#)).
- "we are about to ruin (שחת) this place ... Yahweh has sent us to ruin (שחת) this place" ([Gen. 19:13](#)).
- "the outcry (צעקה) is great before the face of Yahweh" ([Gen. 19:13](#)).

God announces to Noah that a flood of judgment is coming.

- "go into (בוא) the ark" ([Gen. 6:18](#)).

- “the land was ruined (שחת) before the face of *Elohim*, and filled with violence” + “I about about to cause their ruin (שחת) with the land” (Gen. 6:11, 13).
- “an end of all flesh has come before my face (בא לפני) ... קץ, Gen. 6:13).

Just like with the flood, the outcry of the oppressed has risen up against the city of Sodom (Abel's blood also goes up in Gen. 4:10). The city is already in a state of ruin, so God hands the city over to destruction in the same language as the flood narrative.

However, there is an inversion: Even though Lot's “house/ark” is his refuge, he actually has to “go out” (יצא) of the ark, precisely what Noah was told to do after the flood has subsided (“go out from the ark” Gen. 8:16-19).

Reflection Question

Compare and contrast Lot's behavior in this scene with Avraham's in Genesis 18:1-16. What do the similarities and differences tell us about Lot's character?

Session 19: A Flood of Fire

Key Takeaways

- God's angels deliver Lot from destruction, but Lot still wants to choose his own version of safety.
- Later biblical authors invoke Sodom and Gomorrah as icons of God's swift and total judgment on human injustice, immorality, and violence.
- The episode with Lot and his daughters is the origin story of the Moabite and Ammonite nations.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 19:15-22

15 **And just as the sunrise was going up** ,
that the messengers **urged** (ויאיצו) Lot, saying,
"Get up, take **your wife and your two daughters** who are found,
so that **you are not swept away** with the crookedness of **the city** (העיר) !"

16 But he delayed,
and the men grabbed his hand and the hand of **his wife** and the hand of **his two daughters**
—because **the mercy of Yahweh** was upon him—

and they **made him go out** (ויצאהו)
and they rested him outside **the city** (העיר) .

The Man's Speech

17 And it came about as they **made them go out** (הוציא) **to the outside** ,
that he said ,
" **Escape** for your **very being** (נפש) !
Don't stare behind you,
and **don't stand** anywhere in the valley!
Escape **to the mountain** (ההר) , so that **you're not swept away** !"

Lot's Speech

18 **And Lot said to them** ,
"No, **please**, my masters!
19 **Look, please**. Your servant has found **favor** in your eyes,

and you have made great **your loyal love** that you've shown me,
by keeping alive my very being (נפש).

But I am not able to to **escape to the mountain** (ההר),
or else the evil will cling to me, and **I will die**!

²⁰ **Look, please**, this **city** (העיר) is close to **flee** there,
and it is **little** (מצער)!

Please, may I **escape** there,

isn't it **little** (מצער)?

so that my being (נפש) **can live**!"

The Man's Speech

²¹ **And he said to him**,

"**Look**, I have lifted up your face, even about **this thing**,
so that I won't **overturn** the **city** (העיר) which you spoke of.

²² **Hurry** (מהר), **escape** there,

because I'm not able to do **anything** until you go there!"

This is the reason one calls the name of the **city** (העיר) **"Zoar"** (צוער) [= "little"]

Genesis 19:15-29. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Lot's Escape and Noah's Deliverance

Lot's deliverance from the city is described in language designed to recall Noah's deliverance from the waters of the flood.

Genesis 19:15-26	Genesis 6-9
Gen. 19:15 "Rise, take your wife and your two daughters"	Gen. 6:18 "You will enter the ark, you and your sons and your wife and your son's wives"
Gen. 19:16 "and they took him out and they rested him (וינחהו) outside the city"	Gen. 8:4 "and the ark rested (ותנח) on the mountains of Ararat"
Gen. 19:17 "escape to the mountain!" (ההרה)	
Gen. 19:19 "I have found favor in your eyes ... you have kept my very being alive" (להחיות את נפש)	Gen. 6:8 "Noah (נח) found favor (חן) in the eyes of Yahweh" • Gen. 6:19-20 The animals on the ark are "kept alive" (להחיות)

Lot's Escape and Noah's Deliverance. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Genesis 19:15-26

Genesis 6-9

Gen. 19:24 "Yahweh caused it to rain (המטיר) upon Sodom ... pitch and fire from Yahweh, from the skies"

Gen. 19:29 "Yahweh remembered Avraham, and he sent out Lot from the middle of the overturning when he overturned the cities ..."

• **Gen. 7:3** "seed will be kept alive (לחיות זרע) on the land"
Gen. 7:4 "and about to cause it to rain (המטיר) upon the land"

Gen. 8:1 "and Elohim remembered Noah and all the living creatures ... with him on the ark"

Lot's Escape and Noah's Deliverance. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Even though it's Avraham who is truly like Noah, his intercession results in Lot being "kept alive" in the flood of judgment. The narrative is showing that the intercession of the righteous one is effective in bringing about the deliverance of the afflicted.

Lot's Deliverance ... With Qualifications

With the story of Lot, we are introduced to a new complication in his character—he doesn't want the deliverance that Yahweh offers, at least not entirely.

Through an elaborate series of wordplays, the narrator portrays Lot as fickle and petty in the moment of his salvation. Instead of accepting the refuge that God has provided, Lot wants to negotiate his own salvation, so the rescue happens on his own terms.

The Man's Speech

17 And it came about as they **made them go out (הוציא)** **to the outside**,
that he said,
"Escape for your **very being (נפש)**!
Don't stare behind you,
and **don't stand** anywhere in the valley!
Escape **to the mountain (ההר)**, so that **you're not swept away**!"

Lot's Speech

18 **And Lot said to them**,
"No, **please**, my masters!
19 **Look, please**. Your servant has found **favor** in your eyes,
and you have made great **your loyal love** that you've shown me,
by keeping alive my very being (נפש).
But I am not able to to **escape** **to the mountain (ההר)**,

or else the evil will cling to me, and **I will die**!

20 **Look, please**, this **city (העיר)** is close to **flee** there,
and it is **little (מצער)**!

Please, may I **escape** there,
isn't it **little (מצער)**?

so that my being (נפש) can live!"

The Man's Speech

21 **And he said to him**,
"Look, I have lifted up your face, even about **this thing**,
so that I won't **overturn** the **city (העיר)** which you spoke of.

22 **Hurry (מהר)**, **escape** there,
because I'm not able to do **anything** until you go there!"

This is the reason one calls the name of the **city (העיר)** **"Zoar" (צוער)** [= "little"]

Genesis 19:15-29. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

This wordplay continues into the following scene, but for the moment, let's notice how Lot is depicted as short-sighted and fickle at the very moment God is graciously saving his family's life.

This bears an important resemblance to Cain's negotiation over the deliverance that Yahweh provides after the murder of Abel.

- God provides a "sign" for Cain, but Cain goes out and builds a "city" (עיר) for his own protection (Gen. 4:17).
- Cain builds his city because of his fear that someone will "find" (מצא) him and murder him in revenge for his brother's death (Gen. 4:14).
- The analogy between Cain and Lot accentuates what was implicit in the Cain story: Both characters reject the provision of Yahweh and instead provide their own form of deliverance through a city (עיר).

Zoar and a Pillar of Salt

The curious detail about Lot's wife turning into a pillar of salt (נציב מלח, Gen. 19:26) is explained by its structural alignment with Zoar in Genesis 19:23.

The words "Zoar" and "salt" form the outer frame of the short summary unit of Genesis 19:23-26. Both words are part of a macro frame around all of chapters 12-19. Chapters 14 and 19 form the "flood-crescendo" of their respective units.

- Chapter 14 brings Genesis 12-14 to its climax, and it revolves around Avraham's deliverance of Lot.
- Chapter 19 brings Genesis 18-19 to its climax, and it revolves around Avraham's deliverance of Lot, again!

In both stories, the escaped remnant flees to the mountains (Gen. 14:10, 19:17), while the unbelieving stay in the valley and fall into pits of tar near the salt sea and Zoar (Gen. 14:2-3, 8-10). The design parallel of "Zoar"

and “salt” here in Genesis 19:23, 26 places Lot’s wife in the same category as the fleeing kings of Sodom and Gomorroah, who fall into pits of tar. Only here she is turned into something similar above ground, a “pillar of salt.”

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 19:27-29

27 And Avraham rose **early in the morning**,
to the place where he had stood before the face of Yahweh,

28 and he looked down
upon the face of **Sodom and over Gomorrah**,
and upon **all** the face of the land of **the valley**,
and he saw, and look, **the smoke** of the land went up like **the smoke of a furnace**.

29 And it came about when Yahweh **caused the ruin** of **the cities (העיר)** of **the valley**,
that he remembered **Avraham**,
and he sent Lot out from the middle of **the overturning**,
when he **overturned** the **cities (העיר)**,
in which Lot had been **dwelling**.

Genesis 19:15-29. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Avraham, the Righteous Intercessor

Avraham’s role in Lot’s deliverence echoes a theme from the flood narrative; those "with" Noah benefitted from his righteous standing before God and were delivered along "with him."

Genesis 6:18-19 Instructor’s Translation

18 ... Go into the ark, you and your sons and your wife and the wives of your sons **with you**¹⁹ and of every living thing of all flesh, two of everything, you will make go into the ark to keep them alive **with you**.

Genesis 7:1 Instructor’s Translation

Enter, **you** and all your house into the ark, for **you** I have seen as righteous before me in this generation.

Genesis 7:7 Instructor’s Translation

And he entered, **Noah** and his sons and his wife and his wives sons **with him**, into the ark ...

Genesis 7:23 Instructor’s Translation

And everything was wiped out from the land, but Noah was left remaining, and those **with him** in the ark.

Genesis 8:1 Instructor’s Translation

And *Elohim* remembered Noah and all the living things and all the creatures who were **with him** in the ark ...

The narrative clearly highlights Noah's status as the person God deals with and delivers from the flood. But Noah's family and the creatures with him benefit from his righteous status before God, so they too are saved from the flood.

This is precisely the theme at work in the Avraham and Lot story. Avraham is the chosen one, and he was already delivered from the flood of human violence back in [chapter 14](#). Immediately after that, his trust in God was reckoned to him as right-standing before God, so his intercession on behalf of Lot is effective.

Sodom and Gomorrah and the Flood: Icons of Divine Justice

Throughout the Bible, the ruin of Sodom and Gomorrah is a common icon for a whole bundle of concepts involving human evil, the ruin of the land, and the resulting flood of divine judgment. The story itself is referenced throughout the Hebrew Bible.

Deuteronomy 29:23-28 NIV

²³ The whole land will be a **burning waste of salt and sulfur**—nothing planted, nothing sprouting, **no vegetation** growing on it. It will be like the **destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah**, Admah and Zeboyim, which the LORD overthrew in fierce anger. ²⁴ All the nations will ask: “Why has the LORD done this to this land? Why this fierce, burning anger?” ²⁵ And the answer will be: “It is because this people abandoned the covenant of the LORD, the God of their ancestors, the covenant he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt. ²⁶ They went off and worshiped other gods and bowed down to them, gods they did not know, gods he had not given them. ²⁷ Therefore the LORD’s anger burned against this land, so that **he brought on it all the curses written in this book**. ²⁸ In furious anger and in great wrath the LORD uprooted them from their land and thrust them into another land, as it is now.”

Deuteronomy 32:32-33 NIV

³² Their vine comes from **the vine of Sodom and from the fields of Gomorrah**. Their grapes are filled with poison, and their clusters with bitterness. ³³ Their wine is the venom of **serpents**, the deadly poison of cobras.

Isaiah 1:9-10 NIV

⁹ Unless the LORD Almighty had left us some **survivors**, we would have become like **Sodom**, we would have been like **Gomorrah**. ¹⁰ Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of **Sodom**; listen to the instruction of our God, you people of **Gomorrah**!

Isaiah 3:8-9 NIV

⁸ Jerusalem staggers, Judah is falling; their words and deeds are against the LORD, defying his glorious presence. ⁹ The look on their faces testifies against them; **they parade their sin like Sodom**; they do not hide it. Woe to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves.

Isaiah 13:19-20 NIV

¹⁹ **Babylon**, the jewel of kingdoms, the pride and glory of the Babylonians, **will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah**. ²⁰ She will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations; there no nomads will pitch their tents, there no shepherds will rest their flocks.

Jeremiah 23:14 NIV

And among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen something horrible: They commit adultery and live a lie. They strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that not one of them turns from their wickedness. **They are all like Sodom to me; the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah.**

Jeremiah 49:17-18 NIV

¹⁷ “**Edom** will become an object of horror; all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff because of all its wounds. ¹⁸ As **Sodom and Gomorrah were overthrown**, along with their neighboring towns,” says the LORD, “so no one will live there; no people will dwell in it.”

Amos 4:11-12 NIV

¹¹ “I overthrew some of you as **I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah**. You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire, yet you have not returned to me,” declares the LORD. ¹² “Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel, and because I will do this to you, Israel, prepare to meet your God.”

Zephaniah 2:9 NIV

Therefore, as surely as I live,” declares the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, “**surely Moab will become like Sodom, the Ammonites like Gomorrah**—a place of weeds and salt pits, a wasteland forever. The remnant of my people will plunder them; the survivors of my nation will inherit their land.”

Lamentations 4:6 NIV

The punishment of my people is greater than that of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment without a hand turned to help her.

Corruption, Judgment, and the Righteous Remnant

In [Genesis 6-9](#) and [19](#), we are introduced to a network of overlapping terms that will echo throughout the rest of the biblical narrative.

The Vocabulary of Human Corruption

- violence (חמס)
- sexual abuse
- the outcry (זעקה/צעקה)

The Vocabulary of Judgment

- ruin (השחית/שחת)
- sweep away (ספה)
- wipe out (מחה)

- die (מות)
- expire (גוע)
- rain/flood waters (המטיר/מים)

The Vocabulary of the Righteous Remnant

- Noah / rest / comfort (נח/נוח/נחם)
- remain / remnant (נשאר/שאר)
- escape / refugee (מלט/המלט)
- flee (נוס)
- images of refuge: mountain (הר) / cave (מערה) / ark (תבה) / house (הבית) / shadow (צל)
- life / to keep alive (חי/החיה)

All of these terms and thematic motifs will be drawn upon and developed throughout the narrative. This verbal cohesion of the flood with Sodom and Gomorrah also explains why later Jews in the Second Temple period drew such close connections between these stories.

Jude 1:5-7 NIV

⁵ Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord at one time delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. ⁶ **And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling**—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. ⁷ **In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion.** They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

2 Peter 2:4-9 NIV

⁴ For **if God did not spare angels when they sinned**, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment; ⁵ **if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood** on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; ⁶ **if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes**, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; ⁷ and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless ⁸ (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)— ⁹ if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 19:30-38

- a ³⁰ And Lot went up from **Zoar (צוער)**,
 b and he **dwelt** on the mountain,
 c and **his two daughters** with him,
 a' because he was afraid of **dwelling** in **Zoar (צוער)**,
 b' and he **dwelt** in a **cave (מערה)**,

c' he and **his two daughters** .

- A 31 **And the firstborn said to the little one (צעירה)**,
"Our father is old,
B and there is no man in the land to come over us,
as is the way of all the land.
32 **Come, let's make our father drink wine,**
C **and let's lie with him,**
and we will make seed (זרע) come to life from our father."
33 **And they made their father drink wine in that night,**
D **and the firstborn went**
and she laid with her father,
and he did not know when she laid down or when she got up.

- A' 34 And it came about on the next day,
that the firstborn said to the little one (צעירה),
B' **"Look, I laid last night with my father.**
Let's make him drink wine also tonight,
C' **and go, lie with him,**
so we can make seed (זרע) come to life from our father."
35 **And they again made their father drink wine on that night,**
D' **and the little one (צעירה) got up**
and she laid with her father ,
and he did not know when she laid down and when she got up.

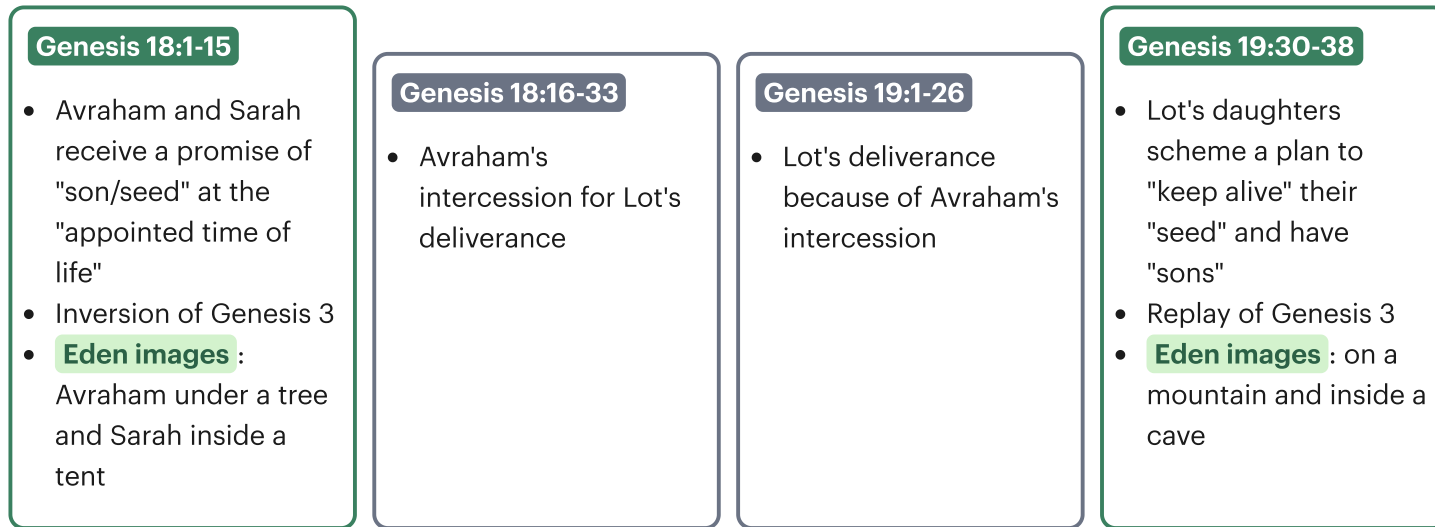
- 36 And the **two daughters of Lot** became pregnant by **their father** .
a 37 And the **firstborn** gave birth to a son,
b and she called his name "Moab,"
c he is the father of Moab until this day.
a' 38 And the **little one (צעירה)**, she also gave birth to a son,
b' and she called his name "Ammon,"
c' he is the father of the sons of Ammon until this day.

Genesis 19:30-38. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

The Blessing of Seed Distorted

This strange and disturbing story seems an odd conclusion to the dramatic narrative epic of Abraham's intercession and Lot's deliverance. The scene's significance is only clarified when it's seen in light of its placement in the design of Genesis 18:1-19:38 and in light of its relationship to the story of Noah and Ham after the flood.

The Macro Design of Genesis 18-19



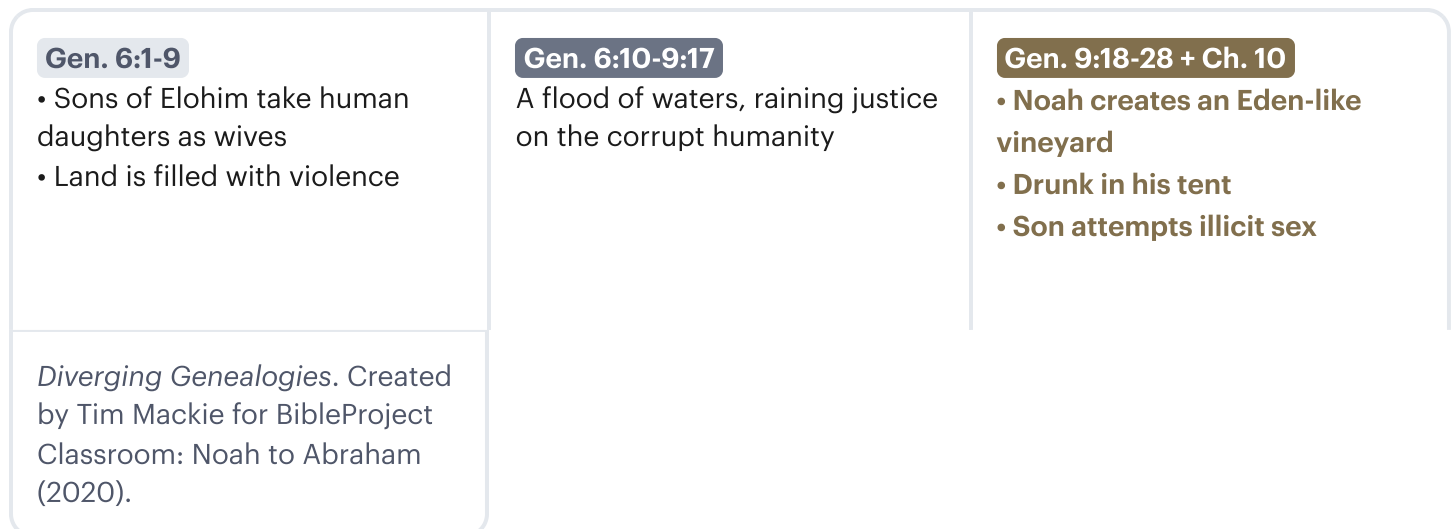
Genesis 18:1-19:38 (Detailed). Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

The opening and closing stories of Genesis chapters 18-19 are about the survival of the future seed. After the flood of judgment and mercy on Avraham in Genesis 17, God's promise of a future seed/son remains in Genesis 18:1-15. The promise is given in two Eden spots, under a tree and inside a tent.

The closing story of Lot's deliverance from the flood of judgment on Sodom is also about the survival of the future seed. But here, the daughters turn their legitimate concern into a distorted scheme of incest: They will deceive their father with wine in order to keep seed alive (Gen. 19:32, 34).

Noah and Ham, Lot and His Daughters

The significance of the story of Lot and his daughters is also illuminated by its placement as a hinge piece between the Sodom story and the next part of the Avraham story. The narrative about Lot's deliverance from Sodom because of Avraham's intercession came to a close in 19:27-29, as Avraham looks down. The story in Genesis 19:30-38, while about Lot, actually stands as a distinct episode after the ruin of Sodom. In this way, the story is precisely aligned with the story of Noah and Ham after the flood.



		resulting in birth of the Canaanites
Gen. 19:1-14 Lot protects angels by offering his daughters to the men of Sodom for sexual violence	Gen. 19:15-29 A flood of justice, raining fire on the corrupt human city	Gen. 19:30-38 • Lot finds an Eden-like cave • Drunk in the cave • Daughters attempt illicit sex resulting in the birth of Moabites and Ammonites
<i>Diverging Genealogies. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).</i>		

Comparing the two stories highlights multiple features of Lot’s story.

Noah’s folly was not in cultivating a vineyard but in drinking so much that he became vulnerable to his son’s predatory desires.

Lot’s folly wasn’t in accepting the counsel of the angels and the deliverance that they sought to provide. Rather, his folly was in his desire to secure his own deliverance by going to a “little” city (Zoar). His folly creates further problems. For some unstated reason, Lot and his daughters leave Zoar and go up to the eastern hills, where his choice of a cave isolates their entire family. It’s precisely that isolation that leads the daughters to think that they’re the only people left in the region and that they need to come up with their own plan to “keep seed alive” (Gen. 19:32, 34).

In both cases, the result of the father’s folly and the children’s inappropriate behavior is the birth of sons who will become hostile to Avraham’s descendants for the rest of the Hebrew Bible.

Moab, Ammon, and Sibling Rivalry

The births of Moab and Ammon, whose descendants will form the kingdoms on the east side of the Jordan, become the mirror image of the Canaanites on the west side of the Jordan. However, unlike the Canaanites who came under the curse of Noah (Gen. 9:25-27), the Moabites and Ammonites are, like Yishmael, family with Avraham (they’re his great-nephews). So their hostility is open to resolution and perhaps even reconciliation.

The Hostility of Moab and Ammon

- Moab will conspire with Midian (sons of Qeturah) to curse the Israelites as they wander in the wilderness (Num. 22-24).
- Moabite women seduce Israelite men into worshipping their gods (Num. 25).
- Eglon the king of Moab allies with Ammon to oppress Israel (Judg. 3:12-14).

- Moabites and Ammonites spar with the Israelites in the days of Jephthah (Judg. 10:6-8), King Saul (1 Sam. 11:11, 12:12, 14:47), David (2 Sam. 8:2, 12), Ahab (2 Kgs. 1:1), Elisha (2 Kgs. 3).

The Future Reconciliation of Moab and Ammon

- The Moabite Ruth is integrated into the lineage of Abraham, Judah, David, and Jesus Messiah!
- David forms a peaceful alliance with Moab and even leaves his parents there for safety from Saul (1 Sam. 22:4).
- Jeremiah anticipates the eventual restoration of Moab (Jer. 48:47) and Ammon (Jer. 49:6).

Cain, Lot, and Lot's Daughters

Notice how the unit of Genesis 19:17-22, which relates how Lot was forced outside of Sodom by the angels, concludes with an etiology about the naming of Zoar (Gen. 19:22). This entire unit is about how God shows mercy to Lot and directs him to flee to the mountains (ההרה המלט, Gen. 19:17). But Lot would rather flee to a city and dwell there.

This entire scene recalls the story of Cain, when God shows mercy to him after he murders his brother (Gen. 4:9-17). God promises to protect Cain by placing a sign upon him, but Cain immediately goes into exile and builds for himself his own form of protection, a city (עיר), which he calls by the name of his son (שם + קרא, Gen. 4:17).

This final unit of Genesis 19:17-22 creatively develops this theme, as Lot is shown the “mercy of Yahweh” (חמלת יהוה, Gen. 19:16). Instead of accepting Yahweh’s deliverance, he negotiates his own plan to be spared in a city (עיר), the name of which is subject to various wordplays (צוער, מצער). The unit concludes with the naming of the city: “So then, one calls the name of the city Zoar” (19:22).

Notice how this unit of Genesis 19:17-22 acts as a frame to the bonus units about Lot’s daughters (Gen. 19:30-38). It provides a mirror episode of Lot’s hesitation and negotiations with the angels while also echoing the story of Noah and Ham after the flood.

Lot is afraid to stay in Zoar, so he ends up living in the mountains after all (Gen. 19:30, 17), specifically, in a cave (מערה), a wordplay on “little” (מצער) and “nakedness” (ערום) and “shrewd” (ערום) from the Eden narrative (Gen. 2:25, 3:1).

Lot’s firstborn and “little one” (צעירה) devise their own plan to “keep alive their seed” (נחיה ... זרע, 19:32, 34), even though God has already done so, just as he did for Noah’s family (Gen. 7:20). Just as Lot proposed his own plan that led to little Zoar (צוער, מצער), so now his daughters propose their own plan to save their seed in a cave (מערה, זרע).

In both cases, the characters reflect an ignorance of Yahweh’s deliverance and so develop their own plan instead, leading to the naming of a city (Zoar), and to the birth and naming of two sons (Moab and Ammon) who will come to cause trouble for Abraham’s descendants.

Reflection Question

Ammon and Moab are born from a string of tragic and disturbing events. What role do their descendants play in the biblical drama?



Module 5: Abraham Surrenders His Sons

SESSIONS 20-24

Abraham runs out of schemes and reaches the point of surrender. As his plans result in the division of his family, God leads Abraham to the ultimate test.

Session 20: Abraham Endangers Sarah Again

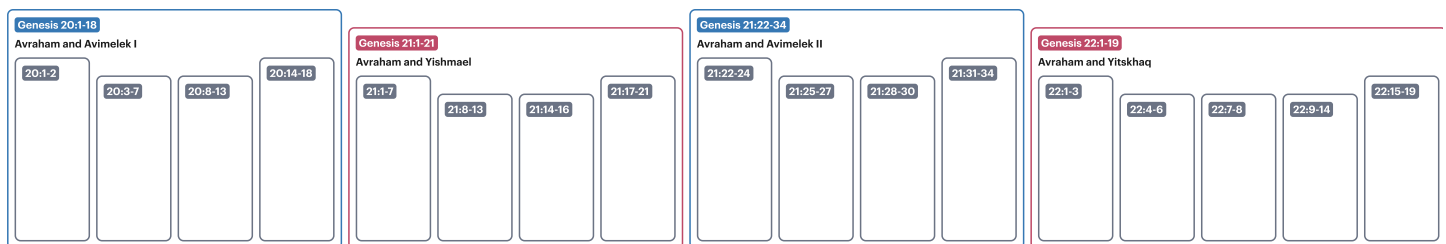
Key Takeaways

- Genesis 20:1-22:19 deals with the unresolved tension over the promised seed.
- Avraham chooses deception once again, so Avimelek acts as his own intercessor.
- The Hebrew Bible regularly critiques its own human heroes, providing a realistic portrait of the people God chooses to work with.

Movement II: Yitskhaq's Birth and the Division of the Family

There are four stories that make up the next main literary unit in Genesis 20:1-22:19.

Macro Design of Genesis 20:1-22:19



Genesis 20:1-22:19. Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Thematic Unity

Now that the subplot of Lot's problematic presence has been addressed (from [Gen. 12:4](#) to [chapter 19](#)), there are still other themes in Avraham's story that need to be resolved.

- The promise of a chosen son who will be named "Yitskhaq" (from [Gen. 17-18](#)).
- The problematic presence of Hagar and Yishmael, whom Sarah doesn't like (from [Gen. 16](#)).
- The question of how Avraham is going to become a blessing to the nations around him ([Gen. 12, 14](#)).
- The promise that Avraham will inherit the land of the Canaanites ([Gen. 12, 13, 15, 17](#)).

Compositional Unity

These four stories are arranged in a symmetrical pattern, inviting the reader to relate the stories to one another and compare and contrast them.

Genesis 20:1-18

Avraham and King Avimelek: Round 1

- **20:13** Avraham asks Sarah to deceive others as an act of loyal love (חסד).
- **20:9-10** Avraham deceives Avimelek who disputes with him over the treachery.
- **20:16** Avimelek gives money to Avraham and Sarah to resolve what is disputed (יכח).
- **20:14** Avimelek “took flocks and herds ... and he gave them to Avraham.”

Genesis 21:1-21

Yitskhaq is born; Avraham loses his son to the wilderness

- **21:12-13** God allows the exile of Yishmael and Hagar.
- **21:14** Avraham rose early (וישכם) and took a water skin, setting it upon her shoulder.
- **21:17** The angel of Yahweh comes to rescue in the last minute.
- **21:15, 19** God spares Yishmael, who is under (תחת) a bush, by providing water.

Genesis 21:22-34

Avraham and King Avimelek: Round 2

- **21:23** Avimelek makes Avraham swear that he will act with loyal love (חסד).
- **21:25-27** Avraham thinks he’s been deceived and disputes with Avimelek over a stolen well.

Genesis 22:1-19

Yitskhaq is to die; Avraham loses and then regains his son

- **22:2** God asks Avraham to offer up Yitskhaq.
- **22:3, 6** Avraham rose early (וישכם) ... placing the wood upon Yitskhaq.
- **22:11** The angel of Yahweh comes to rescue in the last minute.
- **22:13** God spares Yitskhaq with a “ram” in the thicket that is offered “in his place” (תחת).

Genesis 20:1-22:19 (Detailed). Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Placement Within the Avraham Story as a Whole

The four stories in this unit have also been designed with an eye toward its arrangement. It is curious upon a first reading, until we realize that the stories have been organized to correspond to the sequence of stories in the previous large literary unit of the Avraham stories.

11:27-14:24			15:1-17:27			18:1-19:29		
11:27-12:5	12:6-13:18	14:1-24	15:1-21	16:1-16	17:1-27	18:1-15	18:16-33	19:1-29
12:10-20 Avram Deceives Pharaoh Re: Sarai			Sarah Exiles Hagar Because of Pregnancy			Avraham Chosen for Blessing to Nations on a High Place, Avraham Intercedes With Yahweh on Behalf of Sinful Sodom		
20:1-18 Avraham Deceives Avimelek Re: Sarah			21:1-21 Sarah Exiles Hagar and Yishma'el			21:22-34 Avimelek Makes a Covenant with Avraham, God's Chosen One 22:1-19 On a High Place, Avraham Offers a Sacrifice for His Sins		

Placement of Parts Within the Avraham Story. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

The story in [Genesis 20:1-18](#) is a clear replay of [12:10-20](#). In both stories, Avraham lies about Sarah being his sister, which results in her being taken by a foreign king. The innocence of both kings is highlighted, as is Avraham's guilt for the deception.

The story in [Genesis 21:1-21](#) is essentially part two of the Sarah versus Hagar rivalry. Now that Yitskhaq (Isaac) is born, the presence of Yishmael is a threat to Sarah. And so Hagar finds herself exiled once again, and once again God comes to her in the wilderness and provides rescue in the form of water.

The two stories in [Genesis 21:22-34](#) and [22:1-19](#) are connected to the episode of Avraham's intercession on behalf of the righteous in Sodom. In [Genesis 18:17-19](#), Yahweh speaks to himself about how he chose Avraham to be the vehicle of divine blessing to the nations. In the episode of [Genesis 21:22-34](#), Avimelek can see that this is true of Avraham, so he seeks to make a covenant of peace with him.

In [Genesis 18:16-33](#), Avraham uses his privileged role to gain an audience with Yahweh and intercedes on behalf of the innocent in Sodom, asking God to spare the city, which he overlooks from a high place. In [Genesis 22:1-19](#), Avraham is called to a high place where he is to offer up the life of his son as a sacrifice that will intercede for his own sins (against Hagar and the kings).

These repetitions allow the narrator to compare and contrast each story with earlier precedents in the life of Avraham, creating more nuance in the developing portrait of God's chosen one.

Avraham Endangers Sarah, Again

The story is designed with three main parts: a brief introduction to the main narrative actions ([Gen. 20:1-2](#)) followed by a large center panel with two longer dialogues, the first between God and Avimelek ([Gen. 20:3-7](#)), and the second between Avimelek and Avraham ([Gen. 20:8-13](#)). The third unit concludes the story by resolving each element of Avimelek's conflict with Avraham, with Sarah, and with God ([Gen. 20:14-18](#)).

Macro Design of Genesis 20:1-18

Genesis 20:1-2

- a - Avraham journeys to Gerar
- b - He lies about Sarah
- c - She is taken by King Avimelek

Genesis 20:3-7

Double Dialogue Between Elohim and Avimelek

- **20:3, 5** “And Elohim came to Avimelek in a dream of the night and said ... In the blamelessness of my heart **I have done this thing** (עשיתי זאת).”
- **20:6** “And Elohim said to him in a dream ...”

Genesis 20:8-13

Double Dialogue Between Avimelek and Avraham

- **20:9** “And Avimelek called to Avraham and said ... What is it that **you have done to us** ?! (מה עשית לנו)”
- **20:10** “And Avimelek said to Avraham ...”

Genesis 20:14-18

- c - Avimelek returns Sarah to Avraham
- b - Avimelek compensates them for any damages
- a - Avraham leaves Gerar

Genesis 20:1-18 (Detailed). Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

The double dialogues and the longer conclusion are designed to highlight Avimelek’s innocent motives in taking Sarah to be his wife. Each case of repetition or lengthening adds an element that makes Avimelek appear more righteous than Avraham.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 20:1-18

¹ And Avraham journeyed from there to the land of the Negev,
and he dwelt between Qadesh and between Shur,
and he was migrating in **Gerar**.

² And Avraham said about Sarah his wife,

“ **She is my sister** .”

And Avimelek king of **Gerar** sent
and he took Sarah.

Genesis 20:1-18. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

The short introduction in Genesis 20:1-2 assumes the reader’s knowledge of the story in Genesis 12:10-20, so it abbreviates details that can be inferred from the earlier episode. Avraham’s motives and the reasons for his sojourn can be omitted because the narrator assumes the reader will fill in the gaps with knowledge from the parallel story. This also allows the narrator to give more space to the main focus of this story, which is the contrast between Avimelek’s integrity and Avraham’s self-protective deception.

³ And **Elohim came to Avimelek in a dream** of the night,
and he said to him,

“Look, **you are about to die** ,
on account of **the wife** whom **you took** ,
as she is married to a husband.”

⁴ Now, Avimelek had not gone near to her, and he said,

a “My master, would you **murder** a nation that is also **righteous** ?

b ⁵ Didn’t he say to me,

‘ **She is my sister** .’

b’ And she also said,

‘ **He is my brother** .’

a’ In the **blamelessness of my heart** and by the **innocence** of my hands **I have done this** !”

⁶ And **Elohim said to him in a dream** ,

“I do know that in the **blamelessness of your heart** **you have done this** ,
so I, yes I, withheld you from committing **moral failure** against me.
This is why I did not allow you to touch her.

⁷ **And now** , **return** **the wife of the man** ,

because he is a prophet,

and **he can pray** on your behalf so that **you can have life** .

And if you don’t **return** **her** ,

know that **you will certainly die** , you and all that belongs to you.”

a ⁸ And Avimelek rose early in the morning,

b and he called to all his **servants** ,

b’ and he spoke all these words in their ears,

and the **men** were **afraid (יִירָאוּ)** , very much.

⁹ And Avimelek called to Abraham, and said to him,

a “ **What is it you have done to us** ?!

b What **moral failure** have I committed against you,

b' that you have brought upon me and upon my kingdom this great **moral failure** ?!

a' **Doings that should not be done, that's what you've done to me** !”

¹⁰ And Avimelek said to Abraham,

“ **What** did you **see** (ראית) , that **you have done this thing** ?”

¹¹ And Abraham said,

“It's because I said,

‘Surely there is no **fear** (יראת) of Elohim in this place,

so they will **murder** me on account of **my wife**.’

¹² And also, **she truly is my sister** ;

she's the daughter of my father,

just not the daughter of my mother,

so she became **my wife**.

¹³ And it came about when Elohim made me wander from the house of my father,

then I said to her,

‘This can be the loyal love that you do for me:

in whatever place to which we go, say of me,

“ **He is my brother** .””

¹⁴ **And Avimelek took** flocks and cattle and slaves and **female slaves**,

and **he gave** them to Abraham,

and **he returned** to him **Sarah his wife**.

¹⁵ And Avimelek said,

“Look, my land is before you.

Dwell where it is **good in your eyes** .”

¹⁶ And to Sarah he said,

“Look, I give one thousand silver to your brother.

Look, it is for you **a covering of the eyes** for all who are with you,

and as for everything, you are thus beyond dispute.”

¹⁷ And **Abraham prayed** to Elohim,

and Elohim healed Avimelek,

and **his wife, and his female slaves**,

and they gave birth,

¹⁸ because Yahweh had fully-restrained every womb in the house of Avimelek,

on account of **Sarah the wife** of Abraham.

Avraham the Deceiver

In this story, Avraham replays his deception of a foreign king from the story in Genesis 12:10-20. And while his own motives and reasoning are omitted by the narrator, we are meant to infer them from the parallel story in Genesis 12.

In the intervening chapters, however, Avraham has become a more dimensional character. In Genesis chapters 14 and 18, we saw Avraham play a role in God's purposes among the nations. Specifically, Avraham is God's chosen vehicle to bring blessing on the nations, yet he persists in deceiving the nations and putting his own wife at risk. In Genesis 18:16-33, we also learned that Avraham has been invited into the divine council, so his intercession is accepted by God and can influence the divine will. Instead of asking God for help or deliverance in Gerar, Avraham resorts to his old schemes.

Avimelek the Righteous King

In contrast to Avraham, Avimelek is depicted as a normal ancient Near Eastern king who takes wives as he chooses. Because Avraham has forfeited his role as God's intercessor in this moment, God comes "directly" to Avimelek in a dream. The dialogue between God and Avimelek makes clever use of the intertwined "failure" narratives from Genesis 3-9 and also of Avraham's intercession in Genesis 18:16-33 by comparing and contrasting the characters in this story with those of earlier narratives.

Avimelek is Unlike Adam and Eve

Genesis 20: Avimelek	Genesis 2-3: Adam & Eve
Gen. 20:2 Avraham said of Sarah, "She is my sister." And Avimelek king of Gerar sent and took (לקח) Sarah.	Gen. 3:6 And the woman (האשה) saw (ראה) that good (טוב) was the tree for eating, and desirable to the eyes ... and she took (לקח).
Gen. 20:3 "Look, you are dead (מת), on account of the woman whom you took." Gen. 20:7 "... And if you don't return her, do that you will certainly die (מות תמות) ..."	Gen. 2:17 "From the tree of knowing good and bad you must not eat, because in the day you eat from it, you will certainly die (מות תמות)."
Gen. 20:6 God said to him ... "I did not allow you to touch/strike (נגע)."	Gen. 3:3 "From the tree that is in the middle of the garden we cannot eat from it or touch it (נגע)."
Gen. 20:9 : Avimelek called out to (ויקרא ... ל) Avraham and said " What have you done to us (מה עשית לנו)?"	Gen. 3:9 And Yahweh called out to (ויקרא ... אל) the man ...
<i>Avimelek Unlike Adam and Eve. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).</i>	

Genesis 20: Avimelek	Genesis 2-3: Adam & Eve
	Gen. 3:13 And Yahweh said to the woman, "What is this you have done" (מה זאת עשית)?"
Gen. 20:15 And Avimelek said, "Behold, my land is before you, dwelt (ישב) in the good in your eyes (טוב בעיניך)."	Gen. 2:16 And Yahweh commanded (ויצו) the human ... Gen. 3:23 And Yahweh sent away (שלח) the human from the garden of Eden.
Gen. 20:16 "One thousand silver pieces ... let it be as a 'covering of the eyes' (כסות עינים) for you."	Gen. 3:5 "...in the day that you eat from it your eyes (עינים) will be opened ..."
<i>Avimelek Unlike Adam and Eve. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).</i>	

Avimelek is depicted as similar to the woman “taking” from the forbidden tree, which in this case turns out to be a woman, Avraham’s wife.

Unlike the Eden narrative, where God warned the humans beforehand about the death-dealing effects of taking from the tree, here God can only offer the same warning after the fact. This difference from the Eden story highlights Avimelek’s innocent motives in taking Sarah to be in his harem, but now it places the moment of decision before him. Now that he has “taken” the forbidden fruit, he has a chance to give it back!

Notice the contrast in how the two stories end: In Genesis 3, the humans break the divine command, take the fruit, and they are exiled. In Genesis 20, Avimelek does wrong, but not by breaking the divine command. And after the matter is addressed, Avraham, the real wrongdoer, is allowed to stay in the land as if it’s a new Eden.

Avraham is Like Cain and God is Like God

Avraham	Cain
Gen. 20:4 And [Avimelek] said, “My master, would you really murder (הרג) a righteous nation? Didn’t he say to me, ‘She is my sister (אחות) ?’ And didn’t she say, ‘He is my brother (אח) ?”	Gen. 4:6 And Yahweh said to Cain, “Why is there hot anger to you? And why has your face fallen? ⁷ If you do good, won’t there be lifting up? and if you do not do good, at the door, moral failure (חטאת) is a croucher, and its desire is for you, but you can rule it.” ⁸ And Cain spoke to Abel his brother (אח) , and it came about when they were in the field, and Cain rose up to Abel his brother (אח)
Gen. 20:9 And Avimelek called to Avraham and said, " What have you done (מה עשית) to us?! What was my moral failure (חטא) against you?! You brought upon me and upon my kingdom a	
<i>Avraham Like Cain. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).</i>	

Avraham	Cain
great moral failure (חטאה) ! Doings that should not be done, that's what you've done (עשית) to me!"	and he murdered (הרג) him.
Gen. 20:11-12 And Avraham said, "It's because I said, 'Indeed there's no fear of Elohim in this place, and they will murder (הרג) me on behalf of my wife. And also, she really is my sister (אחות) ..."	⁹ And Yahweh said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother (אח) ?" and he said, "I do not know. Am I the keeper of my brother (אח) ?"
	¹⁰ And he said, "What have you done (מה עשית) !?"
<i>Avraham Like Cain.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).	

God comes to confront Avimelek about Avraham’s “sister,” just as he confronted Cain about his “brother.” But Avimelek’s innocent motives are on his side, so he appeals to God with a pure heart.

Avimelek accuses Avraham of acting like a careless Cain, whose “moral failure” regarding his so-called “sister” (spelled with same letters as “brother” in Hebrew) almost led to the “murder” of the innocent.

Cain's sin against his brother was the first step leading up to the flood. Avraham’s sin against Avimelek also leads to a severe flood-like judgment featuring the scarcity of wombs rather than the abundance of water (Gen. 20:18).

Avimelek Becomes His Own Intercessor

Avimelek in Genesis 20 20:4: "My master, would you really murder a righteous (צדיק) nation?!" 20:5: "In the blamelessness (תם) of my heart (לבב) and the innocence of my hands I did this!" 20:6: "I know that you did this in the blamelessness (תם) of your heart (לבב) ..."	Noakh in Genesis 6:5, 8-9 And Yahweh saw that multiplied was the badness of humanity in the land, and every purpose of the plans of his heart (לבב) was only bad all the day... But Noakh found favor in the eyes of Yahweh ... Noakh was a righteous one (צדיק), blameless (תם) in his generation; Noakh walked with Elohim ... Avraham in 18:23-25 And Avraham drew near, and said, "Are you really about to sweep away the righteous (צדיק) along with the wicked?" ... "Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put to death (מות) the righteous (צדיק) along with the wicked, so that the righteous (צדיק) and wicked become alike! Far be it from you! Shouldn't the justice-bringer of all the land do justice?"
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Avimelek, His Own Intercessor. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Avimelek makes the same appeal to God that Avraham did when he interceded for the righteous in Sodom. He appeals to God's justice, asking him to take account of the fact that Avraham deceived him. His "heart" was "blameless" unlike the generation of the flood whose "heart" was "only bad all the time" (Gen. 6:5).

And just as God accepted both Noah and Avraham's intercession, God acknowledges Avimelek's innocence and gives him a new command that will test his character: He must give Sarah back to Avraham.

Avraham's Prophetic Intercession for the Womb

Even though Avraham is a deceiver, he is God's deceiver, the one to whom God has made many promises. Notice that God does not abandon Avraham, but rather he intervenes to set right what Avraham did wrong, and then he directs Avimelek to go to Avraham for prayer and healing.

This is the first story of "healing" (רפא) in the Bible. Notice the connection between the key words and ideas here.

Genesis 20:7, 17 Instructor's Translation

⁷ And now, return the wife of the man,
 because he is a prophet,
 and he can pray on your behalf so that you can have life.
 And if you don't return her,
 know that you will certainly die, you and all that belongs to you."

...

¹⁷ And Avraham prayed to Elohim,

and Elohim healed Avimelek,
and his wife, and his female slaves,
and they gave birth,

Notice the parallel sequences of verbs.

- 20:7: **return the wife** > pray > **have life**
- 20:17: **return the wife** > pray > **healing and birth**

The story makes a close connection between the prophetic role of Avraham among the nations—their treatment of him will bring about either life or death, fertility or infertility, healing or sickness. And Avraham is given a privileged role among the nations, despite his deceptive behavior. This whole story explores the complicated role of God’s chosen people among the nations; the nations’ treatment of Avraham determines their fate.

17 **and Yahweh said,**

“Should I hide from Avraham **what I am about to do** ?

18 For Avraham will certainly become **a nation great** and powerful,
and **all nations** of the land will discover **blessing** through him;

19 Indeed, **I have known** him,

so that he would command his sons and his house after him,

that they should **keep the way of Yahweh,**

by **doing what is right and just**

so that Yahweh will bring upon Avraham what he has spoken about him.”

Genesis 18:16-33. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Prophetic Intercession and the Life of Eden

Avraham is given a privileged role as God’s prophetic-representative among the nations. This sets the paradigm for the role of the prophet that will continue to develop throughout the Hebrew Bible.

This concluding line also creates irony: Avraham was able to intercede for the infertile wombs of other people, but he never did this on behalf of his own wife. But now that he has done so, Sarah instantly becomes pregnant and gives birth (Gen. 20:1). This leads us directly into the next story.

Reflection Question

How do you reconcile the discomfort that arises when God continues to bless Avraham even when Avraham deceives and misuses others around him?

Session 21: Isaac's Birth

Key Takeaways

- The biblical authors use literary design and key linking words to both convey Sarah's joy and echo her doubt at the birth of Yitskhaq.
- As we think about how to approach these stories, the macro view is just as important to consider as the micro view.
- When God's chosen partners behave unjustly, God must work in compromised circumstances to accomplish his purposes with and through these partners.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 21:1-7

A
a 1 **Now, Yahweh visited Sarah,**
b just as he said ,
a' and **Yahweh did for Sarah,**
b' just as he spoke .
a" 2 And **Sarah became pregnant** and **gave birth** to a **son** **for Avraham** **in his old age** ,
b" at the appointed time **that Yahweh had spoken** to him.

B
a 3 And Avraham called the name of **his son** ,
b the one **born for him** ,
b' whom Sarah had **born for him** ,
a' **Yitskhaq** (= " **Laughter** ")
a 4 And Avraham **circumcised** (וימל) **Yitskhaq** **his son** ,
b a **son** of eight days,
c **just as Elohim commanded** him.
b' 5 And Avraham was a **son** of **one hundred years** ,
a' when **Yitskhaq** his **son** was **born for him** .

A'
6 And **Sarah** said,
"Elohim has made **laughter** for me!
Everyone who hears will **laugh** with me!"
7 And she said,
" **Who would have told** (מי מלל) Avraham that Sarah would nurse **sons** ?

But I have **given birth for him** **in his old age**!”

Genesis 21:1-21. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

God’s Promise Fulfilled and Sarah’s Tenuous Belief

The three-step design of this paragraph contrasts Yahweh’s actions and Avraham’s actions with Sarah’s response.

Genesis 21:1-2

A - **God** Acts Upon **Sarah** (Her Name is Repeated 3x)

Genesis 21:3-5

B - **Avraham Acts Upon Yitskhaq**: Giving of a Name and Circumcision

Genesis 21:6-7

A' - **Sarah** Speaks About **God**

Genesis 21:1-7. Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Notice the emphasis in each sub-unit on the spoken word of Yahweh that promised the birth of a son, “... just as Yahweh said ... just as Yahweh spoke ... just as *Elohim* commanded.”

This emphasis on Yahweh’s fulfillment of the promise makes us evaluate Sarah’s words in a deeper way. Her question, “Who would have told Avraham that Sarah would nurse sons?” is easily answered: “Yahweh told you both, back in Genesis chapter 18!”

In other words, Sarah’s response is first grateful (“laughter”), but the key word “laugh” reminds us of Avraham’s laughter that demonstrated his lack of trust in Yahweh back in Genesis 17:17.

Genesis 17:17 Instructor’s Translation

And Avraham fell on his face, and he laughed (= *yitskhaq*) and said in his heart, “Will there be a birth for a son of a hundred years?! Or Sarah, a daughter of ninety years, she will give birth?!”

Sarah’s laughter can be understood in two ways.

1. At first her laughter seems to be a celebration of God’s generosity toward her (“*Elohim* has made laughter for me!”).
2. But, like Avraham, laughter can be a response of unbelief, as if she simply can’t believe that this was the work of Yahweh to fulfill the covenant promise. Thus her question, “Who would have told ...” seems to be more than simply rhetorical. The obvious answer to her question is “God told you!” Sarah’s laughter seems to indicate an abiding lack of trust in the promise of God.

Yitskhaq, Circumcision, and Echoes of Noah's Obedience

This unit is riddled with allusions to the flood narrative and to Genesis 17, an earlier Avraham narrative that also echoed the flood narrative. Avraham is obedient to the divine command given in Genesis 17:9-14 that everyone in his family should be circumcised as a sign of God's covenant with them.

God's Promises and Commands Spoken to Noah and Avraham	God's Promises and Commands Fulfilled
God's Promise Spoken to Noah Gen. 6:17-18 "Look, I am going to bring the flood (המבול) of water upon the land ... to ruin all flesh, which has in it the breath of life, from under the skies, everything that is on the land will expire, and I will set up my covenant with you; and you will go into the ark." Gen. 6:20 "Of the birds after their kind, and of the animals after their kind, of every creeping thing of the ground after its kind, two of every kind will go to you ..."	God's Promise Fulfilled Gen. 7:6 And Noah was six hundred years old, and the flood (המבול) of waters came upon the land. Gen. 7:15-16 And they went to Noah, into the ark, two by two, from all flesh in which was the breath of life, and those going, male and female of all flesh, went as Elohim had commanded him.
God's Command Spoken to Noah Gen. 6:14 "Make for yourself an ark of gopher trees ..." Gen. 6:18-19 "And I will set up my covenant with you; and you will go into the ark, you and your sons and your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing of all flesh."	God's Command Obeyed Gen. 6:22 And Noah did according to all that Elohim had commanded him , so he did. Gen. 7:5 And Noah did according to all that Yahweh had commanded him .
God's Promise Spoken to Avraham Gen. 17:15-16 "Her name is Sarah . And I will bless her, and also, I will give to you from her a son ." Gen. 17:21 "... Yitskhaq, whom Sarah will birth for you at this appointed time in the year after ."	God's Promise Fulfilled Gen. 21:1-2 Now, Yahweh visited Sarah, just as he said , and Yahweh did for Sarah, just as he spoke . And Sarah became pregnant and gave birth to a son for Avraham in his old age, at the appointed time that Yahweh had spoken to him .
God's Command Spoken to Avraham Gen. 17:10 "This is my covenant that y'all will keep, between me and between y'all, and between your seed after you: circumcise (המול) for yourselves every male."	God's Command Obeyed Gen. 21:3 And Avraham called the name of his son , the one born for him, whom Sarah had birthed for him, Yitskhaq (Laughter).
<i>Echoes of Noah's Obedience. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).</i>	

God's Promises and Commands Spoken to Noah and Avraham

God's Promises and Commands Fulfilled

Gen. 17:19 And Elohim said, "Nonetheless, Sarah your wife will birth for you a son, **and you will call his name 'Yitskhaq'** (Laughter), and I will establish my covenant with him."

Gen. 21:4 **And Avraham circumcised Yitskhaq** his son, a son of eight days, **just as Elohim commanded him**.

Echoes of Noah's Obedience. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

In the flood story, God's promise of a coming flood (*hamabbul* / המבול) was fulfilled, and God commanded Noah to build and board the ark to keep his family and the animals alive. The fulfillment of and the obedience to the divine word are both registered in the narrative.

In Avraham's story, God's promise of a coming son was fulfilled, and God commands Avraham to give his son a specific name and to circumcise (*himmol* / המול) him. Both fulfillments and the obedience to the divine command are registered in the narrative.

In this way, Yitskhaq's arrival and his circumcision strike the note of the flood narrative and mark this unit as a hinge narrative that concludes the thematic cycle and also begins a new thematic cycle.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 21:8-13

⁸ And the child **grew big** (גדל) and he was **weaned** (יגמל),
and Avraham made a **big** (גדול) **feast**,
on the day that **Yitskhaq** (יצחק) was **weaned** (הגמל).

A ⁹ And **Sarah saw** the **son** of Hagar the Egyptian,
the one she **had born for Avraham**,
making **laughter** (מצחק),

B ¹⁰ **and she said to Avraham**,
"Banish this **slave woman** and **her son**,
because he will not inherit, this **son** of this **slave woman**,
along with **my son**, along with **Yitskhaq** (יצחק)!"

A' ¹¹ And the matter was very much **evil in the eyes of Avraham**,
on account of **his son**.

12 **And Elohim said to Avraham,**
 “Don’t let it be **evil in your eyes** ,
 about the **young boy** and about your **slave woman** .
 Everything that Sarah says to you;
 listen to her voice,
 because it’s by **Yitskhaq (יצחק)** that your **seed** will be called.
 13 And also, the **son of the slave woman** ,
I will make him into a nation ,
 because he is your **seed** .”

Genesis 21:1-21. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Rival Wives and the Tree of Knowing Good and Bad

This scene recalls its earlier parallel in Genesis 16, when Avraham and Sarah abuse and oppress Hagar in the first place, resulting in her pregnancy and the birth of Yishmael. But it also recalls Genesis 2-4, specifically the folly of Eve, Adam’s complicity in her folly, and the banishing of the unchosen son.

Seeing and the Eyes

Genesis 21:9 Instructor’s Translation

And Sarah saw (ותרא) ...

Genesis 16:3-4 Instructor’s Translation

And Sarai took (ותקח) Hagar and she gave (ותתן) her to Avram ... and Hagar saw (ותרא) ...

Genesis 3:6 Instructor’s Translation

And the woman saw (ותרא) ... and she took (ותקח) ... and she gave (ותתן) to her husband ...

Genesis 21:11 Instructor’s Translation

And it was bad in the eyes (רע ... בעיני) of Avraham ...

Genesis 16:4 Instructor’s Translation

And [Hagar] saw (ותרא) that she was pregnant and her mistress was cursed in her eyes (בעיניה) ...

Genesis 16:6 Instructor’s Translation

Avram said to Sarai, “... Do to Hagar what is good in your eyes (טוב ... בעיניך)”

Genesis 3:6 Instructor’s Translation

And the woman saw that the tree was good (טוב) for eating and desirable to the eyes (לעינים) ...

Listening and the Voice

Genesis 21:12 Instructor's Translation

Listen to the voice (שמע + בקול) of Sarah ...

Genesis 3:17 Instructor's Translation

Because you listened to the voice (שמע + לקול) of your wife ...

Banishing

Genesis 21:10 Instructor's Translation

Banish (גרש) the slave woman and her son ...

Genesis 3:24 Instructor's Translation

And Yahweh *Elohim* banished (גרש) the human from the garden ...

Genesis 4:14 Instructor's Translation

Look, today you have banished (גרש) me from the face of the ground.

In [Genesis 3](#), the woman does what is good in her eyes and her husband participates. In [Genesis 16](#), Sarah and Avraham do the same. In [Genesis 21](#) however, the situation is more complex, because God has committed himself to the lineage born through Sarah and not through Hagar. He will still bless and provide for Hagar's son, but Yitskhaq is the chosen son.

God acquiesces to Sarah's selfish behavior, telling Avraham to "listen to her voice." In both [Genesis 3](#) and [16](#), the man listening to the voice of his wife is a negative thing. How should it be evaluated here?

Now God commits to both Avraham and Sarah but also to Hagar, based on the divine promise to bless her son as well ([Gen. 16:10](#)). It's as if God knows that Sarah will not tolerate having a rival wife and son around, and, in the interests of protecting Hagar and Yishmael, God allows them to be expelled. The fact that this is immediately followed by God's rescue of Hagar and Yishmael shows that he has their well-being in mind, even if it means a painful separation. This itself finds a certain analogy with the Eden narrative, as God expels the very humans that he wanted to bless. And so even the act of separation includes a hidden promise of blessing that focuses on the seed ([Gen. 3:15](#) and [21:13](#)).

Reflection Question

Sarah demands Avraham send Hagar and Yishmael away, and God tells Avraham to listen to the voice of his wife. What does this episode tell us about Avraham, about Sarah, and about God?

Session 22: Abraham's Covenant with Abimelech

Key Takeaways

- The biblical authors place these two episodes alongside each other, strongly linked with key words and themes, in order to highlight their differences.
- The family of God can act arrogantly about their chosen status, driving the nations away, or they can, through covenant, reconcile and live together in peace and blessing.
- The line of the chosen has a specific purpose that doesn't have to do with whether they're righteous or not—it has to do with the promise of the snake-crusher.
- Comparing literary units with each other is the Bible's way of being its own commentary, leading us to deeper layers of meaning.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 21:14-21

¹⁴ And Avraham rose early in the morning,
and he took bread and a **skin of water** ,
and he gave to Hagar,
placing upon her shoulder, and the **child** ,
and **he sent her away** (וישלחה),

and **she went** (ותלך)
and she wandered **in the wilderness** of **Beer-Sheva (= "Well of Seven ")**
¹⁵ and the **water finished from the skin** ,
and **she cast** (ותשלך) the **child** under one of the bushes,

¹⁶ and **she went** (ותלך)
and **she sat for herself a distance away** ,
going as far as people can **shoot a bow** ,
because she said,
" **I can't see** the death of the **child** ."
And **she sat a distance away** ,
and she lifted up **her voice** ,
and she wept.

¹⁷ And **Elohim heard the voice of the** **young boy** ,

and the messenger of Elohim called to Hagar from the skies,
and he said to her,

"What is it that concerns you, Hagar?

Don't be afraid,

because **Elohim has heard the voice of the young boy**, in the place where he is.

¹⁸ Get up, pick up the **young boy**,

and take him with your hand,

because **I will make him a nation, a great one (גדול).**"

¹⁹ And Elohim **opened her eyes**,

and she saw a **well of water**,

and **she went (ותלך)** and **she filled the skin of water**,

and she had the young one drink.

²⁰ And Elohim was with the **young boy**,

and **he grew big (גדל)** and **he dwelt in the wilderness**,

and he was a **shooter of the bow**.

²¹ and **he dwelt in the wilderness** of Paran.

And his mother took for him a wife from the land of Egypt.

Genesis 21:1-21. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

A Flood of Eden Water in the Desert

The echoes of the Eden and flood narratives in this story are subtle but powerful, and they set up important comparisons between these stories that give depth and insight into this episode.

Echoes of Eden Water

Creation of Eden	Re-Creation of Hagar and Yishmael
Begins with a lack of water: Gen. 2:5 "There weren't yet any bushes (שיח) in the land ... for Yahweh Elohim had not yet caused any rain upon the land."	Begins with a lack of water: Gen. 21:14-15 "And she wandered in the wilderness of Beer-Sheva, and the waters were finished from the water skin, so she cast the child under one of the bushes (שיח)."
Gen. 2:6 "But a stream would come up out of the land and it would provide water (והשקה) for all the face of the land."	Gen. 21:19 "And she saw a well of water, and she went and filled the water skin and she provided water (ותשק) for the child."
Echoes of Eden Water. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).	

Creation of Eden	Re-Creation of Hagar and Yishmael
Gen. 2:24 "And a man will leave his father and mother and become joined to his wife ..."	Gen. 21:21 "And his mother took for him a wife from the land of Egypt."
<i>Echoes of Eden Water.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).	

God provides life-giving water for Hagar and Yishmael in the waterless desert by means of a “well of seven,” which leads to the provision of a wife for the son. This sequence maps onto both the first and last moments of the opening movement of the Eden narrative, which also begins with God’s provision of water in the wilderness (Gen. 2:4-6) and concludes with the provision of a wife (Gen. 2:24).

The point here is that God provides an “Eden blessing” for the non-chosen son separate from the chosen line in the promised land.

Floodwater Images

The Flood	Hagar and Yishmael in the Wilderness
Gen. 8:2 And the rain was restrained (ויכלא) from the skies. Gen. 8:5 And the waters were continually (היו הלוד) decreasing.	Gen. 21:15 And the waters were finished (ויכלו) from the water skin.
Gen. 9:1 And Elohim blessed Noah saying, "Be fruitful and multiply (רבה) ." Gen. 9:12-15 "This is the sign of the covenant ... between me and you and every living creature ... I have set my bow (קשת) in the skies ... never again will the waters become a flood, and the bow (קשת) I will see, to remember the eternal covenant."	Gen. 21:16 And she cast the child under one of the bushes and she went and sat as far as the shot of a bow (קשת) . Gen. 21:20 And the young boy grew up and dwelt in the wilderness and he was a shooter of a bow (קשת רבה) .
<i>Floodwater Images.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).	

Noah and his family are rescued from the flood of too much water and given a covenant sign of the bow to remember God’s promise. Hagar and Yishmael are rescued from not having any water and given protection and promise. The words “bow” and “multiply” are homonyms in Hebrew, different words spelled with the same letters, and this is a key linking word that ties the two narratives together.

Avraham Loses His Firstborn Son ... First

This story and the following story of the binding of Yitskhaq in [Genesis 22](#) are the narrative culminations of Avraham's many failed tests. The sin of Avraham and Sarah against Hagar that began in [Genesis 16](#) has created a conflict that has boiled over in [chapter 21](#). And while God allows them to expel Hagar and her son, the expulsion is depicted on analogy to the near loss of Yitskhaq that will soon follow.

It's as if God is finally requiring of Avraham the consequences of his and Sarah's failures. The following list of parallels between the two stories shows a clearly intended analogy.

Genesis 21:8-21	Genesis 22:1-19
Gen. 21:12-13 God orders Yishmael and Hagar's expulsion	Gen. 22:1 God orders the sacrifice of Yitskhaq
Gen. 21:14 And Avraham woke early in the morning (וישכם אברהם בבקר).	Gen. 22:3 And Avraham woke early in the morning (וישכם אברהם בבקר).
Gen. 21:14 And he took (ויקח) bread and a skin of water and he gave to Hagar setting upon her shoulder (שם על שכמה).	Gen. 22:6 And Avraham took (ויקח) the wood of the burnt offering and he set upon (וישם על) Yitskhaq.
Gen. 21:15 And she cast the child under one of the bushes (תחת אחד השיחים).	Gen. 22:13 And behold, a ram behind (אחר) in the bush/thicket ... and he offered it in the place of (תחת) his son.
Gen. 21:16 And she sat far away (הרחק) ... for she said, "I will not look (ראה) upon the death of the child."	Gen. 22:4 And he saw (ראה) the place [of Yitskhaq's death] from afar (מרחק).
Gen. 21:17 And the angel of God called to Hagar from the heavens.	Gen. 22:11 And the angel of Yahweh called to him from the heavens.
Gen. 21:17 "Don't be afraid (ירא)."	Gen. 22:12 "Now I know that you fear (ירא) God."
Gen. 21:18a "Pick up the young man (הנער) and grab (חזק) him with your hand (ידך)."	Gen. 22:12-13 "Don't send out your hand (ידך) against the young man (הנער) ... a ram caught/grabbed (אחז) by the bush."
Gen. 21:18b "I will make him into a great nation."	Gen. 22:17 "Your offspring will be like the stars in

Avraham Loses His Firstborn Son. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Genesis 21:8-21	Genesis 22:1-19
	the sky and the dust of the land."
Gen. 21:19 And God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water.	Gen. 22:13 And Avraham lifted his eyes and saw, a ram caught in the bush by his horns.
Gen. 21:33 And he planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba.	Gen. 22:19 And Avraham dwelt in Beersheba.
<i>Avraham Loses His Firstborn Son. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).</i>	

In both stories, God saves Avraham’s sons from the death that was set in motion by God’s own commands—first to expel Yishmael, second to offer Yitskhaq as a sacrifice.

Both crises are resolved by God providing a solution (water and a ram) at the last moment to a parent who has surrendered to the inevitability of death.

At each point, Avraham’s experience in [Genesis 22](#) is a reversal of Hagar’s experience with Yishmael.

In both stories, God is the one who allows/causes the loss of the son, and in both stories it is God who intervenes at the moment of crisis (an “angel of Yahweh calling from the skies”) to deliver the son from death.

In these two narratives, Avraham is forced to give up both of his sons to death, and in both he provides them with items that will play a role in their reversal from death: Yishmael with the skin bottle, and Yitskhaq with the wood on his back.

This tragic loss of Yishmael is a result of Avram and Sarai’s sin in [Genesis 16](#), resulting in a sibling rivalry pattern:

- Sarai and Hagar are rival wives angered over each other’s offspring.
- Yishmael and Yitskhaq are rival brothers. Like Qayin and Hevel/Seth, the firstborn will be banished to live in the wilderness, but unlike Qayin, the irrational anger belongs to Yitskhaq's mother.

This story pushes forward the paradoxical status of being the chosen son, which forces other brothers to reckon with their own non-chosen status, and which puts the chosen one in danger.

In the case of Yitskhaq, Yishmael’s story sets our expectations that Avraham will have to “give up” Yitskhaq too in some way. As in the story of Yishmael, it is precisely through the “giving over” of the promised son to death that the divine covenant purpose is fulfilled.

Both sons are appointed as carriers of a future legacy, though in this case their descendants will be rival kin living separated from each other.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 21:22-34

22 And it came about at that time,
that **Avimelek said, and Phikol, captain of his army**, to Avraham, saying,

"Elohim is with you in all that you are doing!

23 And now, **swear an oath (שבע)** to me by Elohim!

Look, if you deal falsely with me or my offspring or descendants ...

According to the loyal love that I have done to you,

so you will deal with me,

and with **the land that you have migrated within**."

24 And Avraham said,

"I will **swear an oath (שבע)**."

a 25 And Avraham disputed with Avimelek,

b on account of a **well of water**

a' that the servants of Avimelek had stolen.

26 And Avimelek said,

a **"I don't know who did this thing!**

b And also, you didn't report it to me!

a' And also, I never heard of it until today!"

27 And **Avraham** took sheep and oxen,

and he gave to **Avimelek**,

and **the two of them cut a covenant**.

28 And Avraham set up **seven (שבע)** female lambs of the flock alone,

29 and Avimelek said to Avraham,

"What are these **seven (שבע)** female lambs that you have set up alone?"

30 And he said,

"Because the **seven (שבע)** female lambs you will take from my hand,

so that it will become a **witness (עדה)** on my behalf,

that I dug this **well**."

a 31 For this reason, one calls that place **"Beer - Sheva"** [**Well** of **Seven (שבע)**]

b because there **the two of them swore an oath (שבע)**.

a' 32 And **they cut a covenant** at **Beer - Sheva**,

and **Avimelek got up, and Phikol the captain of his army**,

and they returned to **the land of the Philistines**,

³³ and he planted a tamarisk tree at Beer - Sheva ,
and he called on the name of Yahweh, El-eternal.

³⁴ And he was a migrant in the land of the Philistines for many days.

Genesis 21:22-34. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Rival Families Make Peace Through a Covenant

On the most basic level, the episode is designed in a three-step sequence, indicated by the narrative flow and by the repetition of key words. A simple plot analysis illuminates the basic dynamics of the story.

1. Conflict: The leaders of the Philistines feel threatened by God's blessing and invite Avraham to make a covenant of peace with them.
2. Conflict escalates: Avraham brings up the matter of a disputed well that further aggravates their conflict, and both matters are resolved through a covenant.
3. Resolution: After the two rivals are unified through a covenant, Avraham plants a tree and meets with Yahweh at the tree.

This is a story about two rival "brothers," each of whom feels threatened by the other. The Philistines recognize God's blessing on Avraham ("Elohim is with you in all that you do"), and instead of initiating conflict, they invite Avraham into a covenant of peace. This recalls the promise of [Genesis 12:1-3](#), which says, "Those who bless you will be blessed ... all the families of the land will find blessing by means of you."

Avraham, on the other hand, brings up a disputed matter about a water source in the wilderness. But here too, Avimelek shows himself favorable to Avraham as he confesses his ignorance about the well.

The result: The expected result when two rival families are in conflict over resources is violence, but in this case, the families achieve peace through just dealings that lead to a covenant of peace. The story ends with Eden imagery (Avraham meets with Yahweh under a tree he planted), showing matters have reached an ideal resolution.

Rival Tribes, Rival Brothers, and Wells of Seven

When we zoom out and see [Genesis 21:22-34](#) in a wider context, new elements of the story are highlighted and come into the foreground.

Genesis 20:1-18

A - Avraham and Avimelek: Conflict Caused by Deception

- Abe deceives Avi regarding his wife
- Avi is innocent of wrongdoing and returns Abe's wife
- Abe intercedes for the bound wombs of Avi's wives

Genesis 21:1-21

B - Avraham Loses His Son Yishmael, Whose Life Is Spared by God

- Yitskhaq is born
- Sarah and Yitskhaq separate from Hagar and Yishmael
- Avraham sends mother and son to die in wilderness
- God provides **water of life ("Well of Seven")** to save the endangered son
- God will make Yishmael into a great nation

Genesis 21:22-34

A' - Avraham and Avimelek: Conflict Resolved by Covenant

- Avi approaches Abe to make a covenant and **oath of loyalty at the well of seven**
- Avi is innocent of wrongdoing and returns to Abe's well
- Abe meets Yahweh at a sacred tree by the **Well of Seven**

Genesis 22:1-19

B' - Avraham Loses His Son Yitskhaq, Whose Life Is Spared by God

- Yitskhaq is about to die
- Sarah and Avraham are to separate from Yitskhaq
- Avraham is to give Yitskhaq over to death on Mount Moriah
- God provides a substitute ram to save the endangered son
- God will bless all nations through Avraham's seed
- Avraham retires with his son to the **Well of Seven**

Genesis 20:1-22:19 Symmetry. Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

This group of stories is arranged in a forward symmetry that invites us to compare and contrast each one to the other for greater insight.

The two stories about Avraham and Avimelek in Genesis 20:1-18 and 21:22-34 have a remarkable number of similarities and important differences. Both stories begin with Avraham's presence in the land of the Philistines leading to some kind of conflict that is resolved through confession and covenant.

In Genesis 20, Avraham creates the conflict through deception about Sarah, and Avimelek innocently takes a woman that doesn't belong to him. God's chosen one ends up bringing a curse of infertility (i.e., death) onto the nations because of his sin.

In Genesis 21, Avimelek recognizes Avraham as God's chosen one and wants to share in God's blessing through him, so he makes a covenant. When Avraham mentions that Avimelek has stolen his well, Avimelek is ignorant and innocent, but he makes an overture to create peace. God's chosen one ends up sharing God's blessing with the nations through a covenant.

The two stories about the loss and recovery of Yishmael (Gen. 21:1-21) and Yitskhaq (Gen. 22:1-19) show a remarkable number of similarities and differences as well.

Both stories result in near death and surprising rescue of Avraham's sons, and both stories are the sad result of Avraham and Sarah's sin against Hagar in [Genesis 16](#).

In [Genesis 21](#), God allows Hagar to be expelled by Sarah, and Avraham sends the mother and son into the wilderness to die. But God, through a messenger, rescues the endangered son and provides water in the wilderness. The rescued son will be blessed and become a great nation.

In [Genesis 22](#), God tests Avraham by asking him to surrender Yitskhaq as a sacrifice. But God, through a messenger, rescues the endangered son by providing a substitute sacrifice. The rescued son will become a source of blessing for all other nations.

The two stories of conflict and rivalry in [Genesis 21:1-21](#) and [21:22-34](#) are both resolved at Beer-Sheva, the "Well of Seven."

In [Genesis 21:1-21](#), the rivalry between the wives and son leads to a near death in the wilderness because of no water. It is precisely the water that provides the transition from death to life.

In [Genesis 21:22-34](#), the exact same water becomes a source of rivalry that is resolved by a covenant of peace.

Sibling Rivalry Resolved in an Eden Place

The story of Avraham and Avimelek's conflict and covenant is also hyperlinked to the entire network of earlier stories about family rivalries that result in separation. And these rivalry stories are themselves rooted all the way back in the story of the splitting of the one human to become two.

Adam and Eve in the Garden

In the garden of Eden (גן עדן), the human is alone (לבדו), so God causes sleep to fall on the human so that one side (צלע) can be taken and built into another human, and now the two (שניהם) are meant to become one flesh (בשר אחד). The two of them (שניהם) are naked and have no shame.

Qayin and Hevel at the Door of Eden

At the door (פתח) of Eden, two brothers bring offering. The younger son is favored by God, and the elder son gets angry and murders God's chosen one, the younger sibling. Qayin, the non-chosen, is banished (גרש).

Noah's Sons in the Garden Tent

In the tent (אהל) in Noah's vineyard (כרם), while Noah is asleep from wine, the youngest son attempts to usurp the position of the older brothers through illicit sex. When he informs his older brothers, the two of them (שניהם) cover the shameful nakedness, and the father blesses the tent (אהל) of the middle son Shem, and the brothers separate (פרד).

Avraham and Lot in the Promised Land

Avraham and his nephew Lot are living in the promised land, but it cannot support them and their flocks living together as one (יחדו). There is a dispute (ריב) between the brothers, and Lot separates (פרד) from Avraham to go live in Sodom, which he considers to be like the garden (גן) of Eden.

Hagar and Yishmael

Sarah and Yitskhaq are the chosen ones, and in angry jealousy Sarah wants the non-chosen Hagar and Yishmael to be banished (גרש). They wander in the desert, where God provides Eden-like water for them.

Avraham and Avimelek

Avraham is approached by Avimelek at the Well of Seven (Beer-Sheva). There is a dispute (הוכח) over a well, and their conflict is resolved when the two of them (שניהם) make a covenant (ברית) by Avraham setting lambs "alone" (לבדהו). Then Avraham plants a sacred tree where he meets with Yahweh.

In Genesis 2-3, it is precisely the splitting of the human to become more than one that creates the possibility of conflict. Genesis 2:24 becomes an ideal portrait, when the two who are different from one another become one through covenant and live at peace, without shame.

The breakdown of the human family in Genesis 1-11 is a whole series of distortions of this ideal, as different people and families begin a cycle of rivalry, conflict, and separation.

- Adam and Eve at the tree
- Cain and Abel at the door of Eden
- Lemek in the city
- Noah's sons in the tent
- Avraham and Lot in the land

The story about Avraham and Avimelek in Genesis 21 is a dramatic reversal of this theme. In this case, the nations recognize God's chosen one and decide to make peace through covenant so that they can share in God's blessing. When the dispute arises, we expect that violent conflict, or at least separation, will occur. But instead Avimelek makes an offer of covenantal peace, and Avraham is able to negotiate his dispute with the nations.

This story shows Avraham not only reversing his deception of Avimelek, but points forward to how the blessing of Avraham will be mediated to the nations through a covenant of peace.

But there is one more step in this section of stories that contributes to this theme of blessing for the nations. If Avraham found resolution with Avimelek, there is still the outstanding issue of his and Sarah's sin against Hagar. How can Avraham mediate God's blessing to the nations if he and his wife are in fact abusers of the immigrant in their midst? It is to this that the narrative now turns in Genesis 22.

Reflection Question

Based on Genesis 21:14-34, what does it look like for God's family to act as a blessing to the nations?

Session 23: Abraham's Ultimate Test

Key Takeaways

- Moriah means “seeing,” and it’s a strong thematic connection to the test in the garden of Eden.
- The theme of the test in the Bible has two sides: positively, it can be an opportunity to prove loyalty and preparedness; negatively, it can be a temptation or a trap.
- God commands Avraham to offer Yitskhaq as a “going-up” offering—a whole offering of total surrender.
- The New Testament links Jesus’ trial in the garden of Gethsemane to the test Avraham faces in Genesis 22.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 22:1-19

¹ And it came about after these things,
that Elohim tested Avraham,

and he said to him,
“Avraham.”

And he said,
“Look, it’s me!”

² And he said,
“Please **take** **your son** ,
your only one ,
whom you love ,
Yitskhaq ,
and get yourself going to the land of **Moriah [“Seeing” = (מריה)]** ,
and **make him go up there as a going-up offering** ,
on one of **the mountains which I will say to you** .”

³ And Avraham rose early in the morning,
and he bound up his **donkey** ,
and he **took**
two of his **young men** with him
and **Yitskhaq his son** ,
and he split the **wood** of **the going-up offering** ,
and he arose and he went to **the place which Elohim said to him** .

4 On the third day,
then Avraham **lifted his eyes** ,
and he saw (ראה) **the place** from a distance.

5 And Avraham said to his young men,
"Sit yourselves here with the **donkey**,
and I and the **young boy**,
we will go to there,
and **we will** worship,
and **we will** return to you."

6 And Avraham took the **wood** of **the going-up offering** ,
and he placed upon **Yitskhaq his son** ,
and he took in his hand the **fire** and the **eater [= knife]** ,
and the two of them went, together as one.

7 **And Yitskhaq said to Avraham his father** ,
and he said,
"**My father** ."

And he said,
"Look, it's me, **my son** ."

And he said,
"Look, the **fire** and the **wood** ,
but where is the **sheep** for **the going-up offering** ?"

8 **And Avraham said**,
"Elohim **will see to it (יראה)** , the **sheep** for **the going-up offering** , **my son** ."
And the two of them went, together as one.

9 And they went to **the place which Elohim said to him** ,
and Avraham built there an altar,
and he arranged the **wood** ,
and he bound up **Yitskhaq his son** ,
and he placed him upon the altar atop the **wood** ,

10 and Avraham **sent out his hand** ,
and he took the **eater [= knife]** to slay **his son** ,

11 **and the messenger of Yahweh called to him from the skies** ,
and he said,

"Avraham! Avraham!"

and he said,
"Look, it's me!"

12 **And he said**,
"**Don't send out your hand** toward the young one!
And don't do anything to him,

because now I know that you are one who fears Elohim,
and you didn't withhold **your son, your only one**, from me."

¹³ And Avraham **lifted his eyes**,
and **he saw** (ראה), and look, a **ram** afar, caught in a bramble by its horns,
and Avraham went and he took the **ram**,
and **he made it go up as a going-up offering** in the place of **his son**,
¹⁴ and Avraham called the name of **that place**,
"Yahweh **will see to it** (יראה)."
Which is why, today, it is said,
"On **the mountain of Yahweh**, **it will be seen to** (יראה)."

¹⁵ **And the messenger of Yahweh called to Avraham a second time from the skies**,

¹⁶ and he said,
" **I swear an oath** (שבוע) by myself, utterance of Yahweh,
on account of the fact that you did this thing,
and you did not withhold **your son, your only one**,
a ¹⁷ that I will certainly **bless** you,
b and I will certainly **multiply** **your seed**,
c **like the stars of the skies**,
c' and **like the sand upon the edge of the sea**,
b' and **your seed** will inherit the gate of their enemies,
a' ¹⁸ and all the nations of the land will find **blessing** in your seed,
on the heel of the fact that you listened to my voice."

¹⁹ And Avraham returned to his young men,
and they arose **and they went together as one** to Beer-**Sheva** (= Well of **Seven** (שבוע))
and Avraham dwelt in Beer-**Sheva**.

Genesis 22:1-19. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Avraham Surrenders and Regains Yitskhaq From Death

With this story, God's journey with Avraham comes to a culminating point. The opening of this story contains multiple hyperlinks back to God's first "test" of Avraham's faithfulness. The fact that it recalls God's call to Avraham in [Genesis 12:1-6](#) leads us to think that the entirety of God's blessing (introduced in [Gen. 12:1-3](#)) hangs in the balance. As we read through to the end of this episode, this hunch is confirmed (see [22:18](#)).

Genesis 12:1-6

Gen. 12:1 "Get yourself going (לך לך) from your land (ארץ) ... to the land (אל הארץ) which I will show you (אשר אראך)."

Gen. 12:6 "And Avram passed through the land ... to the oak tree of Moreh (מורה)."

Gen. 12:3 "And all the families of the land will find blessing **through you**."

Genesis 22

Gen. 22:2 "Get yourself going (לך לך) to the land (אל ארץ) of Moriah (מריה) ... where I will speak to you (אשר אמר אליך)."

Gen. 22:18 "And all the nations of the land will discover blessing **through your seed**."

Genesis 22 Replays 12. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

"Just as Abraham had to leave all that he held dear to go to the land prescribed by the Lord (see 12:1), so he has to offer to the Lord what he holds most dear and worship where God chooses (see Deut. 12:5)."

Waltke, Bruce K. and Cathi J. Fredricks (2001). [Genesis: A Commentary](#). Zondervan. 305.

This "test" (Heb. *nissah* / נִסָּה) is the culmination of God's relationship with Avraham and of Avraham and Sarah's sinful abuse of Hagar and Yishmael. Recall the tight parallel relationships between this story and Avraham's loss of Yishmael in [Genesis 21:1-21](#).

Genesis 20:1-18

A - Avraham and Avimelek: Conflict Caused by Deception

Genesis 21:1-21

B - Avraham Loses His Son Yishmael, Whose Life Is Spared by God

- Yitskhaq is born
- Sarah and Yitskhaq separate from Hagar and Yishmael
- Avraham sends mother and son to die in wilderness
- God provides **water of life ("Well of Seven")** to save the endangered son
- God will make Yishmael into a great nation

Genesis 21:22-34

A' - Avraham and Avimelek: Conflict Resolved by Covenant

Genesis 22:1-19

B' - Avraham Loses His Son Yitskhaq, Whose Life Is Spared by God

- Yitskhaq is about to die

- Sarah and Avraham are to separate from Yitskhaq
- Avraham is to give Yitskhaq over to death on Mount Moriah
- God provides a substitute ram to save the endangered son
- God will bless all nations through Avraham's seed
- Avraham retires with his son to the **Well of Seven**

Genesis 20:1-22:19 (Simplified). Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

This clear set of hyperlinks between Avraham's loss and Yishmael and Yitskhaq make it clear that they are interrelated. This provides the crucial narrative context for God's test of Avraham. He and Sarah were willing to sacrifice their moral integrity and abuse a slave in order to gain the promised son by their own wisdom. That sin resulted in the expulsion of the slave and her son, and here another result comes about. If Avraham is going to be God's vehicle of blessing to the nations, God requires his faithfulness and total surrender: Will Avraham hand over the life of his son to God, trusting that God will be able to fulfill his promises, even in the face of death?

This is the first biblical narrative where God is said to "test" his chosen one to discern their faithfulness. It is a rich theme that was introduced in the Eden story with the tree of knowing good and bad, and it carries forward into multiple stories that echo this motif.

God Tests ...	Verse
Adam and Eve at the Tree	Gen. 2:16-17 The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."
Noah With the Building of the Ark	Gen. 6:13-14 Then God said to Noah ... "Make for yourself an ark of gopher trees; you shall make the ark with rooms, and shall cover it inside and out with pitch."
Israel at the Waters of Meribah	Exod. 15:25 Then he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet. There he made for them a statute and regulation, and there he tested them .
Israel With the Manna	Exod. 16:4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them , whether or not they will walk in my instruction."
Israel at Mount Sinai	Exod. 20:20 Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you , and in order that the fear of him may remain with you, so that you may not sin."

Tests in the Torah and Judges. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

God Tests ...	Verse
Israel as They Wander in the Wilderness	Deut. 8:2 "You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that he might humble you, testing you , to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not."
Israel With the Remaining Canaanite Nations	Judg. 2:21-23 "I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, in order to test Israel by them , whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk in it as their fathers did, or not." So the Lord allowed those nations to remain, not driving them out quickly; and he did not give them into the hand of Joshua.
<i>Tests in the Torah and Judges. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).</i>	

The core pattern revolves around God testing his chosen one to determine if they will follow his instruction and so become a vehicle of his blessing to others. God's words at the story's climax confirm this is the goal of Avraham's test.

⁹ And they went to **the place which Elohim said to him**,
and Avraham built there an altar,
and he arranged the **wood**,
and he bound up **Yitskhaq his son**,
and he placed him upon the altar atop the **wood**,
¹⁰ and Avraham **sent out his hand**,
and he took the **eater [= knife]** to slay **his son**,
¹¹ **and the messenger of Yahweh called to him from the skies**,
and he said,
"Avraham! Avraham!"
and he said,
"Look, it's me!"
¹² **And he said**,
"**Don't send out your hand** toward the young one!
And don't do anything to him,
because now I know that you are one who fears Elohim,
and you didn't withhold **your son, your only one**, from me."

Genesis 22:1-19. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

God Tests Abraham. Does God Test God?

It makes sense of the narrative logic that God would test Abraham and call him to account for his sins against Hagar. In Abraham's earlier failures, he was the one threatening God's promise of a future seed who will bless the nations. But in this story, God is the one threatening the future of God's own promise.

This story invites the reader into a deep mystery at the heart of the biblical narrative: God's own purpose and promise is what determines the future of the cosmos. But God has also willed that his human partners would be the primary vehicle through which his purposes are carried out. Abraham is both the problem and the solution for God's promise to bless the nations. And Abraham and Sarah's story is itself a micro-cosmic replay of humanity's role in the biblical story: Humans are both God's problem and the solution to his purposes.

This narrative tension is not resolved by the rest of the biblical narrative. Rather, it is heightened to a crisis point by the end of the Hebrew Bible. In this way, the story of Jesus presented in the gospels is the natural outcome of this theological tension: God becomes the faithful human partner he has called us to be, but we often fail to be.

We often fail, but not always! In this story, Abraham is presented as a model of faithfulness because he is willing to surrender the beloved son of God's promise over to God's own paradoxical purpose. This powerful image is repeated in the story of Moses' self-sacrifice for the sins of Israel ([Exod. 32-33](#)), in David's self-sacrifice for his own sins that are afflicting Israel ([2 Sam. 24](#)), and ultimately in the composite figure of the suffering servant of Isaiah 40-55, who, we're told ...

Isaiah 53:7 NASB

He was oppressed and he was afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
so he did not open his mouth.

Mount Moriah, Jerusalem, and the Temple

Mount Moriah (מֹרִיָּה = "Mount Vision") links back to the "oak of Moreh" (מֹרֶה) from [Genesis 12:6](#), creating an inclusion around all of Genesis 12-22. Also, Mount Moriah has clear hyperlinks forward to the temple mount where David will later establish the site for the temple.

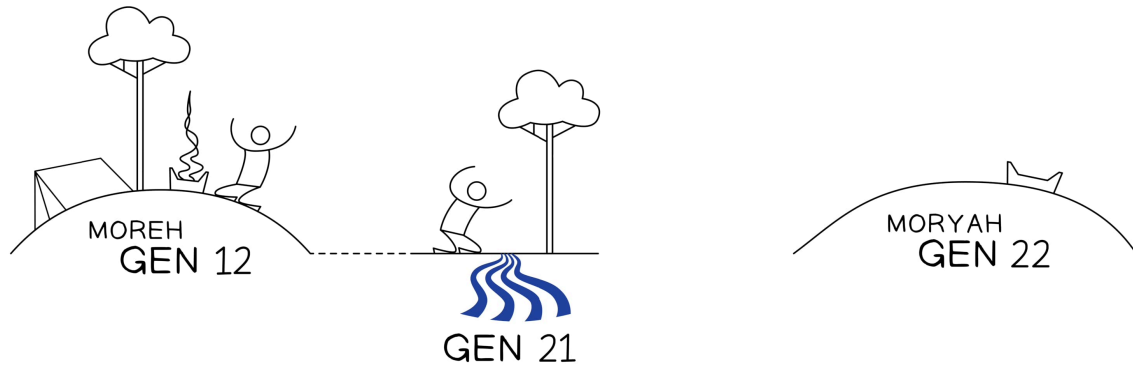
The phrase "mountain of Yahweh" (הַר יְהוָה) in [Genesis 22:14](#) is used once for Mount Sinai ([Num. 10:33](#)) but elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible always refers to Mount Zion, the temple mount in Jerusalem (see [Isa. 2:3](#), [30:29](#); [Mic. 4:2](#); [Zech. 8:3](#); [Ps. 24:3](#)).

"Mount Moriah" only appears one more time in the Hebrew Bible, as the location where the events of David's great test take place in [2 Samuel 24](#).

2 Chronicles 3:1 Instructor's Translation

And Solomon began to build the house of Yahweh in Jerusalem on **Mount Moriah**, where Yahweh had appeared to his father David, which he established at the place of David, **on the threshing floor of Ornan**

Avraham's Hilltop Sacrifice Pattern



Avraham's Hilltop Sacrifice Pattern. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Reflection Question

Do we, the readers, have any reason to believe that God will not take the life of Yitskhaq? What information do we have that Avraham does not?

Session 24: Abraham Surrenders Isaac

Key Takeaways

- Avraham’s test on the mountain mirrors the humans’ test in the garden. But where the man and woman fail, Avraham succeeds.
- Avraham’s act of total surrender and trust in God is directly attributed to the fear of the Lord.
- The narrator connects this moment to the later practice of sacrifice in the temple, which involves an act of surrender and the trust that God will take care of the rest.

Avraham’s Passed Test Versus Adam and Eve’s Failed Test

The story contains a wealth of selective vocabulary that hyperlinks to [Genesis 2-3](#) in obvious and subtle ways.

Genesis 22	Genesis 2-3
Gen. 22:4, 6 And Avraham lifted his eyes (עיניו) and he saw (וירא) ... and he took (ויקח) in his hand the fire and the knife / eater (מאכלת), and the two of them (שניהם) walked on together (יחדו).	Gen. 3:6 And the woman saw (ותרא) that good was the tree for eating (מאכל), and desirable to the eyes (עינים), and she took (ותקה) from its fruit Gen. 2:24-25 ... A man clings to his wife and they become one (אחד) flesh. And the two of them (שניהם) were naked and ... they felt no shame. Gen. 3:7 And the eyes (עיני) of the two of them (שניהם) were opened and they knew that they were naked.
Gen. 22:7 And Yitskhaq said to Avraham and said "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where (איה) is the sheep for the offering?"	Gen. 3:9 And Yahweh God called to the human and said, "Where (אי) are you?"
Gen. 22:10 And Avraham sent out his hand and took (ידו ויקח) the knife / eater (מאכלת)	Gen. 2:9 God caused to grow ... every tree for eating (מאכל).
<i>Avraham Passed, Adam and Eve Failed.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).	

Genesis 22	Genesis 2-3
	Gen. 3:22 "...And now, lest he send out his hand (ישלח ידו ולקח) and eat (אכל) from the tree of life"
Gen. 22:12 "Now I know (ידע) that you fear God (אלהים)"	Gen. 3:5 "You will become like God (אלהים), knowing (ידע) good and evil (רע)." Gen. 3:22 "Behold, the human has become like one of us, knowing (ידע) good and evil (רע)."
Gen. 22:13 And Avraham lifted his eyes (עיניו), and he saw (וירא) a ram ... and he took (ויקח)	Gen. 3:6 And the woman saw (ותרא) that good was the tree for eating (מאכל), and desirable to the eyes (עינים), and she took (ותקח) from its fruit
Gen. 22:16 "Because you have done this thing (עשה + הדבר הזה)"	Gen. 3:13 And Yahweh God said to the woman, "What is this you have done (מה זאת עשית)?"
Gen. 22:18 " On account of (עקב) the fact that you listened to my voice (שמע + בקול)."	Gen. 3:17 And to the human / man God said, " On account of (כי) you listened to the voice of your wife (שמע + בקול)"
<i>Avraham Passed, Adam and Eve Failed. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).</i>	

These correspondences invite us to compare humanity's primal failure that eventually led to God's choosing of Avraham with Avraham's own faithfulness.

- Adam and Eve were given a divine command that required trust, faithfulness, and surrender of their desire to have knowledge of good and bad on their own terms (Gen. 2:16-17). Avraham is given a divine command to surrender the life of his son over to God's will (Gen. 22:2).
- Adam and Eve's failure is by "taking" (לקח) and "eating" (אכל) from the "tree" (עץ, Gen. 3:6). Avraham's faithfulness is shown through "taking" (לקח) the "eater" (מאכלת) and the "wood/tree" (עץ) for the offering (Gen. 22:6).
- Adam and Eve's failure separated the two (שניהם) God purposed to become one (אחד, Gen. 2:24-25). Avraham's faithfulness results in Avraham and his son ("the two of them" שניהם) walking together as one (יחדו, Gen. 22:8).
- Adam and Eve's failure results in the loss of true life and exile unto death (Gen. 3:22-23). Avraham's faithfulness in surrendering Yitskhaq over to death results in him regaining his son with a new life (Gen. 22:13-18).

"But it is not simply that an extraordinary act of obedience by a righteous man [Abraham] leads to extraordinary blessing. It is that one man's obedience climaxes in an act of sacrifice and thus leads to extraordinary blessing ... The faithful obedience of Noah culminating in his sacrifices after the flood changed God's disposition toward sinful humanity. Similarly Abraham's obedience guaranteed the future of his descendants and that through them blessing should come to all nations."

Wenham, Gordon (2001). "The Akedah: A Paradigm of Sacrifice." *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 116, no. 3. 102.

God's Response to Avraham: A Blessings Remix

Yahweh's speech to Avraham is a remix of the entire sequence of blessings up to this point in the story. It deliberately echoes the stories of Adam and Eve, Noah, and every part of the Avraham story in order to show that Avraham's faithfulness has brought the divine promise to a new level of fulfillment.

God's Speech in Genesis 22:15-18	Earlier Stories of Testing and Blessing
"On account of the fact that you have done this thing (אשר עשית את הדבר הזה)"	Gen. 3:13 And Yahweh God said to the woman, "What is this you have done (מה זאת עשית)?" Gen. 12:18 And Pharaoh called out ... " What is this you have done to me (מה זאת עשית לי)?" Gen. 20:10 And Avimelek said to Avraham, "What did you see, that you have done this thing (כי עשית את הדבר הזה)?"
"You have not withheld your son, your only one"	Gen. 22:12 "Now I know that you fear God, and you did not withhold your son, your only one from me."
"I will greatly bless you (ברך אברכך)"	Gen. 1:28 And God blessed (ויברך) them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the land ..." Gen. 9:1 And God blessed (ויברך) Noah and his sons and said, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land." Gen. 12:2 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you (אברכך) and make your name great and you will be a blessing (ברכה)."
"I will greatly multiply your seed (הרבה ארבה את זרעך) ..."	Gen. 3:16 And to the woman he said, " I will greatly multiply (הרבה ארבה) your grief in conception ..."

God's Response to Avraham. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

**God's Speech in Genesis
22:15-18**

Earlier Stories of Testing and Blessing

	Gen. 16:10 And the angel said to [Hagar], " I will greatly multiply your seed (הרבה ארבה את זרעך), and it will not be counted because of its greatness."
"... like the stars of the heavens (כוכבי השמים)"	Gen. 15:5 "Look up at the heavens (השמימה) and count the stars (כוכבים) if you are able ... that what your seed will be."
"And like the sand which is on the lip of the sea"	Gen. 13:15 "I will set your seed like the dust of the land (כעפר הארץ) if someone is able to count the dust of the land, they'll also be able to count your seed."
"And your seed will inherit the gate of their enemies"	Gen. 24:60 And they blessed Rivqah and said ... " May your seed inherit the gate (ויירש זרעך את שער שנאיו) of their haters." Num. 24:17-18 A star treads from Yaaqov, a staff arises from Israel ... and Edom will be a possession (ירשה), and Seir his enemy will be a possession (ירשה שעיר איביו).
"And through your seed all the nations of the land will discover blessing"	Gen. 12:3 "And through you (בך) all the families of the land will find blessing (נברכו)." Gen. 18:18 Avraham will become a great nation and mighty, and all the nations of the land (גויי הארץ) will find blessing (נברכו) through him (בו).
"On account of (עקב) the fact that you listened to my voice (שמע + בקול)"	Gen. 3:15 "Her seed (זרע) will strike your head, and you will strike his heel (עקב)." Gen. 3:8 And they heard the voice / sound (שמע + קול) of God walking in the garden Gen. 3:10 "And I heard your voice/sound (שמע + קול) in the garden and I was afraid" Gen. 3:17 And to the human/man God said, " On account of (כי) you listened to the voice of your wife (שמע + לקול)" Gen. 16:2 And Avraham listened to the voice of Sarai (שמע + לקול).

God's Response to Avraham. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Gen. 21:12 "Everything which Sarah tells you, **listen to her voice** (שמע + בקול)"

Gen. 26:5 "On account of the fact that (עקב) **Avraham listened to my voice** (שמע + בקול)"

*Notice the contrast "listening" moments: (1) People can listen to the human voice (Adam & Eve, Abe to Sarah) resulting in disaster and "listening" to Yahweh's voice coming in judgment; or (2) People can listen to God's voice the first time (Avraham in Gen. 22), resulting in blessing.

God's Response to Avraham. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Retrospective on the Design Shape of Genesis 20-22

As noted above, Genesis 20-22 has a forward symmetry design shape (ABA'B') that relates the four stories in a specific way. There is, however, an overlapping design shape based on other features of these stories that creates a different set of relationships between the stories.

Genesis 20:1-18

A - Avraham's Deception Places Sarah in Danger, but God Delivers

- Avraham's deceitful lie about Sarah places her in danger.
- Innocent Avimelek wrongly takes Sarah as his wife, placing his life and future seed in danger.
- **20:11** Avraham assumed there was no **"fear of God"** (יראת אלהים) in Gerar, when, in fact, there was, and he was the one who didn't fear God.
- **20:6** God prevents innocent Avimelek from sinning unto death: **"I know that (ידעתי כי)"** you did this with wholeness of heart, and so **I withheld you from (חשך מ-)** sinning against me."

Genesis 21:1-21

B - Rival Wives and Sons Are Separated and Not Reconciled

- Hagar and Ishmael are banished because of Sarah's jealous anger.
- **21:14** That anger leads to a near death, but God delivers through the waters of "the Well of Seven/oath" (Beer-Sheva / באר שבע).
- **21:19** "And she saw the **well of water (באר מים)** and went and filled the water skin."

Genesis 21:22-34

B' - Rival Brothers Are Reconciled Through a Covenant Oath

- **21:28-33** Avraham and Avimelek create peace through a seven (שבע) animal exchange that leads to the two of them making a covenant (ברית) and an oath (שבע), at "Well of Seven/oath" (Beer-Sheva / באר שבע).
- **21:25** "And Avraham disputed with Avimelek on account of a **well of water** (באר המים)." .

Genesis 22:1-19

A' - Avraham's Sins Place Issac in Danger, but God Delivers

- Avraham and Sarah's sins against Hagar are brought to account through God's test.
- Innocent Issac is to suffer for Avraham's sins, placing Avraham's future seed in danger.
- **22:12** God prevents innocent Issac from dying for Avraham's sins: "Now **I know that** (ידעתי כי) **you** **fear God**, and **you did not withhold from** (השך מ-) me your son, your only one."

Genesis 20:1-22:19 (Version 2). Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

God Rescues Avraham From Danger and From the Consequences of His Own Sins (Gen. 20:1-18 and 22:1-19)

The opening and closing stories are about how Avraham's sins against others (Avimelek, Hagar and Yishmael) affect the innocent people around him.

- Avraham's deception about Sarah leads innocent Avimelek to wrongfully take another man's wife.
- Avraham and Sarah's mistreatment of Hagar (Gen. 16) leads to Sarah's jealous anger (Gen. 21:9-10) and the expulsion of Hagar and her son.

In both cases God "prevents" (חשך) the sin from reaching a lethal consequence.

- God intervenes through a dream and prevents (חשך) Avimelek from "touching" Sarah (Gen. 20:6).
- God intervenes through an angel and prevents Avraham from "butchering" Yitskhaq (Gen. 22:11-12).

In both cases, Avraham's sin places the future of his descendants (and God's promise) in danger.

- In Genesis 20, Avraham's sin puts Sarah in danger.
- In Genesis 22, Avraham and Sarah's sin puts Yitskhaq in danger.

Rivals Are Either Separated or Reconciled (Gen. 21:1-21 and 21:22-34)

The two inner stories are about how Avraham's sin creates two rivalries that end with opposite conclusions.

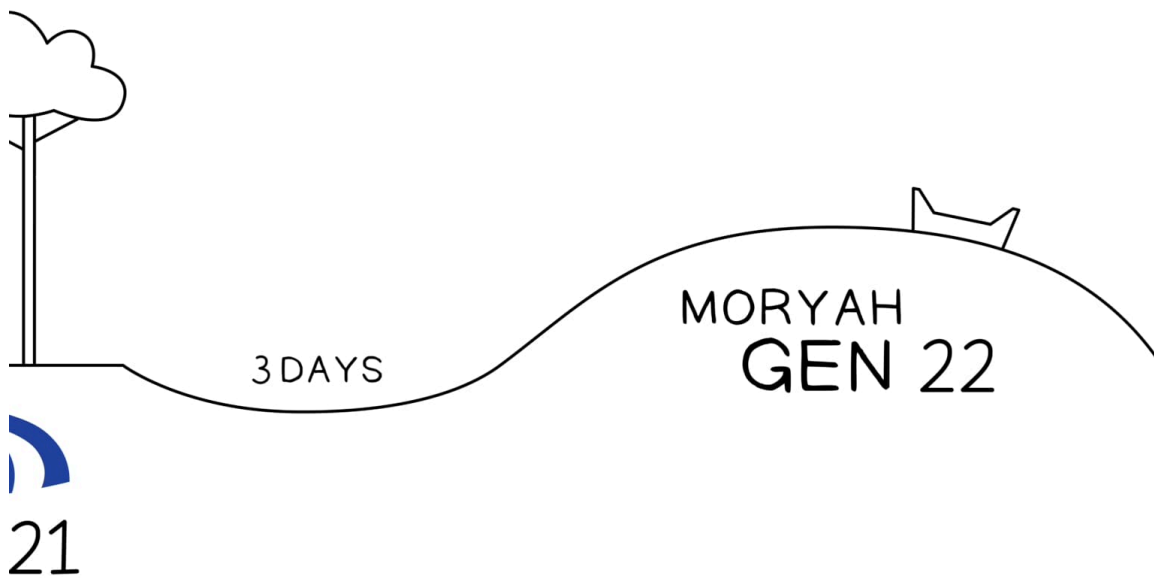
- In Genesis 21:1-21, the rivalry between Sarah and Hagar (and Yitskhaq and Yishmael) leads to separation and near death that is only resolved by the provision of water at "Well of Seven/Oath."
- In Genesis 21:22-34, the rivalry between Avraham and Avimelek leads to a reconciliation and covenant at "Well of Seven/Oath."

In both stories, the focus is on the future well-being of later descendants.

- In Genesis 21:13 and 21, God guarantees that Yishmael will have future seed (זרע) who will become a great nation, and the story concludes with Hagar providing a wife for her son.
- In Genesis 21:22-23, Avimelek wants to guarantee the well-being of his future seed and progeny (נין ונכד) through a covenant with Avraham.

Avraham's Surrender as Fear of the Lord

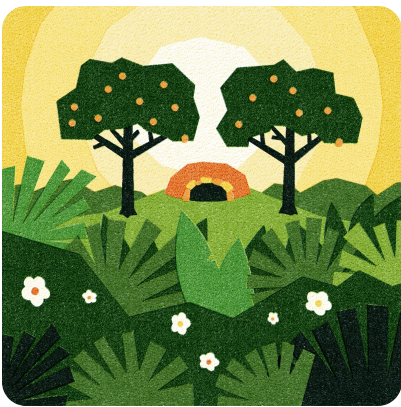
"TEST"



Avraham's Hilltop Sacrifice Pattern. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Reflection Question

Based on Genesis 22:1-19, what does the fear of the Lord look like?



Module 6: Blessing for the Next Generation

SESSIONS 25-30

God is at work behind the scenes, securing the future of the promised seed in the next generation as Abraham's story comes to a close.

Session 25: A Heroine From the Non-Chosen Family

Key Takeaways

- Genesis 22:20-24 is a hinge between major sections of the Avraham story, both concluding the previous section and pointing forward to the next.
- Rivqah (Rebekah) introduces the pattern of heroines of the faith from non-chosen families, which runs through the whole Hebrew Bible.
- Biblical characters are mirrors in which we examine ourselves as well as our communities and cultures.

Movement III: Blessing for the Next Generation

This final stretch of the Avraham story consists of four literary units of uneven length, but they systematically develop the core themes of the story as we transition to the next generation.

Genesis 22:20-24

The Genealogy and Birth of Avraham's Brother Leading to Rivqah

- List of 12 sons + Rivqah

Genesis 23:1-20

The Death of Sarah and Burial in Makpelah

Genesis 24:1-67

Avraham's Servant Sent to Avraham's Brother So Yitskhaq Can Marry Rivqah

Genesis 25:1-6

List of Avraham's Non-Chosen Sons Through Qeturah + Yitskhaq and Rivqah Are Chosen

Genesis 25:7-11

The Death of Avraham and Burial in Makpelah

Genesis 25:12-18

The Genealogy of the Unchosen Yishmael

- List of 12 sons

What’s fascinating is that this conclusion to the Avraham story is recalled at the conclusion of the Yaaqov (Jacob) story as well. The final segments of the Yaaqov narrative mirror both the content and the sequence in Genesis 22:20-25:18.

Genesis 35:16-20

The Death and Burial of Rachel

Genesis 35:21-26

List of Yaaqov’s Wives and Children

Genesis 35:27-29

The Death and Burial of Yitskhaq in Machpelah

Genesis 36:1-8

List of Esau’s Wives and Children

Genesis 36:9-43

The Genealogy of the Unchosen Esau

Genesis 35:16-36:43. Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

The transition sections between the Avraham and Yaaqov narratives and between the Yaaqov and Joseph narratives are alligned. This allignment is important because it allows us to see the compositional analogies between the major parts of Genesis.

1:1-11:26			11:27-25:18		25:19-37:1	37:2-50:20
Adam	Seth	Noakh and Shem	Avraham	Yitzhaq	Ya’aqov	Yehudah
Snake	Cain	Yaphet Kham	Nakhor Haran	Yishma’el	Esau	Jacob’s sons

Genealogies in Genesis. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

This pattern actually highlights an important compositional design that occurs throughout the entire Genesis scroll. The main narrative traces the lineage of the promised seed to a set of siblings. Then, after the story of their separation, the non-chosen line is ushered off the stage with a genealogy that extends far past the narrative time perspective. After this, the narrative backtracks and focuses on the chosen line, picking up their story.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 22:20-24

20 And it came about after these things,
then it was reported to **Avraham**, saying,
“Look, **Milkah**, **she also** **has given birth** to sons for **Nakhor your brother** :
21 Uts his firstborn,
and Buz his brother,
and Qemuel the father of Aram
22 and Kesed and Khazo and Pildash and Yidlaph and **Betuel** .”

23 Now, **Betuel**, **he caused the birth** **Rivqah** .
These eight **Milkah** birthed for **Nakhor the brother of Avraham** .

24 And as for his concubine, her name was Reumah,
and **she also** **gave birth** to Tevakh and Gakhm and Takhash and Maakah.

Genesis 22:20-24. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

What Is This Story Doing Here?

This short narrative and genealogy are fascinating for many reasons. They form a literary frame around chapters 12-22, as the family of Avraham’s brother Nakhor was the focus of the short genealogy at the beginning of Avraham’s story in Genesis 11:27-28.

They address an implicit question that was raised by God’s oath to Avraham in the previous story.

- a 17 that I will certainly **ble**ss you,
b and I will certainly **multi**ply **your seed** ,
c **like the stars of the skies**,
c' and **like the sand upon the edge of the sea**,
b' and **your seed** will inherit the gate of their enemies,
a' 18 and all the nations of the land will find **ble**ssing in your seed,
on the heel of the fact that you listened to my voice .”

Genesis 22:1-19. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

We know that Yitskhaq is the chosen son, but if he is going to inherit the promises made to Avraham and has many children ... who will be his wife?

Notice that Nakhor has twelve sons, just like Avraham’s son Yishmael (Gen. 25:12-18) and his grandson Yaakov (Gen. 36:16-20).

A Heroine From the Non-Chosen Family

This story also begins a key theme that repeats itself many times over throughout the Hebrew Bible: God raises up a female heroine from a non-chosen lineage whose faithfulness carries forward the lineage of promise.

- Rivqah (Rebekah): In Genesis 24, she is depicted as a faithful female counterpart to Avraham.
- Leah: In Genesis 29-30, she is the persistent, unloved wife who gives birth to Judah.
- Tamar: In Genesis 38, she is the courageous woman who risks her social integrity to save the lineage.
- Pharaoh's daughter: In Exodus 2, she rescues Moses out of the waters.
- Tsipporah: In Exodus 4, she rescues Moses from God's judgment.
- Rahab: In Joshua 2, she rescues the Israelite spies.
- Deborah and Jael: In Judges 4-5, these women rescue the Israelites.
- Hannah, Avigail, the wise woman of Tekoa, the wise woman of Abel-Beth, Maakah, Ruth, and more!!

Reflection Question

How would you describe the function of biblical characters for readers of Scripture? Are they models, mirrors, or something else?

Session 26: Sarah's Tomb as a Mini Eden

Key Takeaways

- Contextually, the cave of Makpelah evokes the idea of the naked pair and garden imagery—an Eden spot.
- Avraham buying the cave is an act of sacrifice, surrender, and hope.
- Biblical authors link Avraham and Sarah's burial site to Eden and to hope for life beyond death.

Sarah's Death and Avraham's Purchase of Burial Cave of Macpelah

Genesis 23:1-2

- Sarah's death in Hebron

Genesis 23:3-16

- **23:3-6** Negotiations with the Hittites: Part 1
- **23:7-11** Negotiations with the Hittites: Part 2
- **23:12-15** Negotiations with the Hittites: Part 3
- **23:16** Avraham buys the field

Genesis 23:17-20

- Sarah's burial in the cave in the field by Hebron

Genesis 23:1-20. Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

This story has a very clear symmetrical design. It begins and ends with Sarah's death and burial, told in succinct narrative style. In between these opening and closing frames, there is a long dialogue narrative as Avraham negotiates with the Hittites about a burial plot for his wife and future family. While the story may seem straightforward on a first reading, there are many layers to this story when we notice the network of hyperlinks that connect to the broader themes of the Avraham story as a whole.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 23:1-20

¹ And it was, **the life of Sarah**

^a b one hundred and twenty **years** and seven **years**,
^a the **years** of **the life of Sarah**.

² And **Sarah** **died** in Qiryat-Arba (this is Hebron) in the land of Canaan,

and Avraham went to grieve for **Sarah** and to weep.

³ And Avraham got up from before the face of **his dead one**,
and he spoke to **the sons of Heth** (= Hittites), saying,

⁴ " **I am an immigrant and settler among y'all**,
give me a **burial plot** **as a possession** among y'all,
so I can **bury** **my dead one** from before my face."

⁵ And the Sons of Heth answered Avraham, saying to him,

⁶ " **Listen, our master**.
You are a prince of Elohim in our midst.
Among the choicest of our **burial plots**, **bury** **your dead one**.
No man among us will hold back from you his **burial plot**,
to keep you from **burying** **your dead one**."

⁷ And Avraham got up
and he bowed to the people of the land, to the sons of Heth,

⁸ and he spoke with them, saying
"If it is in your being, the **burying** of **my dead one** before my face,
listen to me,

and approach for me Ephron, the son of Zohar,

⁹ that he would give to me **the cave of Makpelah (= Pairing)** which is his,
which is at the edge of **his field**;
for the full **silver-price** let him give it to me,
in your midst, as a **burial-plot possession**."

¹⁰ And Ephron sat in the midst of the sons of Heth,

and Ephron the Hethite answered Avraham
in the ears of **the sons of Heth**,
of all who were entering the gate of his city, saying,

¹¹ " **No, my master, listen to me**.
I give to you **the field**,
and **the cave** that's in it I give to you,
in the eyes of the sons of my people I give it you,
bury **your dead one**."

¹² And **Avraham bowed before the face of the people of the land**,

¹³ **and he spoke to Ephron in the ears of the people of the land**,
" **Indeed, if only you would listen to me**."

I give you **silver** for **the field** ;
Take it from me,
so I can **bury** **my dead one** there."

14 And Ephron answered Avraham, saying to him,

15 " **My master, listen to me** .

A land, **four hundred shekels of silver** ,
what is that between me and between you?

Bury **your dead one** !"

16 And Avraham listened to Ephron,
and he weighed **the shekels of silver for Ephron** ,
which **he had spoken of in the ears of sons of Heth**:

four hundred shekels of silver ,
by the going of the merchant.

17 **And it was transferred** , **the field** of Ephron
which was in **Makpelah** ,
which was facing **Mamre** ,
the field and the cave which is in it,
and all the trees which are in the field,
which are in all the surrounding border,

18 **to Avraham** as a **possession** ,
in the eyes of **the sons of Heth** ,
along with all who were entering the gate of his city.

19 Now, after this, Avraham **buried** Sarah his wife,
in **the cave of the field of Makpelah** ,
which was facing **Mamre** (this is Hebron),
in the land of Canaan.

20 **And it was transferred** ,
the field and the cave which was in it,
to Avraham as a **burial-plot** **possession** ,
from **the sons of Heth** .

Genesis 23:1-20. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Burial Plots, Rivqah, and God's Blessing

The sequence of stories in Genesis 22-25 may seem odd, but there is an important thematic development as we pass from the generation of Avraham to that of Yitskhaq. This is signaled by the presence of a network of

key words that relate to each other through wordplay association.

Genesis 22:1-19	Genesis 22:20-24	Genesis 23	Genesis 24	Genesis 25
"Blessing" <i>berak / berakah</i> ברכה / ברך	"Rivqah" <i>rivqah</i> רבקה	"Burial / bury" <i>qevurah / qavar</i> קבר / קבורה	Rivqah / blessing <i>rivqah / berakah</i> ברכה / רבקה	Blessing / burial <i>berak / qavar</i> קבר / ברך
Gen. 22:17 "I will ble ss you and I will multiply your seed like the stars of the skies ... and it will possess the gate of its enemies ."	Gen. 22:23 "And Bethuel caused the birth of Rivqah ."	Gen. 23:19 "Avraham buried Sarah in the cave of Machpelah." Note: The bartering scene takes place "in the gate of the city ." (Gen. 23:10, 18)	Gen. 24:60 "And they blessed Rivqah , (ויברכו ... רבקה) 'You are our sister, may you become ten thousand! And may your seed possess the gate of its enemies .'"	Gen. 25:10-11 "And Avraham's sons buried him in the cave of Machpelah ... And after the death of Avraham, Elohim blessed Yitskhaq his son."
Key Words in Genesis 22-25. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).				

The blessing (*berakah*) of Avraham is passed onto his son in the form of Rivqah, with whom he will have children. God's blessing (*berakah*) to Avraham of possessing the land first takes place in the burial (*qavar*) of Sarah. Rivqah is given the same blessing (*berakah*) of future seed that will inherit the land.

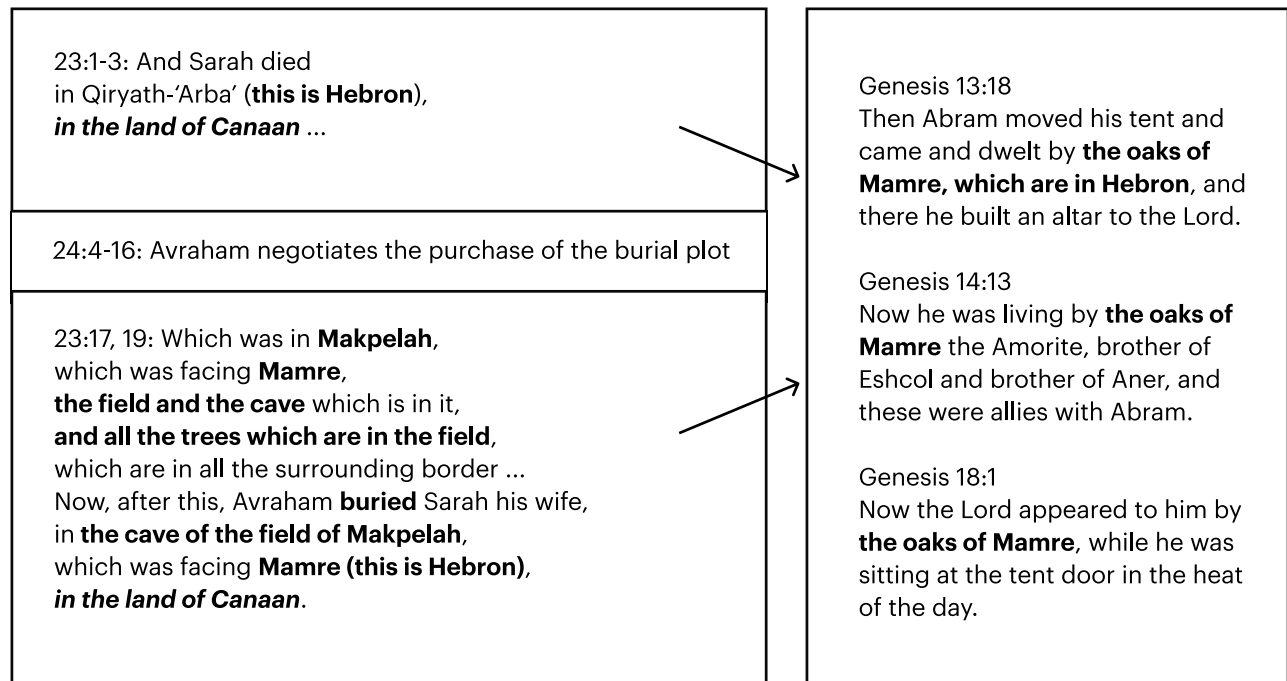
This interconnected series of narratives makes one thing clear: The death of God's chosen ones does not prevent God from continuing his purpose to bless.

Death, Paradise, and the Passing of the Righteous

The story of Sarah's burial is a full-scale replay of the core themes at work in the garden of Eden story. Through wordplays, hyperlinks, and narrative analogies, Avraham's loss of Sarah is compared to both the loss of eternal life in Eden and to the hope of God's promise to restore life.

The Death of the Beloved by the Sacred Tree

After Avraham's great act of faithfulness, we're told that his beloved wife dies near the sacred tree where Avraham had encamped all the way back in [Genesis 14](#). The design of this story emphasizes the importance of this location by repeating the mention of Hebron in the opening and closing of the chapter.



Death by the Sacred Tree. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

The narrative highlights that when Avraham is living near Hebron/Mamre, it is by trees that he lived, worshipped, and met with God. This is a clear Eden motif, as Avraham and Sarah are presented as a new Adam and Eve living in the promised garden land and communing with God by the trees of Hebron.

Sadly, the wife of the new Adam eventually dies by the sacred trees of Mamre. This is a vivid and potent image that recalls the woman eating from the tree that leads to death. But it is also by the sacred trees of Mamre/Hebron that Sarah is buried.

“Dusty” Ephron, and the Hope of Eternal Life

The name of Avraham’s Hittite negotiating partner is Ephron, from the Hebrew word for “dust” (*‘aphar* / עפר). This creates the humorous image of Avraham bartering with “Dusty” to ensure a place of rest for his beloved.

Recall that “death unto the dust” is a key image from the Eden narrative that’s associated with death.

Genesis 3:19 Instructor’s Translation

By the sweat of your face you will eat bread,
until you return to the ground,
because from it you were taken;
for you are **dust** (*‘aphar*)
and to **dust** (*‘aphar*) you shall return.

The Cave of the “Naked Pair”

Both of the words “cave” and “Makpelah” have rich wordplay associations with the Eden story.

“Cave” (*me’arah* / מערה) in Hebrew literally means “place of exposure/nakedness.” This Hebrew noun is related to two root words spelled with similar letters that both mean “to be exposed, naked” (ערר / *’arar*, see [Isa. 32:11](#) and עור / *’ur*, see [Hab. 3:9](#)) and is spelled with the same letters as “nakedness” from [Genesis 2:25](#).

Genesis 2:25 Instructor’s Translation

And they were naked (*’arom* / ערום) and they were not ashamed.

Genesis 23:9 Instructor’s Translation

that he would give to me the cave (*me’arah* / מערה) ...

“Makpelah” is an odd place name that means “doubling” or “pair.” The root is *kaphal* (כפל) which means “to be doubled” or “paired” (see examples of the verb in [Exod. 26:9](#); [Ezek. 21:19](#)).

The meaning of Makpelah as “pair” or “double” is attested early in the history of Jewish interpretation because the Greek Septuagint translators rendered this word with *το διπλοῦν* (“twin” or “paired”).

When these curious words are combined, the name of this place is The Nakedness of the Pair. This is a clever reference back to the moment when Adam and Eve violate God’s command, eat from the forbidden fruit, and then realize that “the two of them are naked” ([Gen. 2:24-25](#) and [3:6-7](#)).

The Burial Plot as Avraham’s Mini-Eden

The description of the cave and the burial plot in [Genesis 23:17-18](#) is repetitious and unnecessarily wordy because it repeats vocabulary from earlier in the chapter. Upon closer inspection, however, these repetitions seem intentional and create a series of hyperlinks back to earlier moments in the Avraham narrative where the promised land was set on analogy to Eden.

Genesis 23:17-18

"And it was transferred, the field of Ephron (עפרון) which is by Makpelah, **which is in front of Mamre** (לפני ממרא) ..."

Hyperlinks to Earlier Genesis Narratives

Gen. 13:10-11 "Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the valley of the Jordan, **all watered ... like the garden of God, before Yahweh destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah** . And Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan ... and they **separated** (יפרדו)."

Gen. 13:14-15, 18 "Yahweh said to Avram after Lot **separated** (הפרד) from him, 'Lift up your eyes and see ... north, south, east, west ... I give it to you and your seed forever, and I will make your seed like the dust (עפר) of the earth.' And Avram tented and dwelt among the **oaks of Mamre** ."

*In Genesis 13, Lot’s choices of Sodom as a false-Eden was set in

Avraham’s Mini Eden. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Genesis 23:17-18	Hyperlinks to Earlier Genesis Narratives
	contrast to Avraham's choice of the promised land, specifically "the oaks of Mamre" which is God's gift of Eden to Avraham.
"... The field and the cave which is in it, and all the trees which are in (כל העץ אשר ב) the field ..."	Gen. 1:29 "And God said to the human, 'Behold I have given to you every plant bearing seed which is on the face of the land, and all the trees which are in it (כל העץ אשר ב)." Gen. 2:9 "And Yahweh caused to sprout from the ground all the trees (כל עץ) that are desirable to look at."
"... which is in all its border around (בכל ... סביב) to Avraham as a possession (למקנה) in the eyes of the sons of Heth, with all who enter the gate of his city."	Gen. 2:10-14 "And a river went out from Eden to water (שקה) the garden, and from there it separated (יפרד) ... the Pishon it went all around (סבב) ... the Gihon it went all around (סבב) ..." Gen. 10:15, 19 "And Canaan bore Sidon his firstborn and Heth ... And the border of the Canaanite was from Sidon as you go ... to Sodom and Gomorrah."
<i>Avraham's Mini Eden. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).</i>	

Avraham's burial plot is described as a tiny refuge for the "naked pair" that is located in the middle of a field filled with trees, namely the sacred trees of Mamre. We couldn't ask for a more rich and creative set of allusions back to the garden of Eden.

Avraham's First Possession of the Land

The description of the cave, trees, and field of Makpelah as Avraham's first actual "possession" ('akhuzzah / אחזה) of the promised land is highly significant. This Eden-like field and burial plot marks the first step in Avraham's family taking possession of the land. This word "possession" links back to God's promises to Avraham, and it will go on to have a significant role in the later narratives of the Israelites taking possession of the land.

God's Promise of the Land as a Possession

Genesis 17:7-8 NASB*

⁷ I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. ⁸ I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, **as an everlasting possession** (לאחזה) and I will be their God.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Avraham's First Possession of the Land

Genesis 23:20 Instructor's Translation

And it was transferred, the field and the cave which was in it, to Avraham **as a possession** (לְאִחְזָה) of a burial plot from the sons of Heth.

Later Descriptions of the Land as a Possession

Deuteronomy 32:48-49 NASB*

⁴⁸ The LORD spoke to Moses that very same day, saying, ⁴⁹ "Go up to this mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab opposite Jericho, and look at the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the sons of Israel **as a possession** (לְאִחְזָה)."

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Joshua 22:4 NASB*

And now the LORD your God has given rest to your brothers, as he spoke to them; therefore turn now and go to your tents, to the land of your **possession** (אִחְזָה), which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you beyond the Jordan.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalms 2:7-8 NASB*

⁷ I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: he said to me, "You are my son, today I have begotten you. ⁸ Ask of me, and I will surely give the nations as your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth **as your possession** (אִחְזָה)."

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Description of the Future Messiah's Inheritance

Amos 9:11-12 NASB*

In that day I will raise up the fallen tent of David, and wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old; That they may **possess** the remnant of Edom, and all the nations who are called by my name ...

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Obadiah 15, 17, 21 NASB

¹⁵ For the day of the LORD draws near on all the nations ... ¹⁷ But on Mount Zion there will be those who escape, And it will be holy. And the house of Jacob will **possess their possessions** ... ²¹ The deliverers will ascend Mount Zion, to judge the mountain of Esau, And the kingdom will be the LORD's.

In this narrative, the field and the cave of Makpelah become a "down payment" of the future inheritance of Israel and ultimately of the Messiah's reign over all nations. The hyperlinks that set this field on analogy with Eden also open the wider associations between this story and Avraham's possession of the new creation

through his messianic family. It is this network of scriptural associations that led Paul the apostle to say what he did in Romans 4:13.

Romans 4:13 NASB*

For the promise to Abraham or to his seed that he would **be inheritor of the world** was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Reflection Question

In what way is Avraham's purchase of the cave from Ephron an act of sacrifice, surrender, and hope? How does the story show us this?

Session 27: Isaac's Marriage to Rebekah

Key Takeaways

- After Avraham receives his first possession in the land, the story turns to the problem that Yitskhaq alone cannot solve.
- Biblical narrative shows us God's providence at work through the "happenings" of the story.
- Rivqah is like the Avraham of the next generation, leaving her home and family to see God's promise secured.

Macro Design Genesis 24

Genesis 24:1-28

Avraham, His Servant, the Oath, and the Journey Back to Mesopotamia

Genesis 24:1-9

Avraham Makes Servant Swear an Oath to Take a Wife for Yitskhaq From His Family

- 24:1 "Yahweh had blessed Avraham in everything"
- 24:4 "Go to my land and my family and take a wife for my son"
- 24:5 "What if she will not come after me?"

Genesis 24:10-28

The Servant's Journey to the City of Nakhor

- 24:10 "And the servant took ten camels and he went ... and kneeled them by a well "
- 24:10-14 The servant prays to God about a test: "Oh Yahweh, Elohim of my master Avraham"
- 24:15-21 The prayer is granted: test fulfilled
- 24:22-28 The servant praises God: "Blessed be Yahweh, Elohim of my master Avraham"

Genesis 24:29-51

The Servant Retells the Story of Yahweh's Faithfulness

Genesis 24:29-33

Lavan Hears the Words that Rivqah Says About the Words of the Servant

Genesis 24:34-49

The Servant **Speaks His Words**

- **24:34-41** The servant recounts his conversation with Avraham (see v. 1-9)
- **24:42-28** The servant recounts his meeting with Rivqah (see v. 10-14)
- **24:49** The servant asks Lavan and Betuel to make a decision

Genesis 24:50-51

Lavan: “ **The word** has come out from Yahweh ... let it be as he has **spoken** .”

Genesis 24:52-67

Rivqah, the Blessing, and the Journey Back to Canaan

Genesis 24:52-61

The Servant Asks Rivqah, Together They Journey Back to Canaan

- **24:52-54a** The servant gives Rivqah many treasures
- **24:54b-58** Rivqah agrees to go with the servant
- **24:59-61** “**And they blessed Rivqah** : 'May you become thousands of multitudes!'"
- **24:61** “**And Rivqah arose ... and she went after the man ... and he took her and he went.**”

Genesis 24:62-67

The Servant and Rivqah Arrive in Canaan and Meet Yitskhaq

- **24:62-64** The servant's return to Yitskhaq at a well
 - **24:63** “And Yitskhaq came from **the 'Well** of Life of Seeing' ... and **camels** were coming”
- **24:65** Dialogue
- **24:66-67** Yitskhaq marries Rivqah and finds comfort

Genesis 24:1-67. Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 24:1-9

¹ Now, **Avraham** was old,
going on in days,
and Yahweh had **blessed (ברך)** **Avraham** in everything.

² **And Avraham said to his servant** ,
the old one of his house,
who ruled over all that belonged to him,
“Please **place your hand under my thigh (ידך)** ,

³ so I can make you **swear an oath** by **Yahweh**,
the Elohim of the skies and the Elohim of the land:

You will not take a woman for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites,
in whose midst I am dwelling.

⁴ Rather, **to my land and to my family** you will go,
and **you will take a woman for my son, for Yitskhaq.**"

⁵ **And the servant said to him,**

"Perhaps the woman will not be willing to go after me to this land.
Should I return your son to the land which you came out from there?"

⁶ **And Avraham said to him,**

"Keep watch of yourself, so that you **don't return my son to there.**

⁷ **Yahweh the Elohim of the skies,**

who took me from the house of my father and from **the land of my family**,
and who spoke to me,
and who **swore an oath** to me, saying,

"To your seed I will give this land."

he will send his messenger before you,
so you can take a woman for my son from there.

⁸ And **if the woman is not willing to go after you from there,**
then you are innocent from **this oath**.
Only **do not return my son to there.**

⁹ And the servant **placed his hand under the thigh (יד)** of Avraham his master,
and he **swore an oath** to him about this matter.

Genesis 24:1-28. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Macro Design Genesis 24:10-28

Genesis 24:10-14

- **24:10** The servant rides camels over the rivers **to a well**
- **24:11** The servant with his camels **by a well** outside the city
- **24:12-14** **The servant's prayer to Yahweh**
 - **"O Yahweh, Elohim of my master Avraham."**
 - **The test: Meet woman at the well > She gives a drink and waters the camels**

Genesis 24:15-21

- **24:15-16** A woman appears at the well: Rivqah, Avraham's great-niece
- **24:17-20** The test fulfilled: She gives drink and waters the camels
- **24:21** The servant watches and waits to see if Yahweh has made his way successful

Genesis 24:22-28

- **24:22** The servant gives treasures to Rivqah
- **24:23-25** Dialogue between servant and Rivqah
 - **24:23** Servant: (a) Whose daughter are you? (b) Is there a place to stay?
 - **24:24** Rivqah: (a) I am daughter of Betuel, born to Nakhor
 - **24:25** Rivqah: (b) We have a place to stay
- **24:26-27** The servant bows and worships Yahweh
 - "Blessed be Yahweh, Elohim of my master Avraham."
 - Yahweh had led me on the way to the house of my master's brother."

Genesis 24:10-28. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 24:10-67

¹⁰ And the servant took ten camels from the camels of his master and he went and all the good of his master was in his hand and he got up and he went to the land of Aram- Naharayim (= "Aram of Two Rivers"), to the city of Nakhor.

¹¹ And he made the camels kneel outside the city, at a well of water, at the time of evening, at the time when the women who get water come out.

¹² And he said,

A "Yahweh, Elohim of my master Avraham, Please make it happen today before me, and act with loyal-love toward my master Avraham.

¹³ Look, I am standing at the spring of the water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to get water.

¹⁴ And may it be that the young woman to whom I say,

B "Please lower your jar, so I can drink." and she says,

"Drink! And I will also give drink to your camels!"

May she be the one you've decided for your servant, for Isaac.

A' And by means of her, **I will know** that **you have acted with loyal-love toward my master.**"

15 And it came about, before he finished speaking,

a that look, **Rivqah** came out,

b who was born for **Betuel son of Milkah**,

b' wife of **Nakhor, the brother of Avraham**,

a' and **her jar** was on her shoulder.

a 16 And the **young woman** **was good to see, very much**,

b a virgin,

b' and a man had not known her,

a' and she went down to the spring and filled **her jar** and she brought it up,

a 17 and the servant ran to meet her,

b and he said,

"Please, may I **swallow a bit of water** from your jar?"

b' **and she said**,

18 "**Drink**, my master."

a' **and she hurried** and lowered **her jar** in her hand

and she let him **drink**,

19 and **she finished** letting him **drink**,

b' **and she said**,

"Also for **your camels**, let me get **water**,

until they are finished **drinking**."

a 20 **And she hurried** and emptied **her jar** into the **water-trough**,

a' **and she ran** again to the **well** to get **water**,

and she got **water** for all his **camels**.

21 And **the man was staring at her**,

being silent, **so he could know** **if Yahweh had made his way successful or not**.

22 And it came about when **the camels** finished **drinking**,

that the man took a gold nose-ring, a half-Shekel in weight,

and two bracelets on her hands, ten gold was their weight,

23 and he said,

"**Whose daughter are you** ?

a Please tell me!

Is there a place for us to stay in the house of your father?"

24 And she said to him,

"A daughter of **Betuel** I am,

the son of **Milkah**,

h

whom **she birthed for Nakhor**."

25 And she said to him,

a' b' "We have much straw and fodder, and also **a place to stay** .

26 And the man bowed in worship to Yahweh, and said,

27 "May **Yahweh be blessed, Elohim of my master Avraham**,
who has not abandoned **his loyal-love and faithfulness with my master** .

As for me, **Yahweh has guided me on the way** to **the house of the brother of my master** ."

28 And the young woman ran

and she reported to the **house of her mother** about these words.

Genesis 24:1-28. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

29 Now, **Rivqah had a brother**,

and his name was Lavan,

a and Lavan ran to **the man outside the city, to the spring** .

b 30 And it came about when he saw the nose-ring and the bracelets on the hands of **his sister**,

b' and when he heard the **spoken-words** of Rivqah **his sister**, saying,

a' "This is what **the man spoke** to me,"

that he went to **the man** and look, he was standing by **his camels** , **by the spring** .

31 And he said,

"**Come** , **blessed one of Yahweh** !

Why do you stand outside?

I have prepared **the house** and a place for **the camels** !"

32 And the man **came** into **the house** ,

and he opened up **the camels** ,

and he gave **straw and fodder** to **the camels** ,

and **water** for washing his feet and the feet of the men with him,

33 and there was set before him **food for eating** ,

and he said ,

"I will not **eat food** until I **speak** my **words** ."

And he said ,

"**Speak** !"

34 And he said,

"A servant of Avraham I am.

35 And **Yahweh has blessed** my master very much,

and he has become great ,

and he has given to him

flocks and herds
and silver and gold
and male and female servants
and camels and donkeys,

36 and Sarah, the wife of my master, has birthed for him **a son**, after she has become old,
and he gave to him everything which belongs to him.

37 And my master made me **swear an oath**, saying,

‘**You will not take a woman for my son**
from the daughters of the Canaanites,
in whose land I am dwelling.

38 Rather, you will go to **the house of my father**,
and to my clan,
and **you will take a woman for my son**!’

39 And I said to my master,

‘Perhaps **the woman** will not come after me.’

40 And he said to me,

‘**Yahweh**, whom I have walked before his face,
he will send his messenger with you,
and he will make your way successful,

and **you will take a woman for my son**, from my clan, and from the house of my father.

41 Then **you will be innocent from my oath**,
because you will have gone to my clan.

And if they don’t give you,

then **you will be innocent from my oath**.’

42 And I went today to the spring,
and I said,

‘**Yahweh, Elohim of my master Avraham**,
if you would **please make successful my way** upon which I walk,

43 look, I am standing by a **spring of water**.

And may it come about that the young woman who comes out to get **water**,
and to whom I say,

“Please, give me a little **water** to **drink** from **your jar**.”

44 and then she says to me,

“Both you I will give to **drink**, and I will also get **water** for your camels.”

May that be the woman whom **Yahweh has decided for** the son of my master.’

45 I had just finished speaking to my heart,
and look, Rivqah came out!

And **her jar** was on her shoulder,

a and she went down to the **spring** and got **water**,
b and I said to her,
‘Please, give me a **drink**.’
a’ 46 And she hurried and brought down **her jar** from upon her,
and she said,
b’ ‘**Drink**! And I will also **water** your camels.’
and I **drank**, and also she **watered** the camels.

47 And I asked her and I said,
‘Whose **daughter** are you?’
And she said,
‘The **daughter** of Betuel,
the son of Nakhor,
whom Milkah birthed for him.’
48 And I bowed in worship to Yahweh,
and **I blessed Yahweh the Elohim of my master Avraham,**
who guided me on the way of faithfulness,
to take **the daughter of the brother of my master** for his son.

49 And now, if you all are going to act with **loyal-love and faithfulness** to my master, **tell me!**
And if not, **tell me!**
So I can turn to the right or to the left!"

50 And Lavan answered, and Betuel, and they said,
“**The spoken-word has gone out from Yahweh!**
We are not able to **speak a word** to you, bad or good!
51 Look, Rivqah is before you: take and go!
And **she can become a wife for the son of your master,**
just as Yahweh has spoken a word.”

Genesis 24:29-51. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

52 And it came about when the servant of Avraham heard their **spoken-words**,
then he bowed onto the ground in worship of Yahweh.
53 And the servant brought out articles of silver and articles of gold and clothes,
and he gave to **Rivqah (רִבְקָה)**,
and he gave precious gifts to her brother and to her mother.
54 And they ate and they drank,
he and the men with him,
and they stayed the night.

And they got up in the morning,

a **and he said,**

"**Send me off to my master**!"

55 **And they said,** her brother and her mother,

b "Let the young woman dwell with us a few days, or ten;
after that **she can go**."

56 **And he said** to them,

"Do not make me delay.

a'

Yahweh has made my way successful .

Send me off so I can go to my master ."

57 **And they said,**

b' " **Let us call** the young woman,
and we can inquire what she says."

58 And **they called** **Rivqah**

b" **and they said to her,**

"**Will you go** with this man?"

a" **And she said,**

"**I will go** ."

59 And **they sent** **Rivqah** (רבקה) their sister and her nursemaid,
and the servant of Abraham and his men,

60 and they **blessed** (ברך) **Rivqah** (רבקה),
and they said to her,

"Our sister, may you become into thousands of **ten-thousands** (רבבה),
and may your seed possess the gate of its haters."

61 And she arose, **Rivqah** (רבקה) and her young women,
and **they rode** (רכב) upon the camels,
and **they went** after the man
and the servant took **Rivqah** (רבקה) and **he went** .

62 Now, Yitskhaq was going from the entrance of **Beer** -Lakhai-Roi (" **Well** of the Living One Who Sees Me")

and he was dwelling in the land of the Negev,

63 and Yitskhaq went out **to urinate in the field** as it turned to evening,
and **he lifted his eyes and he saw**

and look, **camels** coming;

64 and **Rivqah** **lifted her eyes and she saw** Yitskhaq,
and she fell off her **camel** .

65 And she said to the servant,
 "Who is this man,
 who is **walking in the field** to meet us?"
 And the servant said,
 "He is my master."
 And she took a veil and she covered herself.

66 And the servant recounted to Yitskhaq all the things that he did,
 67 and **Yitskhaq brought her (ויבאה)** into the tent of **Sarah his mother** ,
 and he took **Rivqah** ,
 and **she became for him a wife** ,
 and **he loved her (ויאהבה)**
 and Yitskhaq was comforted after the death of **his mother** .

Genesis 24:52-67. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Rivqah: Avraham's Counterpart in the Next Generation

Sarah's death signals the passing away of Avraham's generation. How will the next generation participate in the ongoing covenant promises of Yahweh? For Avraham, the question of seed is paramount. The chosen son has no counterpart, even though Avraham finds himself in a state of blessing. This story foregrounds the miraculous nature of Rivqah's entry into Avraham's family, and it also highlights her own faithfulness by portraying her as a female counterpart to Avraham.

Avraham's Journey of Faith	Rivqah's Journey of Faith
Gen. 12:1 Avraham leaves "his land and family (ארץ + מולדת)."	Gen. 24:7 Avraham's servant brings Rivqah from "the house of my father, and from the land of my family (ארץ מולדתי)."
Gen. 11:31, 12:4-6 He sojourns from Mesopotamia to go to Canaan.	She sojourns from Mesopotamia, by Aram of Two-Rivers (Gen. 24:10), to go to the land of Canaan (Gen. 24:61)
Gen. 11:29 He leaves behind Nakhor his brother and his wife Milkah.	Gen. 24:15, 24 She leaves behind her father Betuel son of Nakhor and her grandmother Milkah.
<i>Avraham and Rivqah.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).	

Avraham's Journey of Faith

Gen. 12:1-2 Avraham leaves because of God's promise of blessing: "I will make you a great nation."

*"Blessing" occurs 5x in Gen. 12:1-3

Rivqah's Journey of Faith

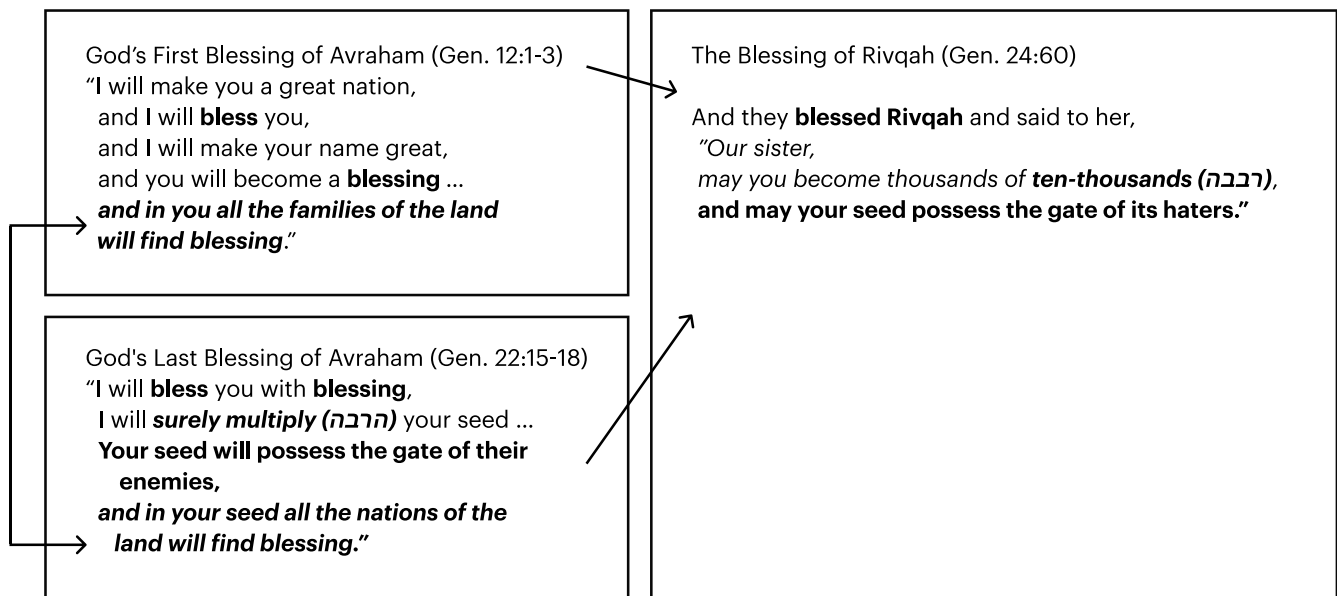
Gen. 24:60 Rivqah leaves with a promise of blessing: "May you become thousands of ten-thousands!"

*"Blessing" occurs 7x in Gen. 24 (v. 1, 11 "kneel," 27, 31, 35, 48, 60)

Avraham and Rivqah. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Blessings From Beginning to End

Rivqah's family announces a blessing over her as she leaves Mesopotamia and surrenders herself wholly to God's purposes. Rivqah's blessing connects to God's first blessing to Avraham when he left Mesopotamia ([Gen. 11-12](#)) and to God's final blessing to Avraham when he surrendered Yitskhaq over to God ([Gen. 22](#)).



Blessings From Beginning to End. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Rivqah, Bride of Eden

Many hyperlinks in this story link back to the provision of a wife for the human in [Genesis 2](#) and to the provision of the ark for Noah in [Genesis 6-8](#). In both cases, God provides for the chosen lineage at precisely the moment when its future is in jeopardy.

God's Provision of a Wife for Adam	God's Provision of a Wife for Yitskhaq
Gen. 2:18-20 The human is alone and cannot carry out God's will to be fruitful and multiply, and no counterparts are found among the animals.	Gen. 24:1-9 Yitskhaq cannot carry on the promised lineage alone, as he needs a counterpart to be fruitful and multiply, but none will be found among the Canaanites.
Gen. 2:10, 21-25 In the garden, by the stream that will become "rivers" (נהרים), and with the animals, God splits the human and builds (בנה) a counterpart, his wife.	Gen. 24:10-21 Past the land of "two rivers" (נהרים), by a spring/well of water, with the camels, God provides a female counterpart for Yitskhaq to be his wife.
Gen. 2:22 "And Yahweh Elohim brought her to (ויבאה אל) the human."	Gen. 24:67 "And [Yitskhaq] brought her into his tent (ויבאה ... האהלה)"
Gen. 2:23 "And the human said, 'This (זאת) time: bone from my bone, flesh from my flesh, this one (לזאת) will be called wo-man because from man she was taken.'"	Gen. 24:65 "And [Rivqah] said, 'Who is the man (האיש), this one (הלזה) ...?'"
Gen. 2:24 "A man will leave his father and his mother and cling to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."	Gen. 24:38 "Go to the house of my father, and take a wife for my son." Gen. 24:67 "And Yitskhaq brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother, and Rivqah became his wife ..."
God's Provision, Adam and Yitskhaq. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).	

God's Provision of the Ark for Noah and the Animals	God's Provision of a Wife for Yitskhaq
Gen. 6:14-22 God tells Noah to build a place of refuge from the flood, the ark (התבה).	Gen. 24:15 The servant goes to get a wife for Avraham's son, and comes to the house (הביתה) of Avraham's brother.
The animals come, two by two, male and female, each with his wife (אשה / איש, Gen. 7:2) and "enter into the ark" (Gen. 7:9) where they are given food for eating (Gen. 6:21).	Gen. 24:32 The servant's 10 animals come with him, and as "the man enters into the house," they are given food.
God's Provision, Noah and Yitskhaq. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).	

God's Provision of the Ark for Noah and the Animals	God's Provision of a Wife for Yitskhaq
Gen. 7 Noah and his wife pass through the waters of the flood with the animals.	Gen. 24:61 The servant and Yitskhaq's future wife cross the rivers of Mesopotamia with their animals.
<i>God's Provision, Noah and Yitskhaq. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).</i>	

Notice that the story of Ruth is aware of these connections between Genesis 2, 6-8, and 24, and the story draws upon the entire design pattern by selecting vocabulary from strategic moments in the stories.

Reflection Question

How does the biblical narrative tell us God is at work in Genesis 24?

Session 28: Not Chosen But Blessed

Key Takeaways

- The theme of fractured relationship in the Avraham story is crucial for understanding the plight of humanity and for building the biblical hope of eventual reconciliation.
- Avraham's sojourns in Babylon and Egypt create a thematic link between the two. Israel's exodus from Egypt later becomes the hope for the nation's return from exile in Babylon.

Macro Design of Genesis 25:1-18

Genesis 25:1-6

- **25:1** Avraham marries Qeturah
- **Birth: Sons of Qeturah**
 - **25:2-4** Qeturah births 16 sons and grandsons for Avraham
- **Brothers Divide**
 - **25:6** Avraham separates Yitskhaq away from sons of concubines who go east

Genesis 25:7-11

- **Death**
 - **25:7-8** Avraham expires at 175 years, buried and gathered to his people
- **25:9-10** Yitskhaq and Yishmael bury Avraham in cave/field of Makpelah in Mamre
- **Brothers Divide**
 - **25:11** Yitskhaq is selected for blessing and lives in Yishmael's old haunt

Genesis 25:12-18

- **Birth: Sons of Yishmael**
 - **25:12-16** Yishmael's birth generations: 12 sons (grandsons of Avraham)
- **Death**
 - **25:17** Yishmael expires at 137 years, buried and gathered to his people
- **Brothers Divide**
 - **25:18** Yishmaelites live in south, away from his brothers

Genesis 25:1-18. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Avraham's Marriage to Qeturah

These three units bring the Avraham story to a close, and they are tightly woven together in a number of ways that recall the same type of conclusion to the Adam and Eve story in Genesis 4-5, and the Noah story in Genesis 10-11

God Blesses the Chosen One, Who Eventually Fails	God Chooses One From the Next Generation; Brothers Divide, One to the East	Genealogy of Births and Deaths	Selection and Blessing of the Next Generation
Adam & Eve (Gen. 2-3)	Cain, Abel, Seth (Gen. 4)	Gen. 5 These are the birth generations	Noah (Gen. 6-8)
Noah (Gen. 9:1-17)	Japheth, Shem, Ham (Gen. 9:18-29)	Gen. 10 These are the birth generations	Avraham (Gen. 11:27-12:6)
Avraham & Sarah (Gen. 11-24)	Yishmael, Yitskhaq, and sons of Qeturah (Gen. 25:1-18)	Gen. 25 These are the birth generations	Yitskhaq (Gen. 25:5-6, 11)

Three Cycles of the Pattern. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 25:1-18

¹ And Avraham did it again,
and he took a wife,
and her name was Qeturah.

a ² And she birthed for him
b Zimran and Yoqshan and Medan and Midyan and Yishbaq and Shuakh,
c ³ and Yoqshan birthed Sheva and Dedan,
c' and the sons of Dedan were Ashurites, Letushites, and Leummites;
b' ⁴ and the sons of Midyan were Ephah and Epher and Enoch and Avida and Eldaah.
a' All these are the sons of Qeturah.

- a 5 **And Avraham gave all** that belong to him
 b **to Yitskhaq**,
 b' 6 **and to the sons of the concubines** of Avraham,
 a' **Avraham gave gifts**,
 a and he sent them away from Yitskhaq his son,
 b while he was still alive,
 a' **to the east (קדמה)**, **to the land of the east (קדם)**.

- a 7 **And these are the days of the years of the life of Avraham** which he **lived**:
 b one hundred years and **seventy (שבע)** years and five years.
 a' 8 And he **expired** and **Avraham died**,
 b' in good old age,
 b'' old and **complete (שבע)**,
 a'' and he was **gathered to his people**.

- a 9 And they **buried him**, **Yitskhaq and Yishmael, his sons**,
 b in the cave of Macpelah,
 c in **the field** of Ephron son of Zohar that **Hethite**,
 b' which is opposite Mamre,
 c' 10 **the field** which Avraham purchased from the sons of **Heth**,
 a there **were buried Avraham** and Sarah his wife.

- 11 And it came about after the **death of Avraham**,
 that Elohim **blessed Yitskhaq his son**,
and Yitskhaq dwelt at Well of the Living One Who Sees Me.

- 12 **And these are the birth-generations of Yishmael, son of Avraham**,
 whom **she birthed**, Hagar the Egyptian, the slave-girl of Sarah, for Avraham.
 13 **These are the names of the sons of Yishmael**,
by their names of their birth-generations:
 the firstborn of Yishmael: Nevayot
 and Qedar and Adbeel and Mivsam,
 14 and Mishma and Dumah and Massa,
 15 Khadad and Tema, Yetur, Naphish, and **Qedmah (קדמה)**.
 16 **These are the sons of Yishmael and these are their names**,
by their villages and encampments,
twelve princes according to their clans.

- 17 **And these are the years of the life of Yishmael**:
 One hundred years and thirty years and **seven (שבע)** years.

And **he expired and he died, and he was gathered to his people** .

18 **And they dwelt from Havilah unto Shur** ,
which is opposite Egypt as you go to **Ashur** ,
against the face of all his brothers he fell.

Genesis 25:1-18. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Brothers From Different Mothers

This design sets up a paired relationship between Avraham's sons through Hagar and Qeturah, both in contrast to Yitskhaq. They all dwell in the south and east of the land of Canaan where Yitskhaq lives. Notice the wordplay between the sons of Qeturah who live in the east (קדמה) and the last son of Yishmael who is named "east" (קדמה).

The "sending away" of the sons of Qeturah from Yitskhaq is also parallel to the sons of Yishmael "falling against the face all his brothers." The vocabulary of these opening and closing sections of Genesis 25:1-18 is closely aligned with the story of Adam and Eve and Qayin's expulsion from Eden.

Gen. 25:6b And he sent them away (וישלחם)	Adam: Gen. 3:23a And Yahweh sent [human] away (וישלחהו) Cain: Gen. 4:14 Behold you have banished me (גרשת אתי)
from (מעל) Isaac while he was still living (עודנו חי)	Adam: Gen. 3:23b from the garden of Eden (עדן) Cain: Gen. 4:14 from upon the face of (מעל פני) the land and from before you (ומפניך)
to the east (קדמה) , to the land of the east (קדם)	Adam: Gen. 3:24 And he stationed on the east (מקדם) , the cherubim ... to guard the way to the tree of life (חי) Cain: Gen. 4:16 And Cain went out (ויצא) ... and dwelt in the land of Nod (נוד // עדן) , east of Eden (קדמת עדן)

Sent Away Sons. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

The descendants of Qeturah and Yishmael are also set on analogy with the sons of Ham in Genesis 10, through the not-so-subtle repetition of names.

Descendants of Ham

- Dedan and Sheva (Gen. 10:7)
- Havilah (Gen. 10:7)
- Ashur (Assyria, Gen. 10:11)

- Egypt ("Mizraim," Gen. 10:6).

Descendants of Avraham Through Qeturah

- Sheva and Dedan (Gen. 25:3)
- Ashurim (Gen. 25:3)

Descendants of Avraham Through Yishmael

"And they lived from Havilah unto Shur, which is before Egypt as one goes to Ashur" (Gen. 25:18).

These sons of Avraham are likened to the sons of Ham, who will live at odds with the chosen line of Avraham near their borders.

Non-Chosen but Blessed

Remember that in Genesis 16-17, Avraham asked God to favor Yishmael as the chosen son. God responded that Yishmael would indeed experience the Eden blessing, but he would not be chosen as the vehicle of promised lineage.

Genesis 17:18-20 Instructor's Translation

¹⁸ And Avraham said to God, "Oh that Yishmael might live before you!" ¹⁹ But God said, "No. Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his seed after him. ²⁰ As for Yishmael, I have heard you; look, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful and will multiply very much; **he shall become the father of twelve rulers**, and I will make him a great nation."

Genesis 25:12-16 Instructor's Translation

¹² And these are the birth-generations of Yishmael, son of Avraham, whom she birthed, Hagar the Egyptian, the slave-girl of Sarah, for Avraham. ¹³ These are the names of the sons of Yishmael, by their names of their birth-generations:
the firstborn of Yishmael:

Nevayot and Qedar and Adbeel and Mivsham, ¹⁴ and Mishma and Dumah and Massa, ¹⁵ Khadad and Tema, Yetur, Naphish, and Qedemah.

¹⁶ These are the sons of Yishmael and these are their names, by their villages and encampments, twelve rulers according to their clans.

Reflection Question

How is Avraham's story relevant for people of God who are so far removed from his time and situation?

Session 29: Reflecting on the Abraham Story

Key Takeaways

- The emphasis on protecting the vulnerable reminds us that when we choose our own version of Eden, we secure perceived safety at the expense of others, with consequences that impact generations.
- When we see brokenness in the world, Avraham's story reminds us that even though we're in Babylon right now, it's not the end of the story.
- Learning to read the Bible better trains us to read our own stories and discern what God is doing in our lives and communities.



This session has no notes

Reflection Question

Take some time to reflect on the insights you learned in this class.

Session 30: Studying the Abraham Story in Different Settings

Key Takeaways

- People learn more when they try to teach others what they are learning.
- Like the biblical authors who anchor their stories to the Bible's larger narrative, we can shape our practices and gatherings to reflect the unified story of Scripture.
- Calling attention to hyperlinks helps people see the way the Bible functions as a commentary on itself.



This session has no notes

Reflection Question

How would you share what you learned in this class with others in your context?