**Biblical Theology**

Lesson 5 – Election & Promise (Genesis 12-50)

1. Our next epoch in the story of redemption continues the advance of the line of the woman through Seth, Noah, and Shem and now picks up with Abram and will continue with the patriarchs.
2. Genesis 12-50 can be divided into 5 sections with each section focused on a particular individual:
   1. Abram/Abraham (Genesis 12-25:11)
   2. Ishmael (Genesis 25:12-18)
   3. Isaac (Genesis 25:19-35:29)
   4. Esau (Genesis 36-37:1)
   5. Jacob/Joseph (Genesis 37:2-50:26)
3. Notice that the beginning focused on Abram and the end focused on Jacob are relatively the same in length (about 14 chapters). Notice that Ishmael and Esau only get a few verses to themselves. Also notice that Isaac stands at the center.
4. The story begins with the call of Abram and the covenant that Yahweh makes with Abram. The Lord calls Abram out of a pagan land and covenants with him and promises 4 things to Abram:
   1. Seed/descendants (Gen 12:2; 13:16; 15:5)
   2. Land (Gen 12:7; 13:15; 15:18-21)
   3. Personal Blessing (Gen 12:2; 15:1)
   4. Blessing to Nations (Gen 12:3; Gen 18:18)
5. The actual covenant with Abraham begins in Genesis 12, is formally solemnized in Genesis 15 and is reiterated in Gen 17 with the sign of the covenant - circumcision. In Genesis 15, Abraham is told to cut in half a 3-year-old cow, 3-year-old female goat, and 3-year-old ram. Abraham falls into a deep sleep and Yahweh speaks to Him, foretelling the slavery in Egypt for 400 years until the “iniquity of the Amorites” is complete (Gen 15:12-16). Then Yahweh symbolically depicted as a fire pot and flaming torch passes through the cut animals. Now this was the way that covenants would be made between nations (usually between 1 stronger nation and 1 weaker nation) in the Ancient Near East. But there’s 1 big difference here. In the ANE, both parties to the covenant would walk between the dead animals, testifying that they may be cut in half and destroyed if either of them breaks the covenant. But what happens with Yahweh and Abraham? Only God goes through all by Himself. God takes the full responsibility for fulfilling the covenant with Abraham all by Himself.
6. D. A. Carson says of this covenant that it is all of grace. “Abraham will sin. Isaac will sometimes be a wimp. The next son Jacob is a trickster and a deceiver. He has 12 sons. One of them is sleeping with his father’s concubine. Another is sleeping with his daughter-in-law. 10 of those sons can’t figure out whether to murder the 11th son or sell him into slavery. And still God doesn’t wipe them out.”
7. At the end of Genesis, the 1 man Abraham has become 75 people (see Acts 7:14) so we see the progress of the “seed promise.” However, the reader is left wondering if the “land promise” will be fulfilled. Abraham only owns a small burial plot in the Promised Land and his descendants are “in Egypt” (Gen 50:26).
8. One of the major literary questions in this epoch is, “Which son will receive the blessing and be heir to the promises?”
   1. Abraham has Ishmael and Isaac
   2. Isaac has Esau and Jacob
9. The length devoted to Isaac and Jacob and the relative lack of material for Ishamael and Esau who drop out of the story help answer this question.
10. Additionally, we see Yahweh re-iterate the Abrahamic 4-fold promise to both Isaac and Jacob, but not Ishmael or Esau.
    1. Isaac
       1. Seed/descendants (Gen 26: 4)
       2. Land (Gen 26:3)
       3. Personal Blessing (Gen 26:3)
       4. Blessing to Nations (Gen 26:4)
    2. Jacob
       1. Seed/descendants (Gen 28:3, 14; 35:11; 48:4)
       2. Land (Gen 28:4, 13; 35:12; 48:4)
       3. Personal Blessing (Gen 28:3, 15; 48:3)
       4. Blessing to Nations (Gen 28:14)
11. Another major focus in Genesis 12-50 is the promise of God vs. situations of crisis/struggles/testing regarding the patriarchs. Their faith gets tested in similar ways in relation to God’s promise.
    1. Barren woman
       1. Sarah (Gen 11:30)
       2. Rebekah (Gen 25:21)
       3. Rachel (Gen 29:31)
    2. Waiting for the Promise
       1. Abraham had to wait 25 years for the birth of the promised child.
       2. Isaac had to wait 20 years for the birth of the promised child.
    3. Egypt
       1. Abraham’s wife is “taken” by the Pharaoh (Gen 12:10-20) and by Abimelech (Gen 20)
       2. Isaac’s wife is “taken” by Abimelech (Gen 26:1-11)
    4. Sibling rivalry
       1. Ishmael vs. Isaac (Ishmael gets sent away)
       2. Esau vs. Jacob (Jacob flees away)
       3. The 10 vs. Joseph (Joseph gets sent away)
12. From the perspective of the Israelites on the border of the Promised Land, Genesis 12-50 would have answered the following questions for them:
    1. How did we come to be a populous nation from the clan of Terah?
    2. What kind of men and women were our ancestors and what did they struggle with?
    3. Why is Yahweh giving this particular piece of land to us?
    4. Why do the Edomites, Ishmaelites, Canaanites, Perizzites, etc. hate us and are jealous of us?
13. When we look at how Genesis 12-50 fits into the overall story of Scripture [Redemptive-History], we see:
    1. Election. Abram was a pagan living in a land of darkness, but God called him to leave that land behind and to go where God called him. God passes over Ishmael and elects Isaac. God passes over Esau and elects Jacob. Paul picks up on this in Romans 9:6-13 in discussing how not all Israel is true Israel and how God elected Jacob over Esau solely according to His purpose and not because of anything positive or lacking in either Jacob or Esau. The whole story of redemption involves the elect of God being brought into His kingdom through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. God will open up the hearts of the elect to convert them, while the non-elect will be hardened by the proclamation of Christ and will continue to resist Him by opposing His people.
    2. Salvation by Faith Instead of Works. Paul uses Abraham in different books to talk about how salvation is by faith and not works. A major section is in Galatians 4:21-31. The author of Hebrews also picks up on the theme of faith and its relationship to the patriarchs. Hebrews 11:8-11 says, “**By faith Abraham obeyed** when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents **with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise**. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since **she considered Him faithful who had promised.** Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.”
    3. Demonstrating Faith by Works in a World of Challenges . James picks up on this using Abraham in James 2:18-24. It’s not enough to claim to have faith, works demonstrate true saving faith just like healthy fruit on a tree signifies that the tree itself is healthy. James points to Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac. He believed and trusted in God and demonstrated that by obeying even when it did not necessarily make sense. Sometimes the patriarchs respond poorly to challenges (Abraham sojourning in Egypt, Sarah giving Hagar to Abraham, Jacob deceiving Isaac, Joseph bragging to his brothers about the dream, etc.), and at other times they respond to challenges by faith (Abraham willing to sacrifice Isaac, rescuing Lot, Jacob wrestling with God, Joseph fleeing Potiphar’s wife, etc.). So too our actions demonstrate whether we are exercising faith in the promises of the living God, or trying to escape/solve our challenges in our own strength without recourse to God.
    4. The Gospel in the Old Testament. Paul says that the gospel was preached to Abraham in Galatians 3:7-9 which says, “Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And **the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed**.’ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” The gospel is the same in the OT as well as the NT: Believe the promises of God. The promises of God in the OT pointed toward the Messiah, the promises of God in the NT are in the Messiah Himself.
    5. Christ is the Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant.
       1. Seed: Paul writes in Galatians 3:16, “Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings [seed],” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring, [seed]” who is Christ.” The word “seed” in the Abrahamic covenant is in the singular. Paul picks up on this and says that the ultimate seed of Abraham is Christ.
       2. Land: The land is Israel becomes the whole world in the New Heavens and Earth and that is brought at the 2nd coming of Jesus. Paul points this out in Romans 4:13, “For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that **he would be heir of the world** did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.”
       3. Personal Blessing: Paul says that the imputation of righteousness apart from the works of the law is a “blessing” (Rom 4:1,9). And he writes in Ephesians 1:3 that the Father has blessed believers “in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.”
       4. Blessing to Nations: Christ has elected a people for Himself from every tribe, tongue/language, people/family, and nation (Rev. 5:9; 7:9; 11:9; 14:6). The blessing of Abraham to the nations is the preaching of the promised seed, Christ, to the nations, so that some from every nation is brought into the eternal kingdom of God. Paul says in Galatians 3:14, “in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles….”
14. “In calling Abram (God later renamed him Abraham) and promising to make him into a great nation, God temporarily narrows his focus to concentrate on one group of people in order to bless all people, remove the curse from creation, and restore and renew the original relationship that existed in the garden. God appoints a special sign to remind the people that they are “set apart” in order to “remove the curse” from the world - circumcision.” –International Bible Society
15. The role of Genesis 12-50 in redemptive-history can be summarized as, “Yahweh’s gracious promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are the very platform of the history of redemption.” –Willem VanGemeren