

## Abraham and the Covenants

(from *The Hebrew Bible* in English, published by the Jewish Publication Society of America, 1917 Edition)

### (The Covenant with Abraham: The Promise of a Nation and a Land; the First Calling)

**Genesis 12:1** Now the LORD said unto Abram: 'Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee. **2** And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and be thou a blessing. **3** And I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' **4** So Abram went, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him; and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. **5** And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came. **6** And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Shechem, unto the terebinth of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. **7** And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said: 'Unto thy seed will I give this land'; and he builded there an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him. **8** And he removed from thence unto the mountain on the east of Beth-el, and pitched his tent, having Beth-el on the west, and Ai on the east; and he builded there an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD. **9** And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the South.

(12:10-20 and 13:1-4, because of famine in their lands, Abram and Lot journey to Egypt, and then return to the promised land, at which time they separate.)

**13:5** And Lot also, who went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents. **6** And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together; for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. **7** And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle. And the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelt then in the land. **8** And Abram said unto Lot: 'Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we are brethren. **9** Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me; if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou take the right hand, then I will go to the left.' **10** And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of the Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou goest unto Zoar. **11** So Lot chose him all the plain of the Jordan; and Lot journeyed east; and they separated themselves the one from the other. **12** Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the Plain, and moved his tent as far as Sodom. **13** Now the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners against the LORD exceedingly. **14** And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him: 'Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward and eastward and westward; **15** for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. **16** And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth; so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. **17** Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for

unto thee will I give it.' **18** And Abram moved his tent, and came and dwelt by the terebinths of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD.

#### **(Devine promise and reiteration of covenant)**

**15:1** After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying: 'Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield, thy reward shall be exceeding great.' **2** And Abram said: 'O Lord GOD, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go hence childless, and he that shall be possessor of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?' **3** And Abram said: 'Behold, to me Thou hast given no seed, and, lo, one born in my house is to be mine heir.' **4** And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying: 'This man shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.' **5** And He brought him forth abroad, and said: 'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars, if thou be able to count them'; and He said unto him: 'So shall thy seed be.' **6** And he believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness.

#### **(Hagar and Ishmael)**

**16:1** Now Sarai Abram's wife bore him no children; and she had a handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. **2** And Sarai said unto Abram: 'Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing; go in, I pray thee, unto my handmaid; it may be that I shall be builded up through her.' And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. **3** And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar the Egyptian, her handmaid, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to Abram her husband to be his wife. **4** And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes. **5** And Sarai said unto Abram: 'My wrong be upon thee: I gave my handmaid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the LORD judge between me and thee.' **6** But Abram said unto Sarai: 'Behold, thy maid is in thy hand; do to her that which is good in thine eyes.' And Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her face. **7** And the angel of the LORD found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur. **8** And he said: 'Hagar, Sarai's handmaid, whence camest thou? and whither goest thou?' And she said: 'I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai.' **9** And the angel of the LORD said unto her: 'Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands.' **10** And the angel of the LORD said unto her: 'I will greatly multiply thy seed, that it shall not be numbered for multitude. **11** And the angel of the LORD said unto her: 'Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son; and thou shalt call his name Ishmael, because the LORD hath heard thy affliction. **12** And he shall be a wild ass of a man: his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the face of all his brethren.' **13** And she called the name of the LORD that spoke unto her, Thou art a God of seeing; for she said: 'Have I even here seen Him that seeth Me?' **14** Wherefore the well was called 'Beer-lahai-roi; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered. **15** And Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. **16** And Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

**(Covenant and Circumcision.** Abram given name, "Abraham," circumcision originally a rite of initiation into marriage and the clan responsibilities, becomes mark, "sign," of obligations as a "chosen people)

**17:1** And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him: 'I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be thou wholehearted. **2** And I will make My covenant between Me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.' **3** And Abram fell on his face; and God talked with him, saying: **4** 'As for Me, behold, My covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be the father of a multitude of nations. **5** Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for the father of a multitude of nations have I made thee. **6** And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. **7** And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee. **8** And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land of thy sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.' **9** And God said unto Abraham: 'And as for thee, thou shalt keep My covenant, thou, and thy seed after thee throughout their generations. **10** This is My covenant, which ye shall keep, between Me and you and thy seed after thee: every male among you shall be circumcised. **11** And ye shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of a covenant betwixt Me and you. **12** And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every male throughout your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any foreigner, that is not of thy seed. **13** He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised; and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. **14** And the uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken My covenant.' **15** And God said unto Abraham: 'As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. **16** And I will bless her, and moreover I will give thee a son of her; yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be of her.' **17** Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart: 'Shall a child be born unto him that is a hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?' **18** And Abraham said unto God: 'Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee!' **19** And God said: 'Nay, but Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son; and thou shalt call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his seed after him. **20** And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee; behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. **21** But My covenant will I establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year.' **22** And He left off talking with him, and God went up from Abraham. **23** And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him. **24** And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. **25** And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. **26** In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, and

Ishmael his son. **27** And all the men of his house, those born in the house, and those bought with money of a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

**(Sarah is reminded that for the God, nothing is impossible)**

**18:1** And the LORD appeared unto him by the terebinths of Mamre, as he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; **2** and he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood over against him; and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed down to the earth, **3** and said: 'My lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant. **4** Let now a little water be fetched, and wash your feet, and recline yourselves under the tree. **5** And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and stay ye your heart; after that ye shall pass on; forasmuch as ye are come to your servant.' And they said: 'So do, as thou hast said.' **6** And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said: 'Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes.' **7** And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetched a calf tender and good, and gave it unto the servant; and he hastened to dress it. **8** And he took curd, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat. **9** And they said unto him: 'Where is Sarah thy wife?' And he said: 'Behold, in the tent.' **10** And He said: 'I will certainly return unto thee when the season cometh round; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son.' And Sarah heard in the tent door, which was behind him.-- **11** Now Abraham and Sarah were old, and well stricken in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.-- **12** And Sarah laughed within herself, saying: 'After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?' **13** And the LORD said unto Abraham: 'Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying: Shall I of a surety bear a child, who am old? **14** Is any thing too hard for the LORD. At the set time I will return unto thee, when the season cometh round, and Sarah shall have a son.' **15** Then Sarah denied, saying: 'I laughed not'; for she was afraid. And He said: 'Nay; but thou didst laugh.' **16** And the men rose up from thence, and looked out toward Sodom; and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way.

**(Abraham softens God's heart.** God is about to destroy the entire city of Sodom due to the wickedness of its inhabitants, at which Abraham challenges God. Addresses the perennial problem of why good people suffer along with the wicked.)

**18:17** And the LORD said: 'Shall I hide from Abraham that which I am doing; **18** seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? **19** For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice; to the end that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him.' **20** And the LORD said: 'Verily, the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and, verily, their sin is exceeding grievous. **21** I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto Me; and if not, I will know.' **22** And the men turned from thence, and went toward Sodom; but Abraham stood yet before the LORD. **23** And Abraham drew near, and said: 'Wilt Thou indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? **24**

Peradventure there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt Thou indeed sweep away and not forgive the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? **25** That be far from Thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, that so the righteous should be as the wicked; that be far from Thee; shall not the Judge of all the earth do justly?' **26** And the LORD said: 'If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will forgive all the place for their sake.' **27** And Abraham answered and said: 'Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the LORD, who am but dust and ashes. **28** Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous; wilt Thou destroy all the city for lack of five?' And He said: 'I will not destroy it, if I find there forty and five.' **29** And he spoke unto Him yet again, and said: 'Peradventure there shall be forty found there.' And He said: 'I will not do it for the forty's sake.' **30** And he said: 'Oh, let not the LORD be angry, and I will speak. Peradventure there shall thirty be found there.' And He said: 'I will not do it, if I find thirty there.' **31** And he said: 'Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the LORD. Peradventure there shall be twenty found there.' And He said: 'I will not destroy it for the twenty's sake.' **32** And he said: 'Oh, let not the LORD be angry, and I will speak yet but this once. Peradventure ten shall be found there.' And He said: 'I will not destroy it for the ten's sake.' **33** And the LORD went His way, as soon as He had left off speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned unto his place.

**(Destruction of Sodom, Lot is saved)**

**19:15** And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying: 'Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters that are here; lest thou be swept away in the iniquity of the city.' **16** But he lingered; and the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the LORD being merciful unto him. And they brought him forth, and set him without the city. **17** And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said: 'Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the Plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be swept away.' **18** And Lot said unto them: 'Oh, not so, my lord; **19** behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast shown unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest the evil overtake me, and I die. **20** Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one; oh, let me escape thither--is it not a little one?--and my soul shall live.' **21** And he said unto him: 'See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow the city of which thou hast spoken. **22** Hasten thou, escape thither; for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither.'--Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar.-- **23** The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot came unto Zoar. **24** Then the LORD caused to rain upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; **25** and He overthrow those cities, and all the Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground. **26** But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt. **27** And Abraham got up early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD. **28** And he looked out toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the Plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the land went up as the smoke of a furnace. **29** And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the Plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt.

**(Birth of Isaac)**

**21:1** And the LORD remembered Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as He had spoken. **2** And Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. **3** And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac. **4** And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. **5** And Abraham was a hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him. **6** And Sarah said: 'God hath made laughter for me; every one that heareth will laugh on account of me.' **7** And she said: 'Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should give children suck? for I have borne him a son in his old age.' **8** And the child grew, and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.

**(Hagar and Ishmael vanquished)**

**21:9** And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne unto Abraham, making sport. **10** Wherefore she said unto Abraham: 'Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.' **11** And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight on account of his son. **12** And God said unto Abraham: 'Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah saith unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall seed be called to thee. **13** And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed.' **14** And Abraham arose up early in the morning, and took bread and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away; and she departed, and strayed in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. **15** And the water in the bottle was spent, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. **16** And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bow-shot; for she said: 'Let me not look upon the death of the child.' And she sat over against him, and lifted up her voice, and wept. **17** And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her: 'What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. **18** Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him fast by thy hand; for I will make him a great nation.' **19** And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink. **20** And God was with the lad, and he grew; and he dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. **21** And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt.

**(God Tests Abraham's Faith; the Second Calling)**

**22:1** And it came to pass after these things, that God did prove Abraham, and said unto him: 'Abraham'; and he said: 'Here am I.' **2** And He said: 'Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.' **3** And Abraham rose early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he cleaved the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him. **4** On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. **5** And Abraham said unto his young men: 'Abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship, and come back to you.' **6** And Abraham took the wood of the

burnt-offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took in his hand the fire and the knife; and they went both of them together. **7** And Isaac spoke unto Abraham his father, and said: 'My father.' And he said: 'Here am I, my son.' And he said: 'Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?' **8** And Abraham said: 'God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son.' So they went both of them together. **9** And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built the altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. **10** And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. **11** And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said: 'Abraham, Abraham.' And he said: 'Here am I.' **12** And he said: 'Lay not thy hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him; for now I know that thou art a God-fearing man, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me.' **13** And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt-offering in the stead of his son. **14** And Abraham called the name of that place Adonai-jireh; as it is said to this day: 'In the mount where the LORD is seen.' **15** And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham a second time out of heaven, **16** and said: 'By Myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, **17** that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; **18** and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast hearkened to My voice.' **19** So Abraham returned unto his young men, and they rose up and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beer-sheba.

#### **(Sarah dies)**

**23:1** And the life of Sarah was a hundred and seven and twenty years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. **2** And Sarah died in Kiriatharba--the same is Hebron--in the land of Canaan; and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her.

#### **(Abraham remarries)**

**25:1** And Abraham took another wife, and her name was Keturah. **2** And she bore him Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah. **3** And Jokshan begot Sheba, and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, and Letushim, and Leummim. **4** And the sons of Midian: Ephah, and Epher, and Hanoch, and Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah. **5** And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac. **6** But unto the sons of the concubines, that Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts; and he sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country.

#### **(Abraham dies and God blesses Isaac [and his descendants, Israelites])**

**25:7** And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, a hundred threescore and fifteen years. **8** And Abraham expired, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people. **9** And Isaac and Ishmael his sons buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre; **10** the

field which Abraham purchased of the children of Heth; there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife. **11** And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed Isaac his son; and Isaac dwelt by Beer-lahai-roi.

**(Descendants of Ishmael, the northern Arabian Tribes)**

**25:12** Now these are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's handmaid, bore unto Abraham. **13** And these are the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to their generations: the first-born of Ishmael, Nebaioth; and Kedar, and Adbeel, and Mibsam, **14** and Mishma, and Dumah, and Massa; **15** Hadad, and Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedem; **16** these are the sons of Ishmael, and these are their names, by their villages, and by their encampments; twelve princes according to their nations. **17** And these are the years of the life of Ishmael, a hundred and thirty and seven years; and he expired and died; and was gathered unto his people. **18** And they dwelt from Havilah unto Shur that is before Egypt, as thou goest toward Asshur: over against all his brethren he did settle.

**Commentary:** I've elected to use *The Hebrew Bible* text as the basic storyline in Abram/Abraham/Ibrahim is critical to Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions. Abraham is considered the original monotheist by Jews, Christians and Muslims alike, referred to as the "Abrahamic Religions." Second, God commands Abraham to go forth from his home to an unknown Promised Land, where he will make Abraham a "great nation," cursing those who don't follow him and blessing those who do. This is Abraham's "first calling." The story of Abraham's debate with God over the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah reflects the Jewish conviction that human beings are co-creators of the moral universe. The human capacity for compassion and justice is special. Even God may have something to learn from it! Abraham's faith is tested again, his "second calling," when God commands him to sacrifice his son. How far does one go in the name of God, and who blinked first? Source: Phillip Novak. *The World's Wisdom*. Edison, NJ: Castle Books. 1994:180.