

**THE PATRIARCHS
ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB**



**STUDY 1 - ABRAHAM WEEK 4
The Promise...Confirmed**

Psalm 110 - Of David. A psalm.

The Lord says to my lord:
"Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies
a footstool for your feet."

*The Lord will extend your mighty sceptre
from Zion, saying,
"Rule in the midst of your enemies!"*

Your troops will be willing
on your day of battle.
Arrayed in holy splendour,
your young men will come to you
like dew from the morning's womb.

*The Lord has sworn
and will not change his mind:
"You are a priest forever,
in the order of Melchizedek."*

The Lord is at your right hand;
he will crush kings on the day of his
wrath.
He will judge the nations, heaping up the
dead and crushing the rulers of the whole
earth.

*He will drink from a brook along the way,
and so he will lift his head high.*

Abram's story continues, but an unusual interruption is recorded in Genesis chapter 13, which begins with a phrase which is just two words in Hebrew, but needs seven words for some translations into English... '*And it happened in the days of...*' (*) and if you think that sounds a little like 'Once upon a time...' then you would likely be about right! This account of a battle begins with an ancient formulaic phrase to indicate this is a different sort of story from what has gone before. The writer wants the reader to know that once again the breadth of the stage set for this narrative is different. Having narrowed down the scope of the story so far from the totally global Creation down to just one man, Abram and his family, there is a broadening out of cast and characters, and the introduction of the idea that Abram and his people are more than just 'Family'. As we read the story keep an eye out for these changes...

Read Genesis 14; 1 - 16...

Apart from the long and difficult names, what strikes you from this part of the story?

Whilst the goings-on of the Nations widen the scope of Abram's story, it is his concern for one man (Lot) that motivates him. And the language used about Abram is still that of a family unit, not a nation - but... in verse 16 Abram is called 'the Hebrew' - the Nationhood promise is taking form.

Abram is capable of defeating (with God's help?) these Kings in battle, and the expectation from those around and about must have been that now Abram and his people would capitalise on their success. But Abram thinks differently!... which is evident when we see him meet **Melchizedek...**

Read 14; 17 - 24

Who is this Melchizedek?

Hebrews 7;1-3 'This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, the name Melchizedek means "king of righteousness"; then also, "king of Salem" means "king of peace." Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.' - (NIV)

Note that there is more detail here about Melchizedek in this reading than we get in the Genesis story. And look back at the Psalm we read at the beginning of this study.

'Most High God' or 'God most high' - is a translation of 'El Elyon'

'El' is the name for the Canaanite God of the Sky. 'Elyon' is another Canaanite god's name too. Both are also Hebrew words that together mean 'God most high' or 'the most high God'

So Melchizedek is a Canaanite priest of their 'double god' 'El-Elyon' - probably their creator god in their pantheon of deities. His city is 'Salem' - yes, one day to be Jerusalem, - which means 'Peace' - So 'King of Peace' as he is also recognised as a King, whose actual name has the meaning 'King of Righteousness' So in later generations this story becomes a rich seam to mine much meaning from. Neither we, the readers, nor anyone else it seems, knows Melchizedek's history or life story or when he died, so even that becomes part of the mythology around him to be used later on by other writers.

Abram uses some of this in his dealings with this King after the battle. Abram's God, as we discovered last week, is called 'YHWH' and Abram combines use of this NAME with 'El Elyon' as a way of forming a connection between and recognising in some way the faith of the other. In other parts of Scripture both 'El' on its own, and 'Elyon' and on at least one occasion, both together are used to denote 'YHWH'. Abram recognises in Melchizedek someone who shares with him some sort of monotheistic ideal, or at least, he 'co-opts' this King Priest into that ideal.

The King/Priest brings out 'bread and wine' to welcome Abram and his 'Lads', as Abram calls them, after the battle. And then he blesses Abram...

*'Blessed be Abram to Elyon - possessor of heaven and earth.
and blessed be El Elyon - who delivered your foes into your hand' (*)*

This double act of blessing, for the meal and the blessing itself are one and the same thing, is very powerful! Abram, the stranger in their midst, is being recognised as both one who is blessed by 'God most high' and one who blesses 'El Elyon' in his actions and life and so has that God's approval. Through Abram the land and its peoples have been set free and given peace that even the 'King of Peace' could not achieve. Abram, it seems is on the point of getting his 'Promise' fulfilled, but...

What does Abram do?

Abram goes back to being a Stranger in the land. Some commentators miss this completely and seem to think that Abram has, by might of arms, taken possession of the land, but as we will see later on, he does no such thing. The 'Promise' is not his to take, but his to receive. That he has subdued 'Kings' through the action of his 'Lads' (a military term really meaning trained men) is a sign of God's blessing, and the 'Lads' do get what they have rightly earned, but it is enough for Abram that God has used him to be a 'Blessing' to the nations (get it???) but it must be God's blessing, not the Nations' assent, that will make Abram 'Great'!

BUT..... there is still a problem - **Read 15; 1 - 6**

Just when the promise seemed to be within reach, Abram would appear to have thrown it away to no avail! God takes Abram's faith and counts it ('accounts it') as Righteousness/'Merit', which is great, but - **and 15;7-21** - With no son-and-heir how could this come to pass - Abram's servant is his Heir!

In Hebrew tradition, when you make a Covenant with someone you might say you have 'Cut a covenant' Up until now God's promises to Abraham have been made verbally. They have also tended to be one-sided, in that God has taken the primary role - 'I will....' do this and that... Now God himself 'Cuts a Covenant' with Abram, and vice-versa - or so it seems!



The idea behind the ritual described is that as the two parties walk arm-in-arm between the sacrificed and divided animals, each is saying to the other, 'Whoever breaks this deal is to become like these animals!' This part of the Covenant then is a formal process such as might be used by anyone. However, only Abram seems to be there, on his own waiting for his friend to join him! All day he fights with the carrion crows to keep this offering clean. By nightfall he is exhausted and in a deep sleep (the sleep that Adam slept when God took a rib to create Eve) and a darkness falls that is more than the evening twilight.

The contrast between the daytime 'Contract' and the nighttime is marked by mystery and what we might call 'magic' Abram, seemingly incapacitated, as in one of those dreams where you find you cannot move a muscle, hears a voice pronounce God's intent, including the exile to Egypt, but a long life for Abram and repeating the promise '*To your seed I have given this land...*' (*) - which this time is given in the perfect tense, not the imperfect (*I will give...*). This promise is an action that is complete and cannot be changed! And God takes responsibility for it upon himself only - only God walks through between the carcasses and so bears their implications and potentially, Abram's failures - his 'sin'!

But...that is not the end of the story... - next time - **The Promise - delayed?**

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(NIV) = New International Version