

Lecture 7: The Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac (and Ishmael); the Aqedah.

Reading: Genesis 12-22; Kugel 89-106, 119-132.

Second part of Genesis is the story of one family, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph.

Historicity of all these narratives is much debated; is the setting the early second millennium BCE, the ostensible date, or sometime in the first millennium BCE, the apparent date of the authors? Most scholars today, rejecting the legacy of Albright (see Kugel), prefer the second alternative.

Dramatic if unstated transition from Genesis 11 to Genesis 12ff

- Universal → particular.
- God chose Noah because he was righteous (Gen 6:9), but why Abra(ha)m? Text gives not a clue.
- In the text God chooses Abra(ha)m; in later interpretations Abra(ha)m chooses God (see Kugel); famous story about Abraham destroying the idols in his father's workshop.
 - ♦ Gen 15:6 *Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness* (KJV and many others) vs. *And because he put his trust in the Lord, He reckoned it to his merit* (JPS in the JSB). For Paul, Abraham is archetype of "faith"; "faith" vs. "trust".

Genesis 12-22:

- Gen 12 Abra(ha)m migrates from Haran to the land of Canaan; descent to Egypt;
- Gen 13 Abram and Lot;
- Gen 14 Abram the warrior;
- Gen 15 covenant between God and Abra(ha)m "between the sections";
- Gen 16 Abra(ha)m, Sara(i), Hagar, birth and expulsion of Ishmael;
- Gen 17 covenant between God and Abraham, circumcision;
- Gen 18-19 Abraham and the three visitors; destruction of Sodom; Lot and his daughters;
- Gen 20 Abraham and Avimelekh king of Gerar;
- Gen 21 birth of Isaac; expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael; covenant with Avimelekh;
- Gen 22 the binding (*aqedah*) of Isaac.

Duplications here:

- Wife-sister motif (Gen 12 and 20; cf. 26 re Isaac; at 26:1 the redactor seems to be aware that he is dealing with a duplicate *Now there was a famine in the land—besides the earlier famine of Abraham's time—and Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines in Gerar*);

- Expulsion of Hagar (Gen 16 and 21);
- Naming of Beer Sheva (21:31, 26:33);
- Two covenants (Gen 15 and 17).

Themes within these narratives:

God speaks with the patriarchs who clearly enjoy special status and ease of access to God:

- In 20:7, God tells Avimelekh that Abraham is a “prophet” (*navi*, intercessor) and that Avimelekh should request Abraham to pray for him to God.
- Abraham also intercedes for Sodom.

God appears in a dream to outsiders like Avimelekh (20:3); the moral order applies to them as well.

- Destruction of Sodom.
- The sin of the Amorite in 15:16.

Promise of the land of Canaan to Abraham’s descendants: 12:7, 13:15, 15:7, 17:8, 24:7:

- Canaan is son of Ham son of Noah (10:6), cursed to serve Shem and Japheth (9:25-27); therefore the Canaanites are not entitled to the land;
- Mysterious motif: we are not of this place. Abraham and the Israelites come to the land from the outside twice-over: from Ur/Haran, and from Egypt.

Covenant (*berit*): a treaty, a compact. God had a covenant with Noah (6:18, 9:8).

Gen 15 “between the sections” (see Kugel) vs. Gen 17 circumcision.

- A covenant between a people and its God is unparalleled anywhere else in the ANE.

Narrators do not make the Patriarchs conform to later Israelite piety:

- build altars everywhere (Kugel);
- Abraham marries his half-sister (20:12; prohibited in Leviticus 18:9);
- Jacob erects a sacred pillar (28:18, 35:14), prohibited in Leviticus 26:1 and Deuteronomy 16:21
- Jacob marries two sisters (prohibited in Leviticus 18:18).
- Aside from circumcision (Gen 17) and removal of foreign gods (35:2-4), distinctive Israelite practices (e.g. Sabbath, food laws [cf. Gen 32:33]) are not mentioned.
- Is this a good argument for the date of these narratives (Kugel)?

Gen 22: a polemic against child sacrifice?