Torah Series - Book of Genesis

A. Chapters 12:1-14:18 – Abraham (Abram)

Genesis 12:1 – Call of Abram:

- **Pivotal turning point** after the primeval history (Genesis 1–11), marking God's election of **one man and family** from among the scattered nations to reverse the effects of Babel.
- Abram's family (Terah) had already left **Ur** of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran.
- **Mesopotamia**: "Between the Rivers." Rivers flood. Really good soil for crops. Humanity starts farming.
- **Akkadian Empire** - First known Empire in history (modern day Iraq)
    - Founded by Sargon of Akkad (2334-2154BC)
    - Sumer (Sumeria) city states, shared common language (Sumerian), all conquered by Sargon.
    - Sumerian language exists in isolation (no related languages). Sumerians were "fish people" (*Apkallu*) depicted as humans in fish clothing.
    - Akkad (Akkadian - Semitic language).
- This time is the "**Sumerian Renaissance**" culture of Abram's day.
- **Ur** is the largest and most dominant city in the world at this time.
- **The call of Abram** involves **radical trust in God**: leaving **your land,** extended family/clan, and security for an **unknown destination** shown only by God.
- **Abram** means "Great or mighty father"

Genesis 12:2-3 – The Abrahamic Promise:

- Religion at this time: gods were associated with a region/land/people. They were connected to a power like the 'storm god' or the 'sun god.' People built temples/ziggurats to them, sacrificed to them to keep them happy/gain blessings.
- God comes to Abraham & promises:
    - to make Abram **a great nation**,
    - to **bless him**, make his name great, and
    - **make him a blessing**.
- Specifically: "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and **in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.**"
- These form the foundation of **the covenant**, focusing on land, seed/offspring, and universal blessing.
- Abram's **obedience** contrasts with the unified **rebellion** at Babel.
- The promises point forward to Israel, **the Messiah** (Christ as the true seed), and the Christian Church as the multi-ethnic people of God through whom all nations are blessed.

Genesis 12:4-5 – The Journey Begins:

- Lot (nephew) accompanies Abram & Sarai. This is a Caravan with myriads of flocks and people and stuff that will travel for years.
- Traveling from Haran to Canaan.

Genesis 12:6-9 – Abram in the Land of Canaan:

- Abram travels through the land to Shechem (at the oak of Moreh), where **God appears** to him and promises the land to his descendants.
- Abram builds an **altar** there (11 more altars will be constructed, each in the future Israelite tribal territories).
- Memorial Cairn/Pile of stones to commemorate a place in the world that God did something. The ritual was in returning to that spot and **anointing the stones with oil**. (Gen 28:10-22 {v.18}, Gen 35:14). This was the connection from Abram to the future tribes of Jacob.
- "To your descendants (seed) I will give **this land**."
- He then moves to the region between Bethel and Ai (both place names were called this by later people {Jacob & Joshua} - evidence of textual updating & editing), builds **another altar**, and calls on the name of the Lord before continuing toward the Negev.
- Abram is in the land but still nomadic due to the flocks. Issue: Canaanites are in the land.

Genesis 12:10 – Famine and Journey to Egypt:

- A severe famine strikes the land, prompting Abram to go down to **Egypt** as a sojourner for relief.

Genesis 12:11-13 – Abram's Deception:

- Fearing that the Egyptians will kill him to take his beautiful wife Sarai, Abram asks her to say she is his sister (a half-truth, as she was his half-sister {Gen 20:12}).
- This is presented as **a lack of faith** or a pragmatic but flawed decision to protect himself.

Genesis 12:14-16 – Events in Egypt:

- The Egyptians admire Sarai's beauty (smokin' hot 65 year old!); Pharaoh's officials praise her to him, and she is taken into Pharaoh's house (added to the harem).
- Abram is treated well and receives livestock, servants, and other gifts because of her.

Genesis 12:17 – God's Intervention and Plagues:

- The Lord **afflicts Pharaoh** and his house with great **plagues** because of Sarai (prefiguring later events like the Exodus plagues).
- God steps in to **protect/deliver** Sarai when Abram fails to do so.

Genesis 12:18-20 – Confrontation and Departure:

- Pharaoh summons Abram, rebukes him for the deception once he learns Sarai is his wife, and sends them away with their **possessions** (plunder// Exodus plunder).
- Abram and Sarai (along with their acquired goods) leave Egypt and return toward Canaan.

Genesis 13:1-4 – Return from Egypt:

- Abram (with Sarai and Lot) leaves Egypt and returns to the Negev, then travels back to the area between Bethel and Ai where he had previously built an **altar**.
- He calls on the name of the Lord again, resuming **worship** (prayer & sacrifice) in the promised land after the events in Egypt.

Genesis 13:5-7 – Wealth and Conflict:

- Both Abram and Lot have become very **wealthy** in livestock, flocks, herds, and tents.
- The land cannot support them dwelling together, leading to **strife** between their herdsmen.
- The presence of Canaanites and Perizzites in the land adds tension.

Genesis 13:8-9 – Abram's Peacemaking Offer

- To avoid strife (emphasizing they are "brethren"), Abram generously proposes they separate.
- He gives Lot first choice of direction: "If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or if you go to the right, then I will go to the left."
- This highlights **Abram's faith**, humility, and priority of peace over personal advantage.

Genesis 13:10-13 – Lot's Choice

- Lot looks at the well-watered plain of the **Jordan** (compared to the garden of the Lord or Egypt, before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah). Recall the flooding makes the land around the rivers very fertile.
- He chooses the **fertile area** for himself and journeys east, pitching his tents near Sodom.
- Cain → builds city (separated from natural world due to the curse) → humanity spirals down in commerce/civilization. **Lot chooses to go back** towards this city/pagan world/civilization. Sodom is noted for its extreme wickedness.
- Abram remains on the plain/natural.
- Point: our hope isn't in human civilization (city/commerce/technology - Lot) but rather in God's provision (Abram).

Genesis 13:14-18 – The Land

- After Lot separates from Abram, God tells Abram to look north, south, east, and west
- Abram is instructed to walk the land
- He moves to the **oak of Mamre** (a landmark/person) in Hebron and **builds an altar** to the Lord (third altar mentioned).
- The oak of Mamre and other sites (altars, locations) highlight **sacred space** and pilgrimage in biblical religion—specific physical places tied to God's encounters with Abram (and later patriarchs) remain significant landmarks for Israel.
- Biblical faith is **sacramental** and **tied to the physical world** (God appears visibly, worship involves shared meals/sacrifices); contrasts with overly *spiritualized* or *political* substitutions for religious instincts.

Genesis 14:1-4 – Battle!

- **Four kings** (Amraphel of Shinar, Arioch of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer of Elam, Tidal of nations) War against **five southern kings** (Bera of Sodom, Birsha of Gomorrah, etc., including Zoar) in the Valley of Siddim (Salt Sea/Dead Sea area, raiding party attacks).
- The southern kings had paid tribute ("protection money") to Chedorlaomer for 12 years but rebelled in the 13th
- The northern kings raid in the 14th year.

Genesis 14:5-7 – Attack on the Giant Clans:

- On the way, the northern kings defeat **giant clans**/tribes (ex: Rephaim/Zuzim/Emim, Horites in Seir, Amalekites, Amorites)—Belonging to clans: not genetic/ethnicity rather based on **the god your group worshiped/ritual life**. These groups are defined by **demonic ritual practices** (**human sacrifice/cannibalism, sexual immorality**).
- Such clans recur as problems into Joshua.
- This portrays the northern kings (indirectly) **carrying out God's will** against evil/wicked/giant-clan practices, foreshadowing later patterns (ex: northern invasions disciplining sin, as with Assyria/Babylon).

Genesis 14:8-12 – Southern Kings Defeated:

- The **southern kings** are defeated in battle
- Kings of Sodom/Gomorrah flee into tar pits; survivors hide in mountains.
- The northern coalition plunders goods, livestock, and captives—**including Lot** (now dwelling in Sodom) and his possessions.

Genesis 14:13-16 – Abram the Deliverer:

- A fugitive reports to "**Abram the Hebrew**" at the oak of Mamre (allied with local Amorites {geographical area}, not necessarily giant-clan members).
- Abram musters 318 trained servants, pursues to Dan (later place name), divides forces for a night attack, defeats the kings as far as north of Damascus, and recovers all (including Lot, goods, women, and people).

Genesis 14:17 – Contrast two Kings:

- After Abram's victory over the coalition of kings and recovery of the captives (including Lot), the king of Sodom comes out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (also called the King's Valley), near what would become Jerusalem.
- This sets up a contrast between two kings who meet Abram upon his return: the king of Sodom (representing worldly/carnal power and the wicked city) and **Melchizedek**, king of Salem.

Genesis 14:18 – Melchizedek:

- "And Melchizedek king of **Salem** brought out **bread and wine**; he was priest of God Most High."
- Melchizedek **appears suddenly** with no genealogy or backstory in the text—emphasizing his mysterious, typological role.
- Melchizedek (name meaning "king of righteousness" or "My King is Zedek") is **both king and priest** of Salem (meaning "peace"; traditionally identified with early *Jeru**salem***).
- King & Priest were always one role in the pagan world. It gets split into two roles in Israel.
- Compare Joshua 10:1 : "Adoni-Zedek" **Theophoric** (personal names that embed the name or title of a deity). Salem → *Shulum* → named after a pagan god (like: Athena → Athens)
- Melchizedek serves as a priest of the **one true God** (*El Elyon* / God Most High) in a time when such faithful worship was becoming rare amid surrounding paganism.
- Psalm 110 (**Most cited OT passage in NT!** MT 22:44, MK 12:36; LK 20:42-42; Acts 2:24-25; Heb 1:13, 10:13) & Hebrews 7 touch on Melchizedek.

- The **bread and wine** (Grain offering & Drink offering) are priestly acts of hospitality, blessing, and sacrificial offering in which Abram participates—foreshadowing the Eucharist.
- This foreshadows the **Eucharist** (body and blood of Christ) and points to the **priesthood** of the Messiah. Prefigures Leviticus/Sacrifice/Priestly **pattern**.
