

# Before We Begin

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# Sermon Series

## Power of Promise

1. Love is a Promise (Feb 13)
2. Promise Presents Choice (Mar 13)
3. Promises Must Be Shared (Apr 10)
4. Promise Precedes Consequence (May 22)



# Sermon Series

# Power of Promise

## 5. Promise Follows Following



# Promise Follows Following

- Abram, or Abraham



# Abram: Who Was He?

- Descendant of Shem, one of Noah's sons
  - Arpachshad—1<sup>st</sup> generation post-Flood
    - Genesis 11:10
  - Abram—9<sup>th</sup> generation post-Flood
    - 1 Chronicles 1:1-4



# Genesis 11:10 (NRSV)

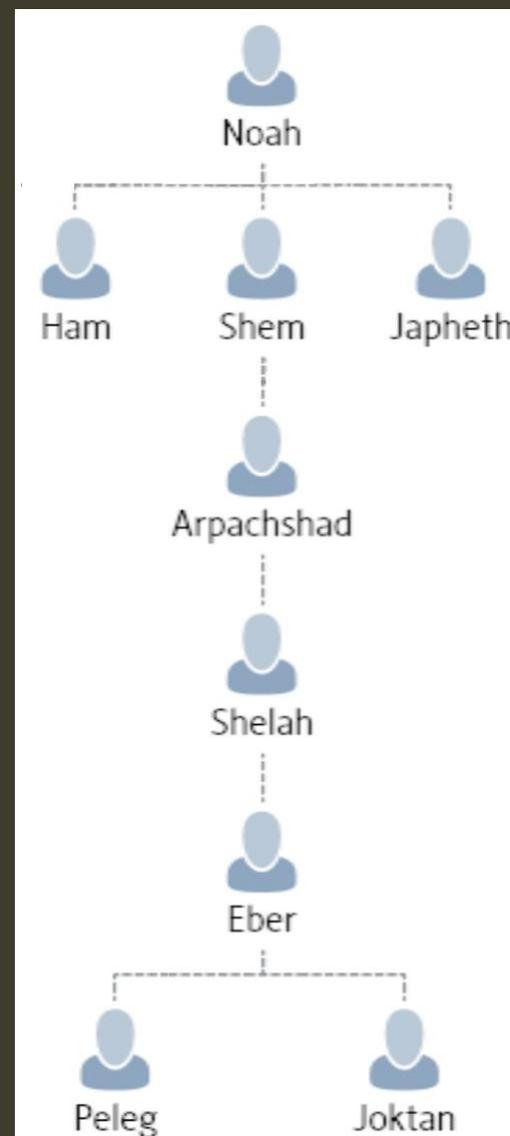
10 These are the descendants of Shem. When Shem was one hundred years old, he became the father of Arpachshad two years after the flood;



# 1 Chronicles 1:24-27 (NRSV)

24 Shem, Arpachshad,  
Shelah;

25 Eber, Peleg...

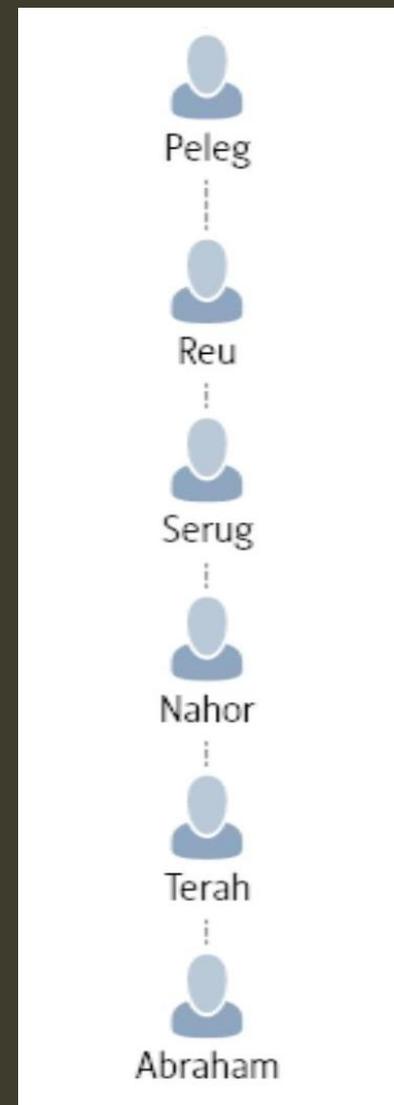


# 1 Chronicles 1:24-27 (NRSV)

25 ...Peleg, Reu;

26 Serug, Nahor, Terah;

27 Abram, ...



# Abram: Who Was He? (cont.)

- Born in a city called *Ur of the Chaldees*
  - The most generally accepted identification is with the ancient site of Ur (Uri), modern *Tell el-Muqayyar*, 9 miles west of the city of *Nasiriyah* and situated on the Euphrates river in southern Iraq<sup>†</sup>.

<sup>†</sup>Wood, D. R. W., & Marshall, I. H. (1996). *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed.) (1219). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.



# Ur (near modern Nasiriyah, Iraq)



# Ur (near modern Nasiriyah, Iraq)

- Nasiriyah is where PFC Jessica Lynch was captured and rescued during the Iraq War in March, 2003



# Ur (Ancient Times)

- Ur was a thriving city of Mesopotamia
- Three ruling dynasties over 3,000 years
- The remains of a large ziggurat survive to the modern day (Ziggurat of Ur)

Source: Myers, A. C. (1987). The Eerdmans Bible dictionary (1030). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

Source: Wood, D. R. W., & Marshall, I. H. (1996). New Bible dictionary (3rd ed.) (1219). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.



# Ziggurat of Ur



# Ziggurat of Ur



# Abram: Who Was He? (cont.)

- Abram's early family consisted of his...
  - father, Terah
  - two brothers, Nahor and Haran
  - nephew, Lot (Haran's son)
  - half sister, Sarai (whom he married)



# Genesis 11:27 (NRSV)

27 Now these are the descendants of Terah. Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran was the father of Lot.



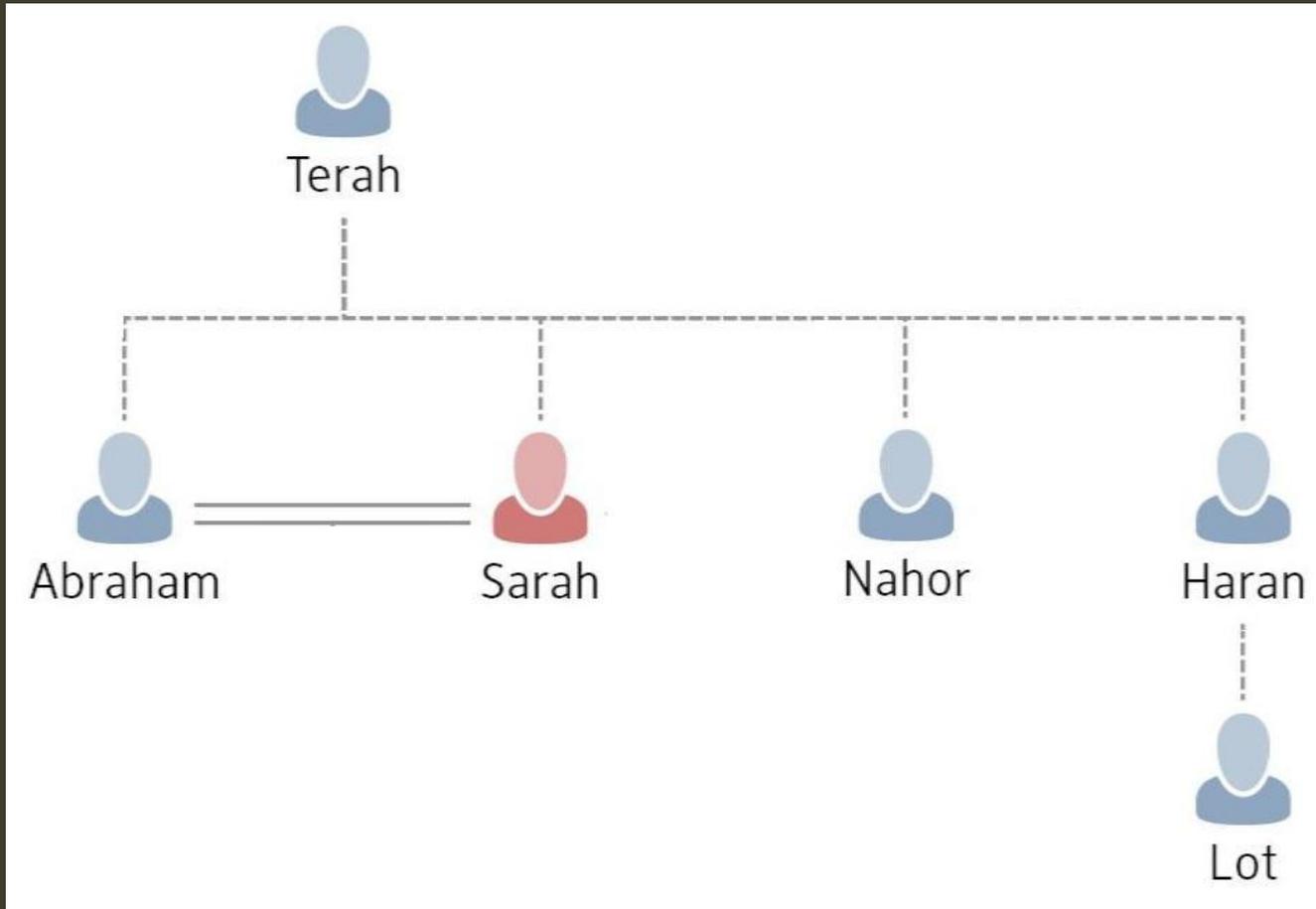
# Genesis 20:2,12 (NRSV)

2 Abraham said of his wife Sarah, “She is my sister...

12 ...she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife.”



# Abram's Early Family



# What Was Abram's World Like?

- Ancient people began to build large structures
- Differences of language began separating people and creating national identities (Egyptians, Chaldeans, etc.)
- The worship of idols was a common practice



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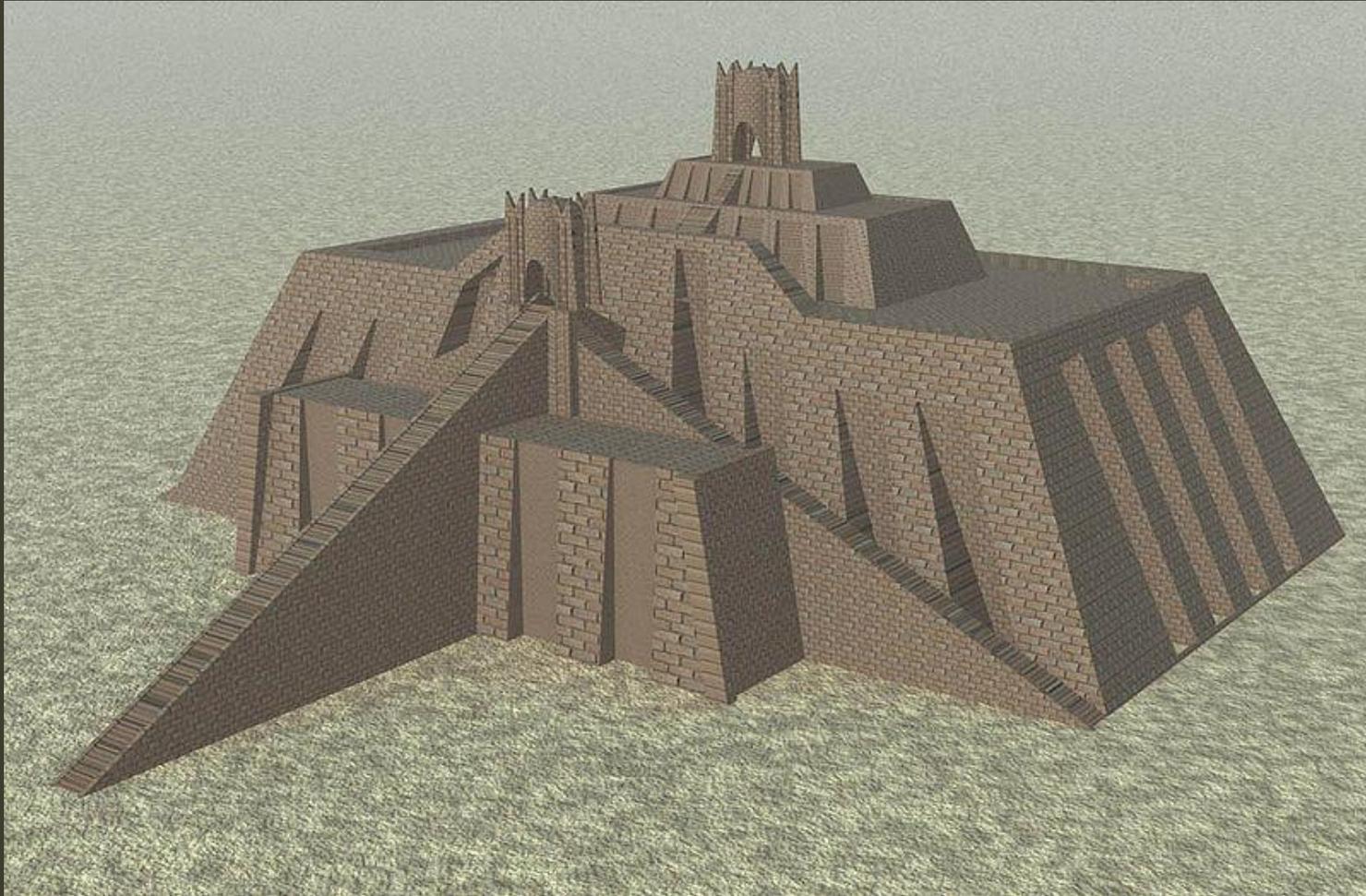
## Genesis 11:2–4 (NRSV)

3 And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar.

4 Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves...



# Ziggurat of Ur (cont.)



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# Idol Worship in Mesopotamia

- “Archaeological excavations in that area have revealed the images of numerous deities and Mesopotamian religious literature reveals the gross polytheism out of which Abraham came.”†

†Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). Baker encyclopedia of the Bible (1014). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House.



# Idol Worship in Mesopotamia



Fertility goddess from Lachish  
Late Bronze Age

(1996). The Archaeological encyclopedia of the Holy Land (3rd ed.). New York: Prentice Hall Press.



Phoenician idol, typical of the patron deities of Phoenician cities

Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). Baker encyclopedia of the Bible (1690). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House.



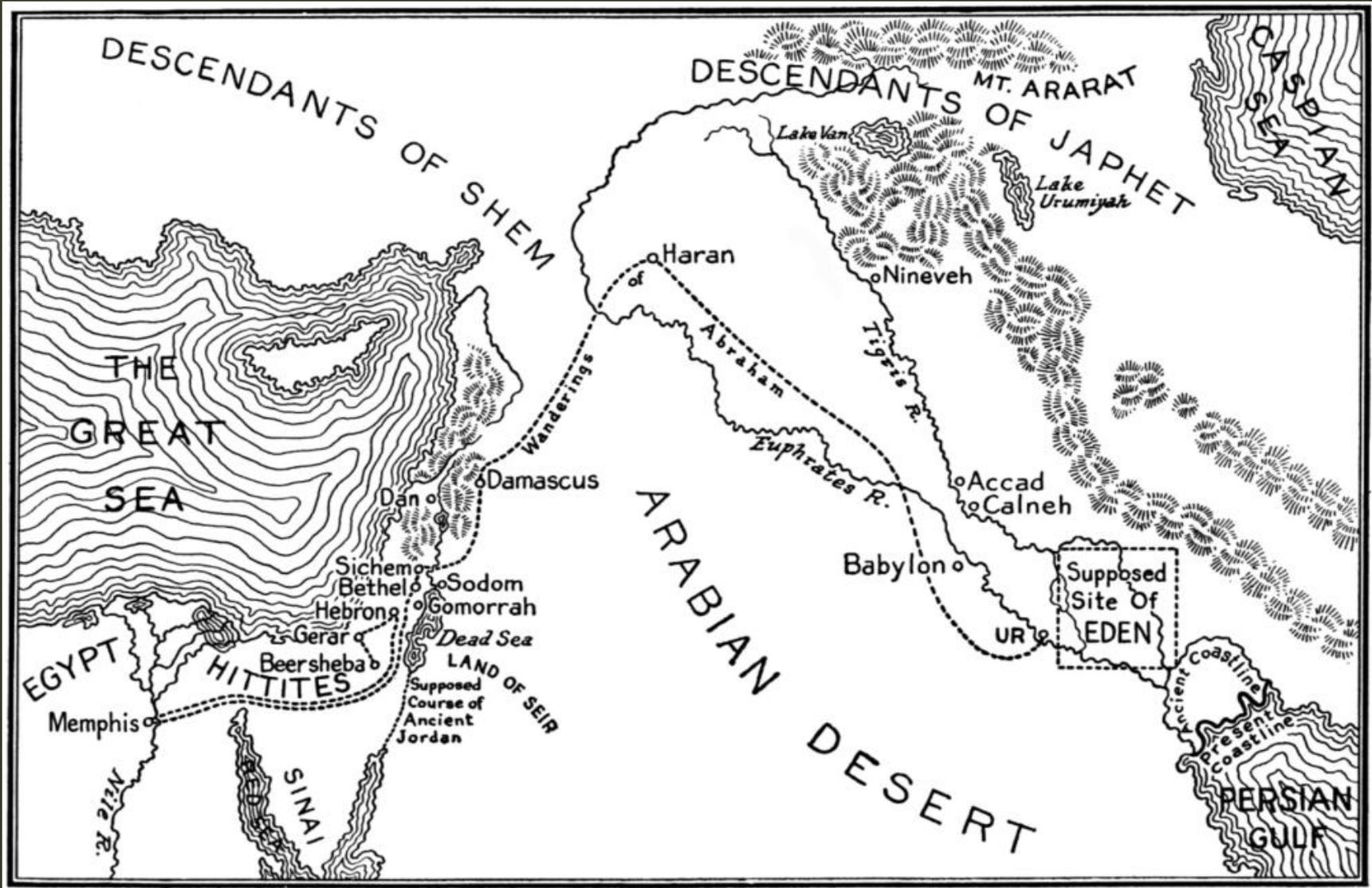
## Joshua 24:2 (NRSV)

2 And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors—Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods.”



# “Beyond the Euphrates” (Iraq)







# The Beginning of Abram's Story

## Genesis 11:31–12:3 (NRSV)

31 Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan; but when they came to Haran, they settled there.

32 The days of Terah were two hundred five years; and Terah died in Haran.



# The Beginning of Abram's Story

## Genesis 11:31–12:3 (NRSV)

1 Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.

2 I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

3 I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse...”



# The Calling of Abram

- God spoke!
- God directed Abram to leave his country and family and to embark on a journey
- God offered Abram a destiny without specifying the destination
- God promised Abram favor for his journey ("I will bless those who bless you")



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# Abram's Journey

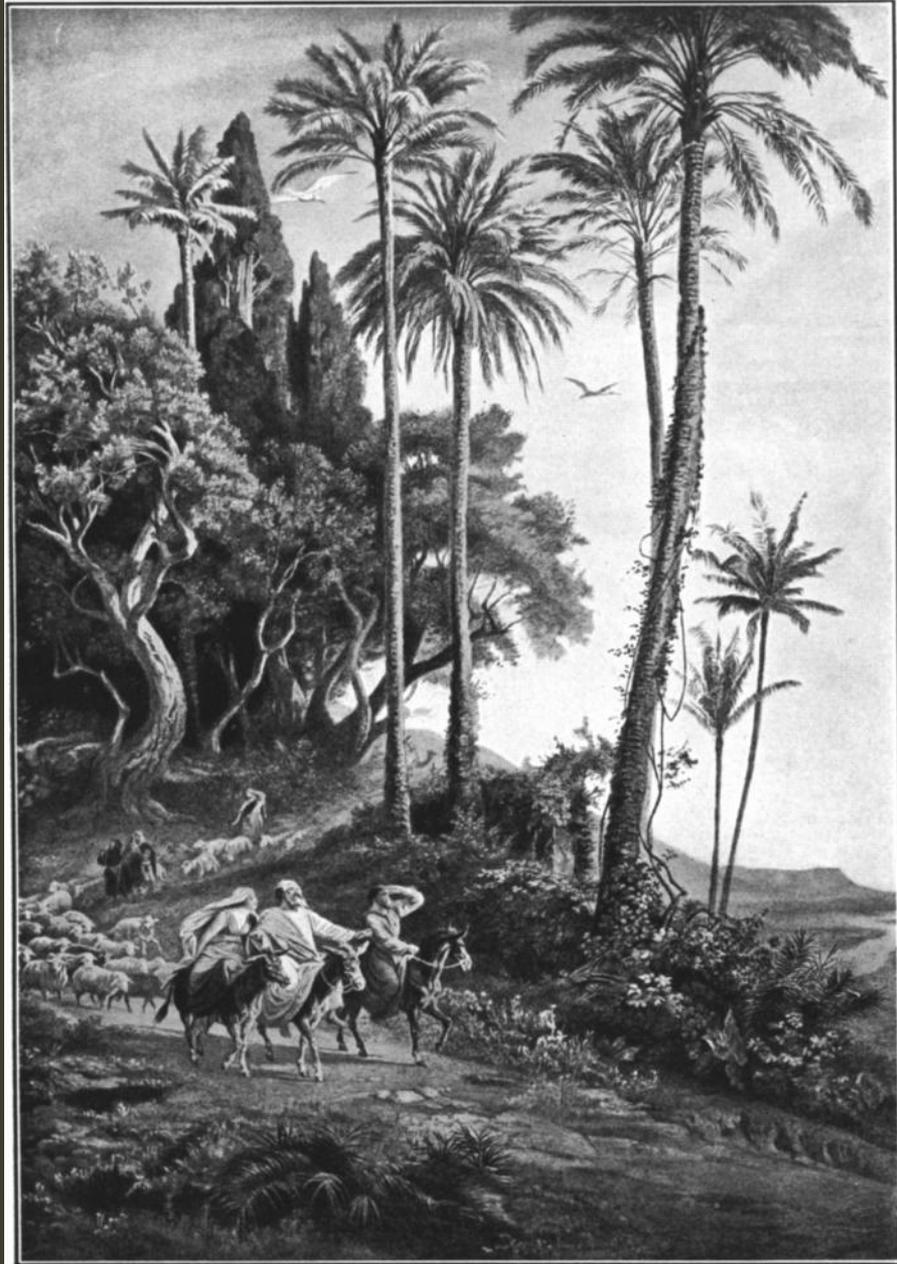
1. Ur to Haran (with Terah)
2. Haran to Shechem (in Canaan)
3. Exploring Canaan
  - a. Between Bethel and Ai
  - b. Unnamed stops along the path to the Negeb (Canaan's southern desert)
4. The Negeb to Egypt
5. Egypt to Shechem via the Negeb



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## Genesis 12:5-7 (NRSV)

5 ...When they had come to the land of Canaan,

6 Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem...

7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.



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## Genesis 12:8 (NRSV)

8 From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and invoked the name of the LORD.





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# Genesis 12:9 (NRSV)

9 And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.





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## Genesis 12:10-20 (NRSV)

10 Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt...

11 ...[with] his wife Sarai, "...a beautiful woman..."

16 [The Pharaoh] treated Abram well for her sake, and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, menservants and maidservants, and camels.



# Abram in Egypt

- Egyptians had laws prohibiting adultery
- Commonly exploited loophole: murder the husband and take the widow legally
- Abram asked Sarai to tell the Egyptians that she was his sister and to be silent about the part that she was his wife
- Pharaoh lavished Abram with wealth and took Sarai into his palace



## Abram in Egypt (cont.)

- There was a sudden outbreak of serious disease, and the Egyptians suspected it was punishment by one of their gods for a violation of Egyptian law
- The Egyptians investigated and learned that Sarai was also Abram's wife
- Pharaoh sent Abram's party away with all of their newly-acquired possessions and servants



# Abram's Journey

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## Genesis 13:1–11 (NRSV)

1 So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him.

3 From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier

4 and where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the LORD.





# First Promise Fulfilled

- God promised Abram favor for his journey ("I will bless those who bless you")
- God fulfilled the promise by giving him an abundance of possessions during his travels



## Genesis 13:1–11 (NRSV)

5 Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents.

6 But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together.

11 So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company



# Second Promise Fulfilled

- Because Abram followed God, God was able to make another promise the first time Abram was in Shechem, “To your offspring I will give this land”
- Abram continued to follow God, and God brought him back to Shechem to ceremonially take possession of it



## Genesis 13:14–15, 17 (NRSV)

14 The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Raise your eyes now, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward;

15 for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever.

17 Rise up, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.”



# Finding Significance in “Abram’s Journey”

- What did it mean to the original readers?
- What does it mean for Christians today?



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- What did it mean to the original readers?
- What does it mean for Christians today?



# Original Readers

- Israelis and many of the Arabic tribes are descended from Abram
- Both Hebrew and Islamic holy books contain stories of Abram
- The claims of Middle Eastern groups to the territory of Canaan (modern-day Israel and Palestine) are, in part, legitimized by a connection to Abram



# Finding Significance in “Abram’s Journey”

- What did it mean to the original readers?
- What does it mean for Christians today?



# Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16 (NRSV)

8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going.

9 By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.



# Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16 (NRSV)

10 For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

13 All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth,



## Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16 (NRSV)

14 for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.

15 If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return.

16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.



# Christian Readers

- God speaks!
- To become a Christian is to begin a journey with Jesus (one that friends and family may not understand)
- God offers a destiny (eternal life) without specifying the destination
- God promises favor for the journey by virtue of his presence



# Journey with Jesus

- Mark 10:21 (KJV) – “come, take up the cross, and follow me.”
- Revelation 22:17 (NKVJ) – “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.”



# God Offers a Destiny

- Romans 6:23 (MSG) – “Work hard for sin your whole life and your pension is death. But God's gift is real life, eternal life, delivered by Jesus, our Master.”
- John 14:3 (NIV) – “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”



# God's Presence

- Hebrews 13:5 (NKJV) – “He Himself has said, *‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’*”
- John 14:18 (AMP) – “I will not leave you as orphans [comfortless, desolate, bereaved, forlorn, helpless]; I will come [back] to you.”



# Promise Follows Following Romans 10:9-10 (NIV)

9 ...If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

