

Through the Bible — Genesis 12-18 — 11/16/2022

Covenant

- The main focus of our story today is the covenant God makes with Abraham.
- A covenant is a legally binding contract between 2 or more parties. Covenants have some very important elements, which are true for all of the covenants in the Bible.
 - Covenants are binding
 - Covenants are inter-generational
 - Earlier covenants do not get overridden by later covenants
 - Breaking a covenant has consequences
 - A broken covenant requires atonement
 - Covenants come with signs that are obligatory for the covenant makers.
- Suzerain = great king, Vassal = a subordinate or dependent state
- Biblical covenants have Provisions, Obligations, and Signs. For Abraham, these are:
 - Provisions: Posterity, inheritance, land, greatness, blessing, universal blessing
 - Obligations: Faith and faithfulness (Genesis 15:6, "Abraham believed")
 - Signs: circumcision (Genesis 17:14)
- God put Abram through 10 Tests to see if he would be faithful to the covenant God was making with him.
 - We know all about tests from God, now that we have studied the book of Job.
 - Pirkei Avot 5:3 - With ten trials was Abraham, our father, tried, and he withstood them all; to make known how great was the love of Abraham, our father.
 - Matthew Henry says: "Strong faith is often exercised with strong trials."
 - What were the tests? Maimonides, a 12th century rabbi who lived in Spain, says they are:
 1. God tells him to leave his homeland to be a stranger in the land of Canaan. (12:1)
 2. Immediately after his arrival in the Promised Land, he encounters a famine. (12:10)
 3. The Egyptians seize his beloved wife, Sarah, and bring her to Pharaoh. (12:15)
 4. Abraham faces incredible odds in the battle of the four and five kings. (14:14)
 5. He marries Hagar after not being able to have children with Sarah. (16:3)
 6. God tells him to circumcise himself at an advanced age. (17:24)
 7. The king of Gerar captures Sarah, intending to take her for himself. (20:2)
 8. God tells him to send Hagar away after having a child with her. (21:12)
 9. His son, Ishmael, becomes estranged. (reflected in the commandment in 21:12)
 10. God tells him to sacrifice his dear son Isaac upon an altar. (22:2)

Abram's early life

- We don't know a lot about Abram's early life.
- We are told that his brother, Haran, died in Ur Kasdim. The Hebrew of Genesis 11:28 says literally, "Haran died in the face of [in front of] his father Terah"
- Then, his father left Ur to go to a city called Haran.
- There is some interesting archaeological evidence that might shed some light on Terah, Abram's father, or might just be coincidental.
 - "Ur Kasdim" is likely a city in the northern part of Mesopotamia, between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers known to history as Urkesh. Urkesh was controlled by a people known as the Hurrians.
 - The Hurrians were less of a kingdom or empire and more of a unique culture of sorts.
 - Some interesting cuneiform tablets were sent to Zimri-Lim, king of Mari in the 19th century BCE. These tablets were largely written by a man named Terru, the governor of the city of Urkesh, put into place by Zimri-Lim.
 - The tablets, mostly letters, relate that the people of Urkesh hated Terru:
 - "Because I have cast my lot with my master [Zimri-Lim], people in my town hate me. A couple of times I have had to save myself, escaping death"
 - "They do not speak with me."
 - "They speak evil things."
 - One of Zimri-Lim's replies: "I did not know that the sons of your city hate you on my account. But you are mine, even if the city of Urkesh is not."
 - Jewish tradition relates that the primary anger of the pagan city of Ur was for Abram because, he was telling them about God, and that Haran followed his brother's lead and had been killed for it.
 - A Story about Abram
 - This is a midrash, a "textual interpretation", "study", or "exegesis"
 - Sefer HaYashar, Book of Genesis, Noach 6
 - Terah, Abram's father had 12 idols made of wood and stone in a large room in his house
 - Abram wanted to find grace with these gods, so he made some food and set it before each of the 12 gods, then sat down to watch them eat the food.
 - Nothing happened, so he thought maybe he had not given them enough food or it was not tasty enough.
 - So the next day he brought more and better food. And again nothing happened.
 - So Abram became angry at his father for leading him astray. He got an axe, went back into the room, and broke all but one of the idols into pieces.
 - Then he put the axe into the hand of the last idol, the largest of them all, and left the room.
 - As he was walking away his father came to see all of the commotion, and became angry with Abram when he saw the destroyed idols.

- But Abram said that when he came to the idols with food, the smaller idols all started eating before the bigger one could eat, so the big idol grabbed an axe and broke all the little idols.
- Terah said, "Will you try to make me believe such things, as if I did not know that these gods have no soul, and no spirit, and no strength within them? For are these gods anything but pieces of wood and stone which I myself have shaped into images?"
- Abram replied, "If you know all that, how can you worship these idols which have neither strength nor power to do the least thing? Can those idols, in whom you trust, save you in the hour of danger, can they hear your prayers when you call on them, or can they deliver you from the hands of your enemies, and fight your battles for you, that you are worshiping those idols of wood and stone, which can neither hear nor speak.
- And now it is not good for you to do these things, nor for those men that are attached to you. Have you all lost your reason and become fools to worship wood and stone, while you are forgetting the Lord your God who made heavens and earth, and who has created you in the earth? And why should you summon upon your heads the great evil which must follow the worship of wood and stone? Have not your forefathers acted in the same way, in times of old, until the Lord brought over them the waters of the flood to the destruction of the whole earth? And now how can you reasonably do again the same wicked things, to worship wood and stone, strange gods, which can neither hear nor speak, nor deliver from trouble, while at the same time you invite the anger of the Lord against your souls and upon the souls of all your household? And now my father do abstain from doing these things.
- Then Abram smashed the last idol and fled from his father
- The story goes on to talk about how Abram was captured by Nimrod, the king, and was thrown into a furnace as punishment, but like Daniel's three friends he was saved from the fire.
- There are some other curious connections between the Hurrians of Urkesh and the stories in the bible.
 - A cultural custom unique to the Hurrians was the practice of adopting a wife as one's sister. This had to do with property and marriage laws.
 - We know that Abram married his half sister, Sarai.
 - Genesis 20:12 -- "Besides, she actually is my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife."
 - Property ownership was held by family clans and the "household gods." Control of the household gods and thus the family property was held by the "senior" father which might explain the importance of the Biblical story of Rachel stealing the household gods.
 - The Hurrians had a close connection to the Hittites, as well, and the Hittites appear to have absorbed some of the Hurrian culture due to that interaction.

- This might explain the Hittites in Canaan telling Abraham, “thou art a prince among us” when he was trying to buy land for Sarah's burial ground in Genesis 23:6.
- Another interesting connection is that there was an a group of people in Urkesh called the Habiru. The Habiru served as mercenaries to the Hittite king, and these Habiru were Hurrians with a small Semitic contingent. Many historians see the Habiru and the Hebrews as likely representing the same group of people. Habiru might come from the name Eber, who was the great grandson of Shem, and Abram's great-great-great-great grandfather.
- Abraham is called "the Hebrew" in Genesis 14:13, the first reference to that name in the Scripture.
- There are also some interesting archaeological references to the Habiru in the 14th century, when the Israelites were conquering the promised land under Joshua. In the 1300s BCE, we find some very desperate correspondence from Canaanite rulers to the pharaoh of Egypt. These documents are called the Amarna Letters, because they were found stored within the Egyptian city of Amarna. The letters describe a fierce group of “nomads” invading Canaan, by the name of Habiru (also called ‘Apiru or Hapiru). These Canaanite rulers, who were subservient to Egypt, were seeing their land gradually captured by these Habiru, and they were desperate for help.
- <https://armstronginstitute.org/349-has-abrahams-father-terah-been-discovered>
- Okay, so obviously some of this is conjecture, but hopefully it helps us put Abram into his cultural context. The fact that there are so many potential connections to the Hurrians and to Urkesh is pretty darn amazing.

First Encounter, and First Test

- So, let's take a look at the story of Abram, remembering that everything we read is connected to the Covenants that God made with him.
- Read Genesis 12:1-3
- Timeline: Abram was 75 years old (c. 1875 BCE)
- Location: Unclear -- Maybe Haran, or possibly Ur
- God's Commands/requirements: Leave your country, go to the land I will show you
- God's Promises:
 - I will make you a great nation
 - I will bless you
 - I will make your name great
 - You will be a blessing
 - I will bless those who bless you
 - I will curse those who curse you
 - In you all the families of the earth will be blessed.
- Abram's Response: He left and went to Canaan

Second Encounter

- Text: Genesis 12:7
- Timeline: soon after the first encounter
- Location: Shechem
- Commands/requirements: none
- Promises: To your descendants I will give this land.
- Response: He did not question God, he just built an altar, because wherever God appears becomes a holy place.
- This location, Shechem, is where Jacob later built a new altar he called *El Elohey Yisrael*, God the God of Israel.
- At the end of Joshua's life, the Israelites came back to Shechem, and Joshua built an altar on Mount Ebal, which is next to Shechem. There Joshua reiterated the obligations given to the Children of Israel at Mount Sinai. On a large stone there he wrote words of the Torah and set it up as a witness of the Israelites' agreement to follow God.

Altar at Bethel

- No encounter is recorded, but Abram built an altar there, so he apparently felt the presence of God there.
- Text: Genesis 12:8
- Timeline: soon after the second encounter
- Location: Bethel (*Beit El*, House of God)
- Response: Abram called on the name of the Lord and built an altar
- Abram returned to that same spot after he came back from Egypt. Jacob also camped there, and saw a vision of angels climbing up and down a ladder to heaven.

Egypt - Second and Third Tests

- The Talmud states that "all people compared to Sarah are like a monkey compared to a human" because she was so beautiful. (b. Bava Batra 58a)
- Was Sarai actually Abram's sister? According to Abram, yes.
 - Genesis 20:12 -- "Besides, she actually is my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife."
- Abram went down to Egypt to blaze a trail for his descendants.
 - The deeds of the father are portents of the children
 - He went down to Egypt to escape a famine.
 - His family was abducted by Pharaoh
 - God smote the Pharaoh with plagues to deliver them.
 - He left with great wealth.
- Does this pattern sound familiar?
- So, he left Egypt and went back to Bethel.

Lot and Abram split ways

- What do we see about Abram's character in this situation? That peace between brothers is more important than wealth or prestige.
- Abram sacrificed everything to make peace with his nephew, including not taking the best land for himself, despite that being his prerogative.
- He is an example for us in this:
 - Matthew 5:39–41 -- Jesus tells us, "whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other toward him also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two."
 - Jesus advised His disciples to demonstrate their good faith by voluntarily setting aside their rights.

Third Encounter

- After he passed that test, God encountered Abram again and addressed his willingness to set aside his rights.
- Text: Genesis 13:14-18
- Commands/requirements: Walk about in the land through its length and width
- Promises:
 - all the land which you see (north, south, east, and west) I will give to you and to your descendants forever
 - Notice that word forever. עַד-עוֹלָם This is forever in the forever sense.
 - Malachi 3:6 -- For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, the sons of Jacob, have not come to an end.
 - Ezekiel 37:24–28 -- 24 “And My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances, and keep My statutes and follow them. 25 And they will live on the land that I gave to My servant Jacob, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons’ sons, forever; and My servant David will be their leader forever. 26 And I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and set My sanctuary in their midst forever. 27 My dwelling place also will be among them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. 28 And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.” ’ ’
 - Isaiah 60:21 -- “Then all your people will be righteous; They will possess the land forever, The branch of My planting, The work of My hands, That I may be glorified.
 - I will make your descendants as plentiful as the dust of the earth
- Response: Abraham moved south to the oaks of Mamre at Hebron, and he built an altar to God.

Battle of the Kings - Fourth Test

- The four kings from the north, in what was later Babylon, now modern day Iraq
- came down into Canaan east of the Galilee and the Dead Sea, and put the kingdoms there under their thumb for 14 years.
- The people of that area finally rebelled against these northern kings.
- But their uprising failed, and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were looted.
- Lot and his family were taken into captivity, too
- Abram gathered an army together. He had his own group of 318 fighting men, and he joined forces with some kings from the west side of the Dead Sea, to go and save Lot. He had an obligation to his family.
- Why did Abram think they could defeat this larger, stronger army? He had faith!
- They caught up to the army in what would later be known as Dan, in northern Israel.
- Abram split up his forces at night, caused the army to be completely confused and run away, and they pursued them all the way to Hobah, north of Damascus.

Blessing of Melchizedek the king of Salem

- Genesis 14:18-20
- מַלְכִי-צֶדֶק *Malki-tzedek* means King of Righteousness. He was called a "priest of God Most High".
- He was the king in a city called Salem, which means "peace" and comes from the same root word as Shalom. That city is Jerusalem.
- Why did he bring Bread and wine? (Psalm 104:14-15)
 - He [God] causes the grass to grow for the cattle,
 - And vegetation for the labor of mankind,
 - So that they may produce **bread** from the earth,
 - And **wine**, which makes a human heart cheerful,
 - So that he makes his face gleam with oil,
 - And **bread**, which sustains a human heart.
- What is so special about Melchizedek?
 - Abram considers him to be so important that he pays him a 10th of his own money. This was not a 10th of the spoils, since Abram did not take any!
 - Melchizedek is a priest of God, which tells us that there were other followers of the one true God in the land. However, they appear to be few and far between, so it might be that Melchizedek is the only one Abram knows.
 - The enigmatic nature of Melchizedek's interaction with Abram has some interesting things to teach us, as we see in the Apostolic writings.
- Hebrews 7:4-10 -- The order of priesthood that Melchizedek represents is higher than that order of Aaron, because while the Israelites gave a tithe to the Aaronic priesthood, their forefather (and by extension even Aaron) gave a tithe to Melchizedek.
- A righteous king of peace ruling over Jerusalem foreshadows the reign of King Messiah in the Messianic Era.

Fourth Encounter, the Covenant

- Text: Genesis 15
- Timeline: After the encounter with Melchizedek, sometime within 10 years after entering the land (see 16:3)
- Location: Mamre (Hebron)
- Notice the back-and-forth here. Abram is no longer just listening to God's promises and obeying him, he is also interacting with God.
- Also notice that Abram's interactions are questions, clarifications, worries, etc. He is being real with God about what he thinks.
- Interaction:
 - God: I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great.
 - Abram: What will You give me, since I am childless?
 - God: Your descendants will be uncountable like the stars
 - Abram: Then he believed in the LORD; and He credited it to him as righteousness.
 - God: Reiteration of the promise of the Land of Israel.
 - Abram: How can I know that will happen?
 - God: I'll make a covenant with you
- Commands/requirements:
 - Slaughter specific animals and form a covenant arrangement with the parts.
 - The Hebrew term for making a covenant is **כָּרַת בְּרִית** *karat b'rit*, literally "to cut a covenant"
- Terrible Darkness
 - Abram fell into a deep sleep and a terrible darkness came over him.
 - Tradition tells us that in that sleep God showed Abram the future, a vision of the coming subjugation of his descendants, of their slavery in Egypt, of the Exodus, of their later subjugations by other nations and of the eventual Messianic Kingdom when his descendants will finally have peace and live in their land under the reign of the Messiah.
 - Jesus refers to this in John 8:56 -- Your father Abraham was overjoyed that he would see My day, and he saw it and rejoiced."
 - The writer of the book of Hebrews also refers to this when he says of Abram, "All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen and welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth." (Hebrews 11:13)
- Promise:
 - Your descendants will be enslaved and oppressed for 400 years, but I will judge their oppressors and they will be released with many possessions.
 - But you will live a long life and die in peace
 - To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates:

Sidebar: 400 years vs. 430 years

- Genesis 15:14 talks about a 400-year sojourn in Egypt
- Exodus 12:40 says that the sojourn lasted 430 years.
- These don't match up, obviously
- The rabbis propose a solution (Genesis Rabbah 44:18): "This means, until four hundred years after seed shall be granted to you."
- In other words, the countdown does not start until Isaac is born, which happens 30 years after God's first interaction with Abram in Urkesh.
- This interpretation depends on reading the word "seed" (זֶרַע *zera*) in the text in the singular form, not in the plural form. In Hebrew, as in English, "seed" can be interpreted either way.
- According to the rabbis, Isaac lived in Canaan, "in a land that was not [his]." His seed, Jacob, went down to Egypt, "in a land that was not [his]."
- Timeline:
 - Promise to Abram
 - 30 years later: Isaac born
 - 60 years later: Jacob born
 - 130 years later: Jacob enters Egypt
 - 210 years later: Exodus
 - = 430 years
- Paul even uses the same "seed" wordplay and the same chronology himself!
 - Galatians 3:15–17 -- ¹⁵ Brothers and sisters, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it. ¹⁶ Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as one would in referring to many, but rather as in referring to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ. ¹⁷ What I am saying is this: the Law, which came 430 years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.
- According to Exodus 12:41, the exodus from Egypt occurred 430 years later "on that very day." This means that the first day of Passover (Nissan 15) is the same day that Abraham received this vision and promise, and the same day that Isaac was born 30 years later.
 - Genesis 18:14 -- "Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time מועד *moed*) I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son."
 - Genesis 21:2 -- So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time (*moed*) of which God had spoken to him.
 - Exodus 13:10 -- Therefore, you shall keep this ordinance at its appointed time from year to year.
 - This was also the same day on which the Messiah's death cast the world into darkness.
 - But in the midst of that darkness, a torch, a light shines forth.

Continuing the Fourth Encounter

- In the ancient world the partner in a covenant is called a friend, *ohev*. Abram became a friend of God through this covenant.
 - In 2 Chronicles 20:7, King Jehoshaphat says that Abram was a friend of God.
 - Isaiah 41:8 -- But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, Descendant of Abraham My friend..."
 - James 2:23 -- and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called a friend of God.
- The furnace of smoke with a blazing torch in the middle of it is symbolic of the Divine Presence, the *Shechinah*. God appears in fire in other places in the scriptures:
 - Deuteronomy 4:11, 36 -- You came forward and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain was burning with fire to the heart of the heavens: darkness, cloud, and thick gloom. 12 Then the LORD spoke to you from the midst of the fire... Out of the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you; and on earth He let you see His great fire, and you heard His words from the midst of the fire.
 - Exodus 24:17 - And to the eyes of the sons of Israel, the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top.
 - Ezekiel 1:4 -- As I looked, behold, a high wind was coming from the north, a great cloud with fire flashing intermittently and a bright light around it, and in its midst something like gleaming metal in the midst of the fire.
- The divine presence of God walked **בֵּין הַגְּזָרִים**, between the pieces.
 - This practice is referred to again in Jeremiah 34:18. The entire nation of Israel is accused of not living up to the covenant God made with Abraham here, and as a result they are told they will go into exile.
 - I will give the people who have violated My covenant, who have not fulfilled the words of the covenant which they made before Me, when they cut the calf in two and passed between its parts...
- What is the significance of God "walking" through the pieces Himself?
 - He is saying that he will keep the covenant in his own merit.

Hagar - Fifth Test

- Abram was now eighty-five years old. God had promised him a son at least a decade before, possibly as much as 15 years before.
- Sarai and Abram wanted to jump-start the plan. It was not uncommon for a man in this time to be polygamous. Since Hagar was her maidservant, the child born to Hagar would be like it was born to Sarai.
- Why did Abram go along with this plan?
 - He had God's promise, but couldn't see how God was going to make it happen.
 - But their impatience led to much distress, and to a rival against their own son. That rivalry is still causing problems to the descendants of Isaac today.

- Genesis 16:4 -- After Hagar conceived, Sarai became "insignificant in her sight." Hagar started lording it over Sarai. She was
- "Sarai answered her harshly" -- That's a bit too interpretive. The Hebrew is וְהִעֲנָהּ שָׂרַי, which means "response or answer". The inference here is that Sarah put Hagar back into her place. This same word is actually used in verse 9, when Hagar is told by God, וְהִתְעַנִּי תַּחַת יְדֵיהָ, "and respond under her hands" (submit under her authority).
- Hagar ran away, but God told her to return and submit to Sarai.
- *Ishmael* = "God hears"
- *Beer-lahai-roi* = "the Well of the Living One Who sees me"
- By this time Abram was 86 years old.

Fifth Encounter: Circumcision and a Name Change - Sixth Test

- Skip forward 13 years. Abram is now 99 years old.
- God shows up and creates a new covenant with Abram.
 - Biblical Covenants do not override or negate older covenants, because God does not break his promises. He is unchanging, and His word is permanent.
 - This covenant reaffirms all of the older covenant's promises, but increases their scope.
 - not just the father of a great nation (12:2), but the father of a multitude of nations.
 - Not only abundant seed (15:5), but kings will come from you
- Note the chiasmic pattern in 17:4
 - **A** And you will be the father of a multitude of nations.
 - **B** No longer shall you be named Abram,
 - **B** But your name shall be Abraham;
 - **A** For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.
- Abraham = אַבְרָהָם
 - Radak on Genesis 17:4:2 -- "לְאַב הַמֶּזֶן גּוֹיִם" The expression הַמֶּזֶן means "a multiplicity." In order that this will be remembered for all future times, I change your name by the addition of the letter ה, which by being joined to the letter מ symbolizes the word הַמֶּזֶן.
 - Name changes in the Bible signify a change in destiny or status. Paul sees this in Romans 4 as being the reason why Abraham is considered to be the father of the Gentiles who come to God in faith.
- Now, after all this time and all the covenant promises, God tells Abraham to take upon himself the sign of the covenant, circumcision.
 - Noah was given a rainbow
 - The Jews at Mount Sinai were given the Sabbath and other signs

- David and his descendants were given a Temple
 - Abraham got circumcision
- This is a sign that the covenant is forever, and it is a forever-requirement for the Jewish people.
 - Genesis 17:13 -- "so My covenant shall be in your flesh as an everlasting covenant."
- Sarai ("my princess") became Sarah ("princess")
 - Our sages phrase this as "originally she was a princess only for her own people, now she was a princess for all nations." (b. Berakhot 13).
- Genesis 17:17 -- Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Will a child be born to a man a hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, give birth to a child?"
 - Rabbenu Bahaya (1255–1340): The last thing that Abraham meant to question was that G-d could arrange for his fathering a child by invoking miracles. He questioned only if it was possible to arrange for this without interfering with the laws of nature. This is why he drew attention to his age. He meant that if he had been unable to sire a child while he was full of youthful vigour how could he do so now without recourse to miracles? Seeing that the Torah had already credited Abraham with believing G-d's promise in 15:6 when he was only 70 years old, much had happened in his life since to strengthen his belief in G-d's ability to perform supernatural miracles.
 - Also, the laughter described here is joyful laughter, and is the same word (צִחֻק) as the name of his future son.
- The covenant is passed down to Isaac, not to Ishmael
 - Genesis 17:19 -- I will establish My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.

The Sixth Encounter - Promise of Isaac's birth

- Genesis 18:1 -- Now the LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre
- This happened while he was recuperating from his circumcision surgery
- Notice he ran out to greet the three men. He did not wait for them to walk up to him. Actually, to him it appeared that they were going to walk on by him, but he pursued them.
- He did not realize they were angels, he just thought they were common wayfarers.
- This is a sign of Abraham's great hospitality.
 - Clement, a disciple of Peter and the second bishop of Rome, says, "For his faith and hospitality a son was given unto him in old age." (1 Clement 10:7).
 - Hebrews 13:2 -- Do not neglect hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.
- Angels or Jesus?

- Angelic appearances happen throughout the scriptures. “Angels” in Hebrew is (מַלְאָכִים) *malakhim*, which means “messengers.” Angels come as messengers of God, to tell humans something God wants them to know.
- Jesus is not an angel, He is the Word of God, the preexistent son, the image of the unseen God. Jesus had not yet come to the world in a physical body.
- After he resurrected from the dead he did not become an angel, either. He was resurrected into the body of the New Man, the first fruits of that resurrected state of perfection.
- Why were there three angels? Rashi says each one had a different job, "One to bring glad tidings to Sarah, one to overturn Sodom, and one to save Lot."
- So, one of the angels speaks on behalf of God, and is what is known throughout the scriptures as the "Angel of the LORD."
- Sarah "laughed within herself," again, because she and Abraham were both so old and she did not see how such a prediction could come to pass.
- At the appointed time (מוֹעֵד *moed*) = the first day of Passover
- Another interesting note as we head into Christmas:
 - The tradition that tells us Jesus was born at Christmas is a late Christian tradition, without any support in the scriptures or in early church tradition.
 - The gospel writers either did not know when the event happened, or they did not feel the information was important to pass along.
 - There are some interesting parallels between the story of the birth of Isaac and the story of the birth of John the Immerser.
 - Zechariah and Elizabeth were old
 - An angel appears and predicts the birth
 - Zechariah and Abraham both laugh about the idea of that happening
 - Luke 1:20 -- And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled at their proper time.” (the Greek here is *καιρὸν αὐτῶν*, which could be read, "at the appointed time.")
 - So, all signs point to John the Immerser being born on Passover.
 - There is some ancient evidence that early Jewish believers celebrated the birth of the Messiah on the first day of the Festival of Tabernacles and His circumcision on the “Eighth Day.”
 - If John the Immerser was born on Passover, and Mary visited Elizabeth when she was 3 months pregnant, then the Master should have been born six months later at the onset of the Festival of Tabernacles.
 - If so, Joseph and Mary may have planned their trip to Bethlehem to coincide with the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The gospel indicates that they were scrupulous in attending the pilgrimage festivals in Jerusalem, and traveling with a pilgrimage caravan going up from Galilee would have made the journey easier and safer.
 - Of course, we can't be sure that this is the case, but the symbolism is pretty powerful:

- Immanuel, God with us, coming into the world on the Festival of Tabernacles, when we celebrate God being with us.

Abraham Pleads for Sodom

- Genesis 18:16 -- Then the men rose up from there, and looked down toward Sodom; and Abraham was walking with them to send them off.
- After a while, two of the angels continued on their journey, but Abraham and the Angel of the LORD continue talking.
- What do we learn from Abraham's interaction with God in this passage?
- As children of Abraham, we should be the first to come to the defense of others, even sinners.
- Abraham holds God to his own standard of Justice.
- Remember the book of Job.
 - God is just and compassionate.
 - He would not allow bad things to happen to people unless they deserve it
 - So, if bad things are happening to you, you must deserve it.
 - So, repent.
- Abraham reminds God of this principle, and haggles Him down from 50 righteous men in the city to 10 righteous men.
 - Why 10? Throughout the Bible, God is present with 10.
 - 10 utterances of Creation in Genesis
 - 10 trials of Abraham
 - 10 plagues in Egypt
 - 10 commandments
 - 10 times the children of Israel transgressed in the Sinai desert (Numbers 14:20-23)
 - 10 spies who were the leaders of an "evil congregation" (Numbers 14:27)

Closing

- What does the choosing of Abraham mean for us today?
 - The seed of Abraham are God's chosen people, chosen because of Abraham's faith.
 - The Jewish people have a special covenant with God, and that is a covenant that cannot be removed, replaced, or broken. It is established by God as an everlasting covenant.
 - Provisions: Posterity, inheritance, land, greatness, blessing, universal blessing
 - Obligations: Faith and faithfulness (Genesis 15:6, "Abraham believed")
 - Sign: circumcision (Genesis 17:14)



