

# THE PATRIARCHS (GEN 12-50)

## I. OVERVIEW

A. Genesis 12 = Beginning of Continuous Biblical History

### B. Patriarchal Movements

1. Abraham moved from Ur “of the Chaldees,” in Sumer to N. Syria
2. Abram continued into Canaan/Palestine; the “Promised Land”
3. Patriarchs were semi-nomadic pastoralists in Canaan
4. They maintained ties with N. Syria (Gen 24, 28)
5. They went down to Egypt during times of drought
6. Ultimate move into Egyptian delta under Joseph’s protection

## II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (see chart)

### A. Mesopotamia

1. Early Bronze Age city states in **Sumer** (ca. 3100-2360 BC)  
\*\* Sumerians = Non-Semites; developed cuneiform writing ca. 3100 BC
2. The Akkadian Empire (ca. 2360-2200 BC)
  - a. Semites in northern Babylonia; established by Sargon the Great
  - b. Language = Akkadian; Semitic
3. Ur III Period (ca. 2200-2000 BC)  
\*\* Dominated by Third Dynasty of Ur; revival of Sumerian culture
4. Amorite (= *Amurru*, “westerners”) migration from west ca. 2000 BC
  - a. Established city states at **Babylon**, Mari, etc.
  - b. 6<sup>th</sup> king of Babylon = **Hammurabi** (ca. 1750 BC); law code

### B. Egypt

1. **Old Kingdom** (=Pyramid Age): Dynasties 3-6 (ca. 2700-2200 BC)
2. First Intermediate Period (ca. 2200-2000 BC): Anarchy and chaos
3. **Middle Kingdom** (ca. 2000-1750 BC): Prosperous period
4. **Second Intermediate (Hyksos) Period** (ca. 1750-1550 BC)
  - a. Asiatics controlled delta region (Lower Egypt)
  - b. Hyksos = “rulers of foreign lands”: Dyns. 15-16

### C. Palestine

1. Early Bronze Age (3200-2200 BC): Large city states; history unknown  
\*\* Ebla in N. Syria: tablets with language similar to Hebrew
2. Middle Bronze Age (ca. 2200-1550 BC)
  - a. MB I: All Early Bronze cities destroyed; semi-nomadic lifestyle (2200-2000 BC)
  - b. MB IIA: Reurbanization of the land; Canaanite culture (2000-1750 BC)
  - c. MB IIB-C: Hyksos period; Palestine ruled with Egypt (1750-1550 BC)

D. Patriarchs may be related to the Amorites = Akkadian *Amurru*

### E. Patriarchal narratives authentically reflect 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC

1. Patriarchs have Amorite names of the period
2. Patriarchal journeys reflect Amorite movement; political situation
3. Lifestyle: Semi-nomads among urban centers
4. Social/legal customs: Patriarchal actions reflect cuneiform texts (use of maid-servants to bear heirs; designation of firstborn; etc.)
5. Patriarchal religion is early; does not reflect later law

### III. ABRAHAM

- A. Travels
  - 1. Called when 75 years old in N. Syria
  - 2. **Shechem**: Abraham established sanctuary at Oak of Moreh
- B. Genesis 14: the first historical event
- C. **The Abrahamic Covenant**
  - 1. Abram's call and God's promise in Gen 12
  - 2. The covenant "cut" or ratified in Gen 15
    - a. 2 types of covenant: conditional & unconditional
    - b. Abrahamic covenant is unconditional; God is bound
  - 3. Genesis 17
    - a. Another version or a renewal of the covenant
    - b. Circumcision is a sign; not a condition
  - 4. The promises
    - a. Father to a great nation
    - b. The land his inheritance
- D. Abraham's heir
  - 1. Abraham failed to trust in God's fulfillment
    - a. Tried to adopt Eliezar of Damascus (Gen 15:2)
    - b. Took Sarah's handmaiden as a concubine: Ishmael (Gen 16, 30)
    - c. Sarah bore Isaac (= "he laughs"), the child of promise
  - 2. Genesis 22: The testing of Abraham; sacrifice of Isaac
    - a. Child sacrifice not uncommon in that day
    - b. "Only son Isaac, whom you love" (Gen 22:2)
    - c. Abraham passed the test
  - 3. Sodom and Gomorrah

### IV. ISAAC

- A. Wife, Rebekah, came from N. Syria (Gen 24)
- B. Continued semi-nomadic lifestyle
- C. Two sons, Esau and Jacob

