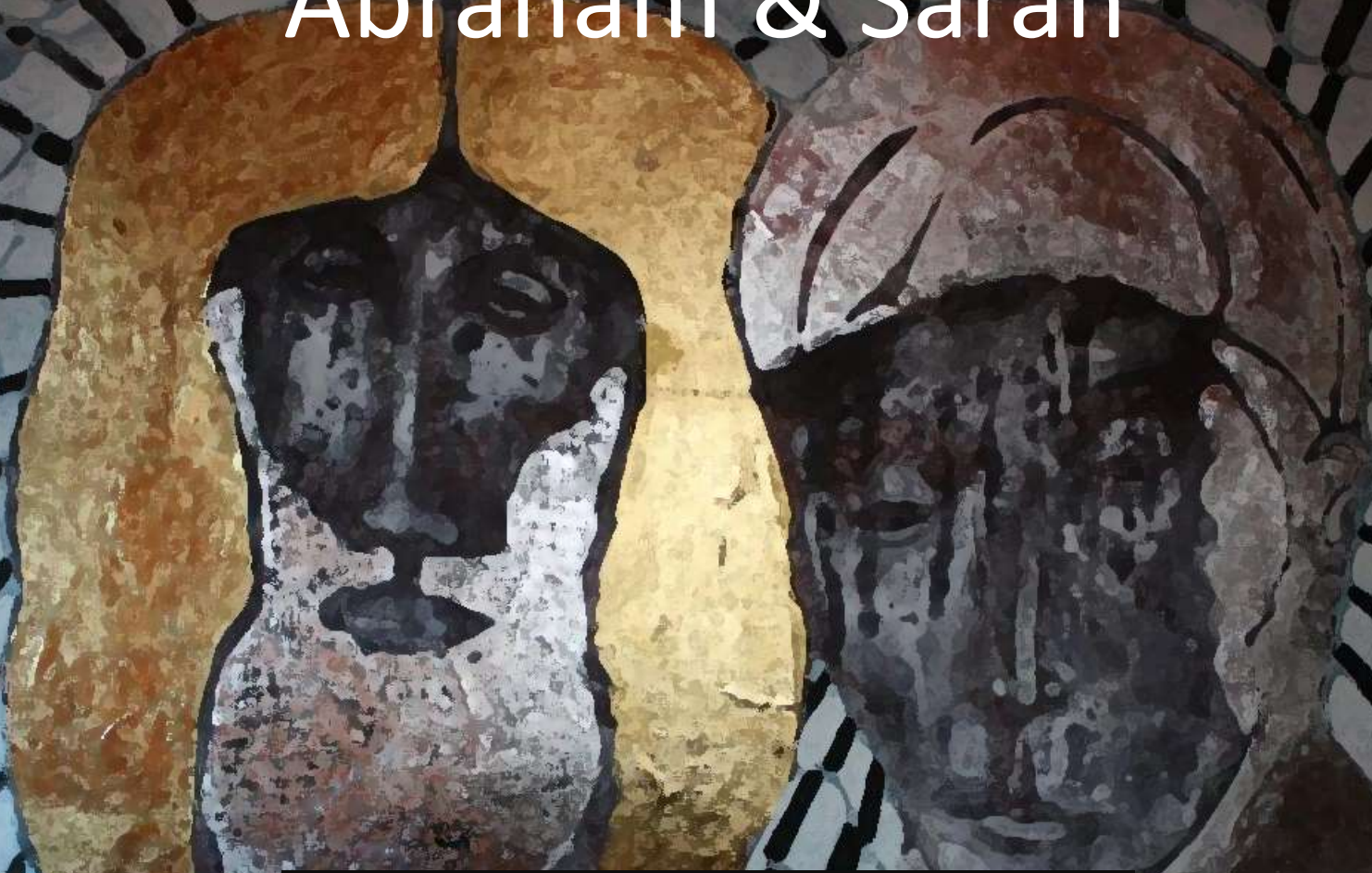


Abraham & Sarah

Call - Faith - Promise



Abraham & Sarah



A "Lessons-To-Go" study
by Mark S. Pavlin

Call - Faith - Promise

Everyone receives a call

In every age, among all people, in every region of the world, God **calls** people to Himself. When people trust in Him (**faith**), follow His commands (**love**), and hold on to His promise to never forsake them (**hope**), His Kingdom is there.

Through him we received grace... to **call** all... to the obedience that comes from **faith** for his name's sake. You also are among those... who are **called** to belong to Jesus Christ. To all... who are loved by God and **called** to be his holy people: Grace and peace.... - *Rom. 1:5-7*

You are a chosen people... that you may declare the praises of him who **called** you out of darkness into his wonderful light.... If you suffer for doing good...this is commendable to God. To this you were **called**, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should **follow** in his steps. - *1Pe. 2:9-10, 21-22*

One church's Statement of Faith (doxology form)

We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit... You call the worlds into being, create persons in your own image and set before each one the ways of life and death.

You seek in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin.

You judge people and nations by your righteous will declared through prophets and apostles.

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Savior, you have come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death and reconciling the world to yourself.

You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ, binding in covenant faithful people of all ages....

You call us into your church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be your servants in the service of others, to proclaim the gospel....

You promise to all who trust you forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, your presence in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life.... honor, glory and power be to you. Amen

One church's Statement of Faith (doxology form)

We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit... You call the worlds into being, create persons in your own image and set before each one the ways of life and death.

You seek to bring all things to their end, for you are the beginning and the end.
You judge all things, and you are the just Judge, who will bring about the final judgment.
You speak through prophets and apostles, and you are the true Word of God.
In Jesus Christ, you have come to us, and you have reconciled us to yourself.
But it had to start once upon a time, in a concrete way, when one man and one woman did respond and did follow. By their **faith, that couple, in effect, brought a blessing to all humankind.**

You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ, binding in covenant faithful people of all ages....

You call us into your church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be your servants in the service of others, to proclaim the gospel....

You promise to all who trust you forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, your presence in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life.... honor, glory and power be to you. Amen

Abraham & Sarah



Call - Faith - Promise
Part 1

The formative figure

Abraham is the first of the three original patriarchs of Judaism, along with **Isaac** and **Jacob**.

His story features prominently in the sacred texts of the major monotheistic religions, **Judaism, Christianity, and Islam**, hence their designation as the three “Abrahamic faiths.”

He is therefore often given the honorific title “Father”, the man to whom all three faiths look as their founder.

Indeed, the name “Abram” means “exalted father” and hints at the possible symbolic nature of the man and his story.

In all three faiths, he is the critical link between the 1st man, Adam, and the most important person: **Moses, Jesus, or Mohammad**

The story of **Abram/Abraham** and his wife **Sarai/Sarah** takes up 15 chapters of Genesis in both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament (**OT**), about 30% of the entire book.



What to watch for when reading
Genesis chapters 11-25

Creation -- Fall -- Re-creation

FIRST

Genesis 11-25 must be read in the context of Genesis 1-11

Before Abraham there is:

- ❖ The **call** of God for all things to come to be
- ❖ The **call** of God to Adam and Eve to “be fruitful”
- ❖ The **fall** of humankind away from God’s presence and will
- ❖ The **call** of God to Noah to faith and action
- ❖ The **promise** of God to re-create, re-build, and not to destroy
- ❖ The **fall** of humankind represented by the Tower of Babel and the dispersion of people to all corners of the world.
- ❖ What is a God to do now...?

Call -- Faith -- Promise

SECOND

- ❖ Abraham and Sarah do not respond as would their parents, community or culture
- ❖ We are given no explanation for this peculiar, this wonderful faith-response
- ❖ However it happens, this **response** to the call elicits from God a Divine **promise**, nothing less than His **presence** in the future
- ❖ The story of Abraham and Sarah, then, is a story of ***call - faith - promise***, the formation of a covenantal relationship
- ❖ This pattern recurs in Scripture because people are unavoidably self-seeking physical and emotional beings if also spiritual beings;
- ❖ God, then, lovingly renews His gracious call, ever seeking from each of us a response of faith, ever re-issuing His faithful promise.



Land - People

THIRD

Uniquely to Abraham and Sarah, the **promise** also concerns land, not just for this landless and wandering (nomadic) couple but, in time, for their many descendants.

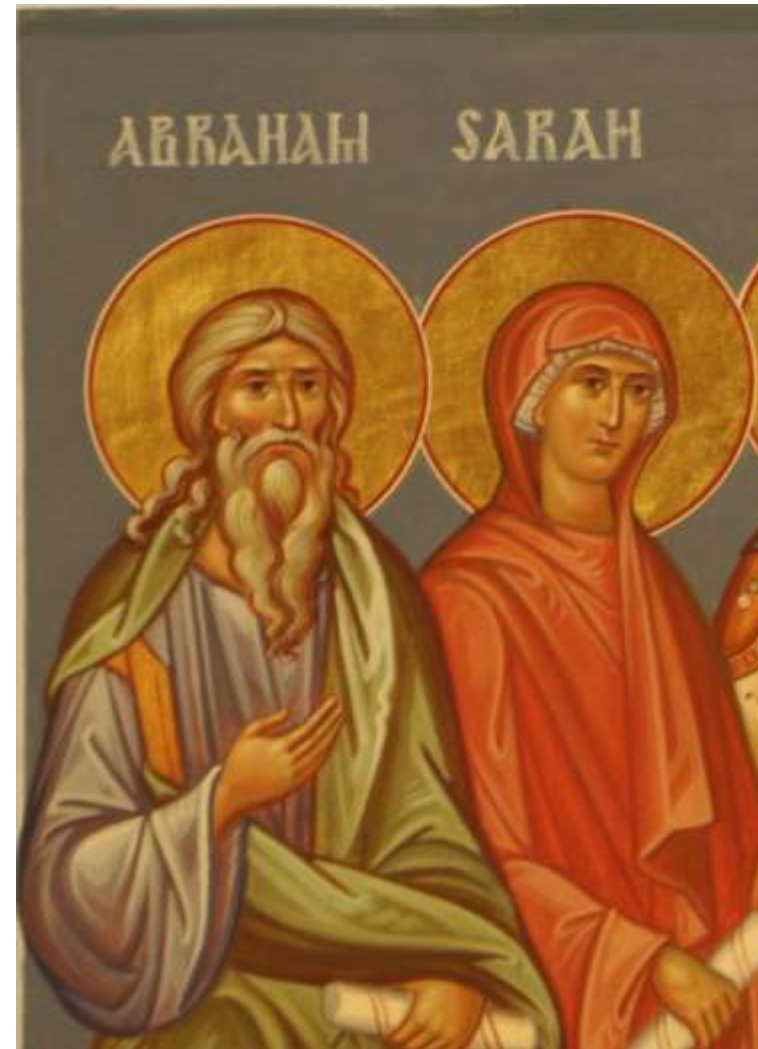


- ❖ Added to that is a 2nd, that of an heir for this barren couple
- ❖ And of faithfulness to all the descendants of that heir, who become a great people
- ❖ And, finally, that this people will bless all nations.
- ❖ Yet, all these **promises** are to all appearances, outlandish and extravagant.

Community of faith and faithfulness

FOURTH


- ❖ This covenantal relationship in turn calls into being a new community...
- ❖ ...which cannot exist, cannot thrive without the faithfulness of God and on-going faith in God of its members
- ❖ **Faith** (in this context) is the capacity of all to cooperatively embrace the promised future with the passion and commitment necessary to forsake what otherwise would be the present and work for that future.
- ❖ This faith is alive today and the community also, a community we know as the **Church**.



They are us – He is God

FIFTH

- ❖ Are Abraham and Sarah paragons? Rock-solid faithful? Under all circumstances? Under all trials?
- ❖ No, they are “normal” human beings (like us) with worries and struggles
- ❖ The narrative is full of vignettes that likely delighted listeners – it is not a dry theological treatise
- ❖ The stories provide an “earthy” portrait of God Himself, as our ancestors pictured Him (and all of their gods), like a man but much more powerful
- ❖ But this God is supreme over all so-called gods, and He is righteous.

The background of the right side of the slide is a scenic photograph of a beach with waves crashing against the shore, with mountains in the distance. Overlaid on this image is handwritten text in black ink.

I will make your
name great, and
you will be a blessing
Genesis 12:2

The issue of text historicity

The text of the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament we have today is the result of a complex development of the tradition.

There are- roughly speaking- two types of material: very old stories echoing history and later commentaries with theological intentionality.

The first compilation *in writing* of the stories we have today in Genesis likely took place after the return to Judah of the Hebrew exiles from captivity in Babylon, about 500-400 BCE.

The historical question is complicated and debated by scholars to this day.

Once it was thought that the oldest layers go back to as long ago as 2,000 BCE, but today, as summarized by scholar William G. Dever...

Archaeologists have "given up hope of recovering any context that would make Abraham, Isaac or Jacob credible historical figures."

The story starts quietly

When Nahor had lived 29 years, he became the father of Terah....

This is the account of Terah's family line. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran.

Haran became the father of Lot. While his father was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth.

Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milkah.

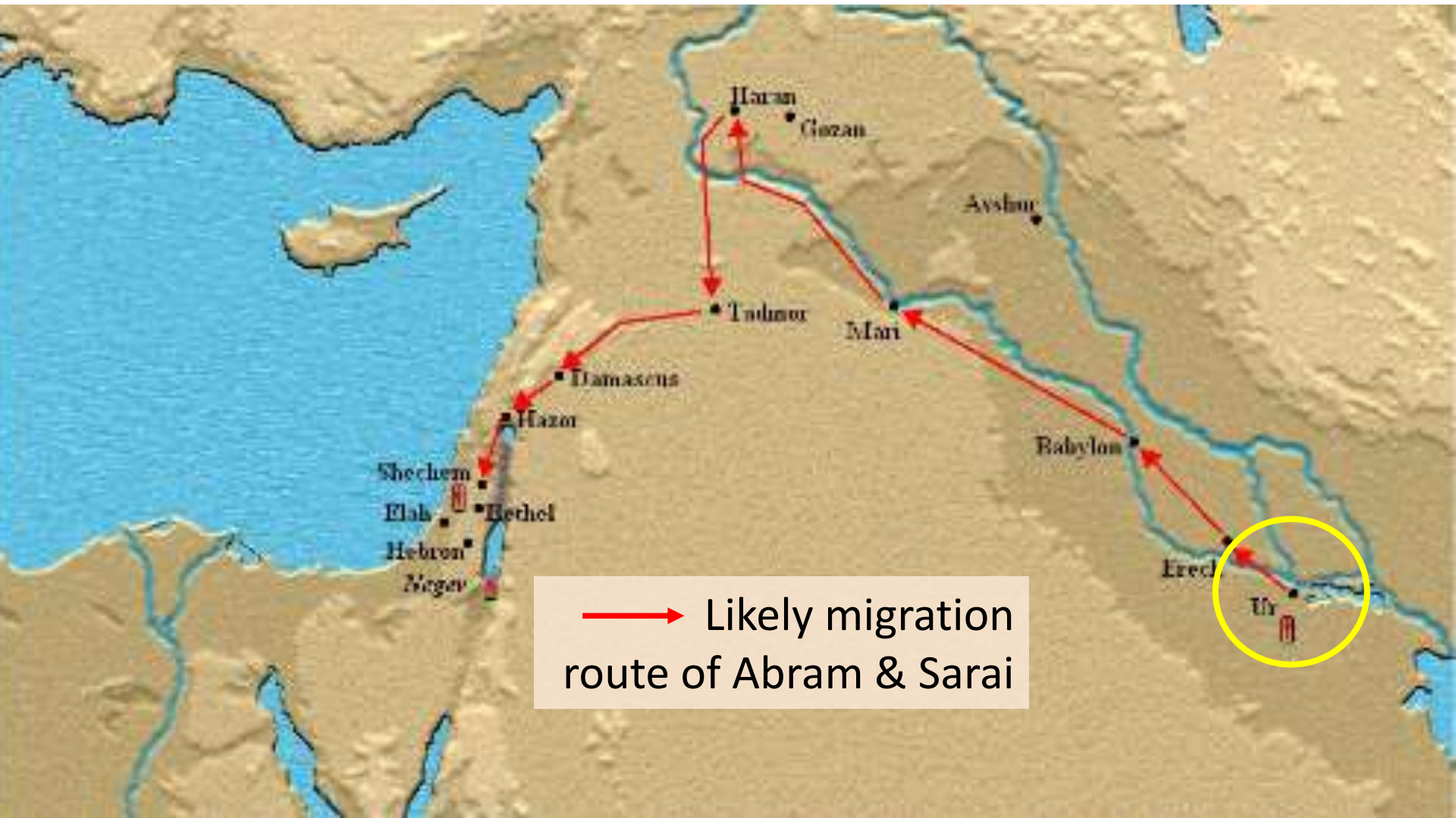
Now Sarai was childless....

- *Gen. 11: 24-30*

We are not given Abram's mother's name – it is, figuratively, as if he had no mother and he comes out of nowhere – “Ur”.

There is nothing extraordinary going on. Some life, some death, a woman who is unable to conceive.

Ur was an important **Sumerian** city-state of **Mesopotamia**, in what is now southern Iraq. It sat at the mouth of the Euphrates on the Persian Gulf but was long ago abandoned and buried by the desert. It is now a protected archeological site well inland as the coastline of the Gulf has shifted.



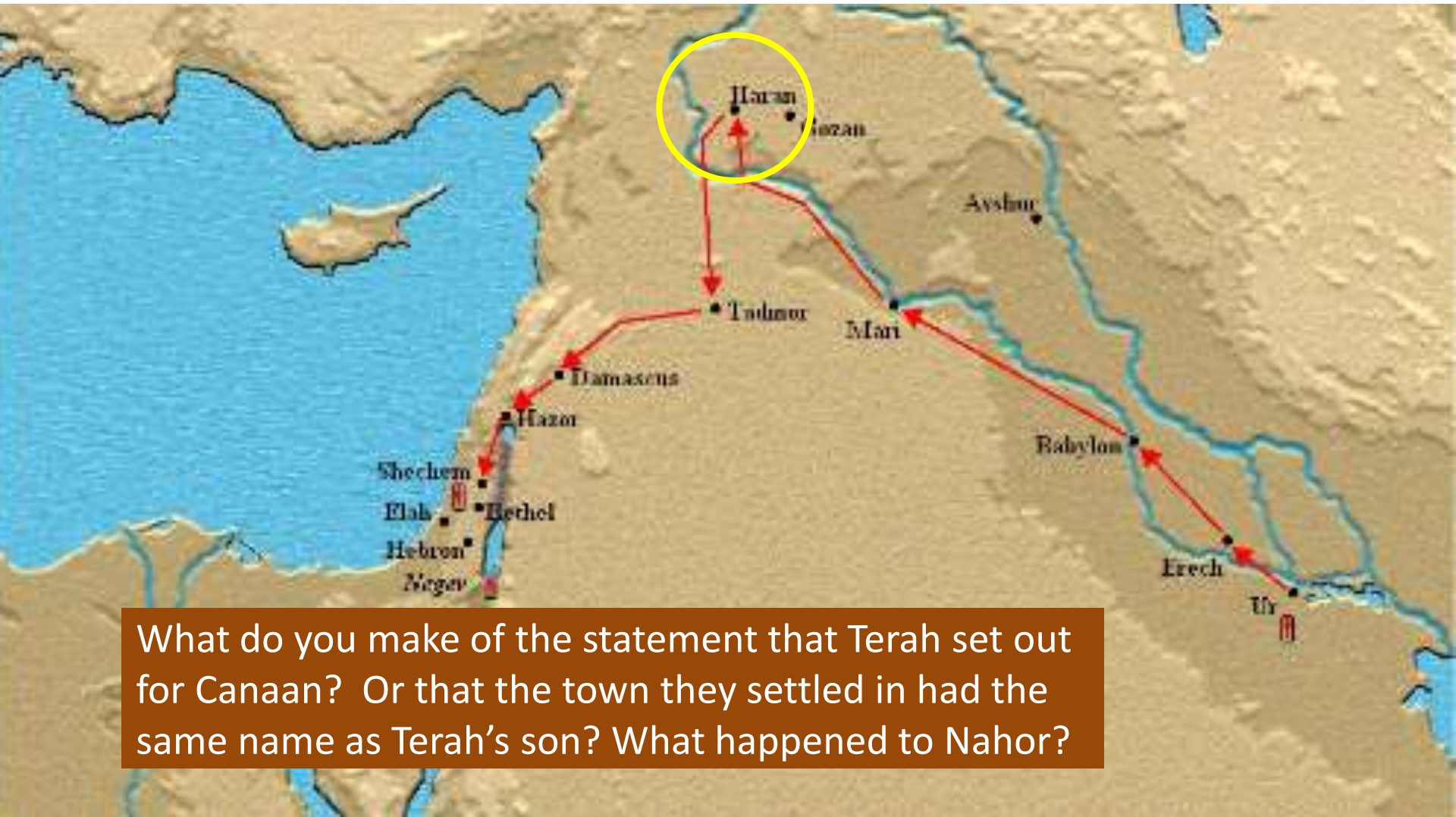


Ur dates from ca. 3800 BCE. The site is marked by the partially restored ruins of the **Ziggurat of Ur**, a shrine to the god Nanna.



Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot... and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to **Haran**, they settled there. Terah... died in Haran.

- *Gen. 11: 31-32*



What do you make of the statement that Terah set out for Canaan? Or that the town they settled in had the same name as Terah's son? What happened to Nahor?

Out of nowhere a call to nobodies

The Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” - *Gen. 12:1-3*

Out of nowhere, to a nobody, from a Deity their culture does not worship comes the **call and the command, “Go!”**

Immediately following the call, without any reason, justification or explanation, there is an extravagant **promise**: I will make... I will bless...

Neither Lot, nor Sarai, nor Abram are of royal blood, of an upper class; they are not rich, have accomplished no great feat, and possess no outstanding abilities or skills. They are ordinary people, just folks.

The command is one of creation

The Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” - Gen. 12:1-3

The words of “the Lord” are God’s decision to create anew, as it were, “out of nothing”.

To again bring forth a new People for Himself. The “I”s make it clear who is acting. He is persistent, if nothing else!

That this couple is childless is a clear metaphor for the barren future of mankind as portrayed in the first eleven chapters of Genesis.

But God does not seem to give this any credence. He is single-minded!

-3

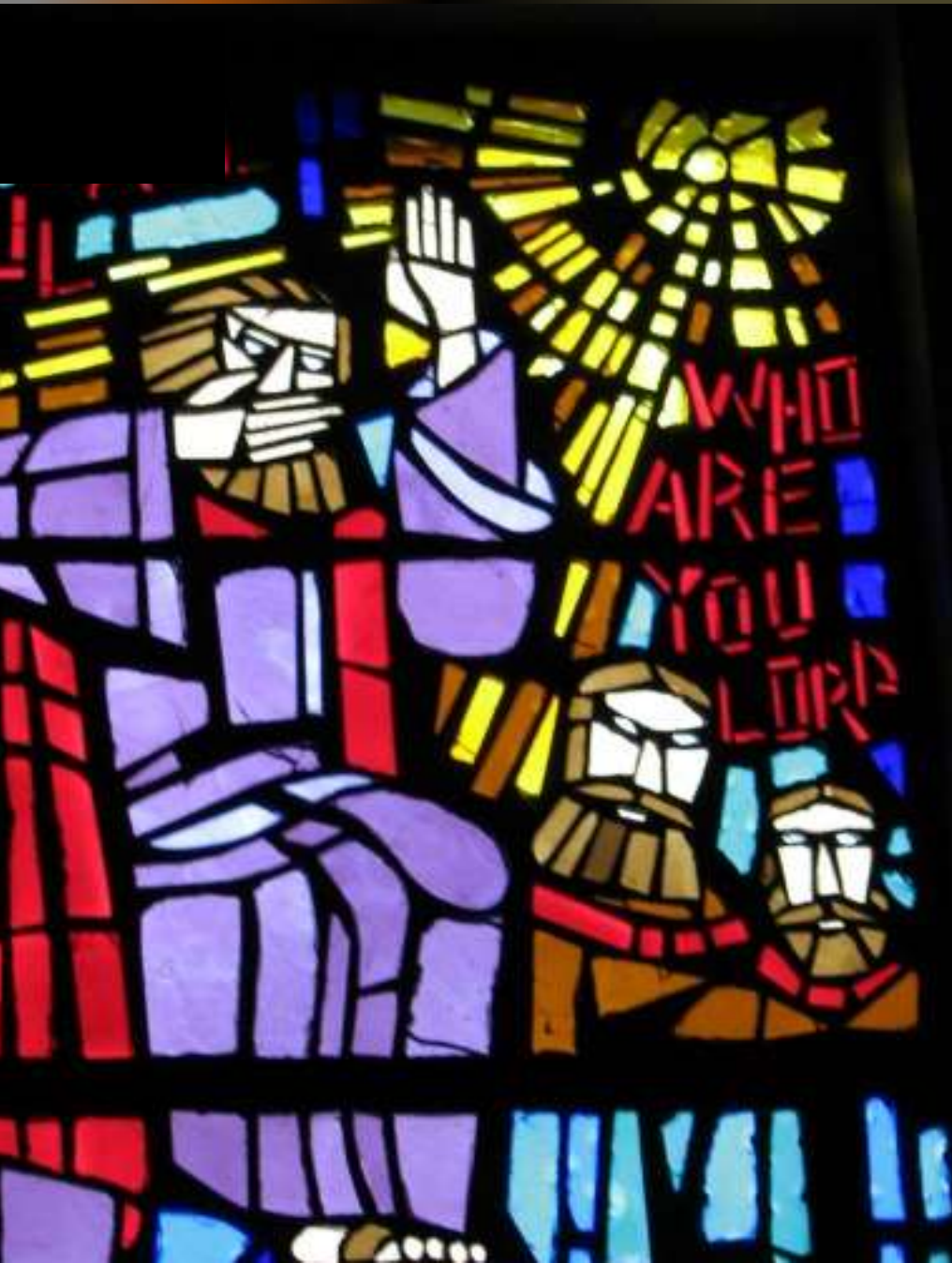
From curse to blessing

To move from Ch. 11 to Ch. 12 is to put behind the destruction of the world in water and the curse of Babel to emerge into a new world of **blessing and promise**. These introductory passages of the Abraham saga tease us with a hint that great things are to come.



We are not prepared for Scripture to swing abruptly from God's dealing **destructively** with the world to His **constructive** call of people who will **build** the community soon to be named "Israel".

Who is this God?



Why don't Abram and Sarai ask, "Who are you, Lord?"

Who do Abram and Sarai think "the Lord" (Yahweh) is?

Just who is making these amazing promises?

Who is it that should be obeyed? How powerful is He?

Did they have a vision or a visit from God? (see v. 7)

We don't know what they are thinking. We only know they obeyed.

There is as yet no hint from the text that A & S are monotheists.

Call --- Faith --- Promise



So Abram went, as the Lord had told him and Lot went with him.

He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran.

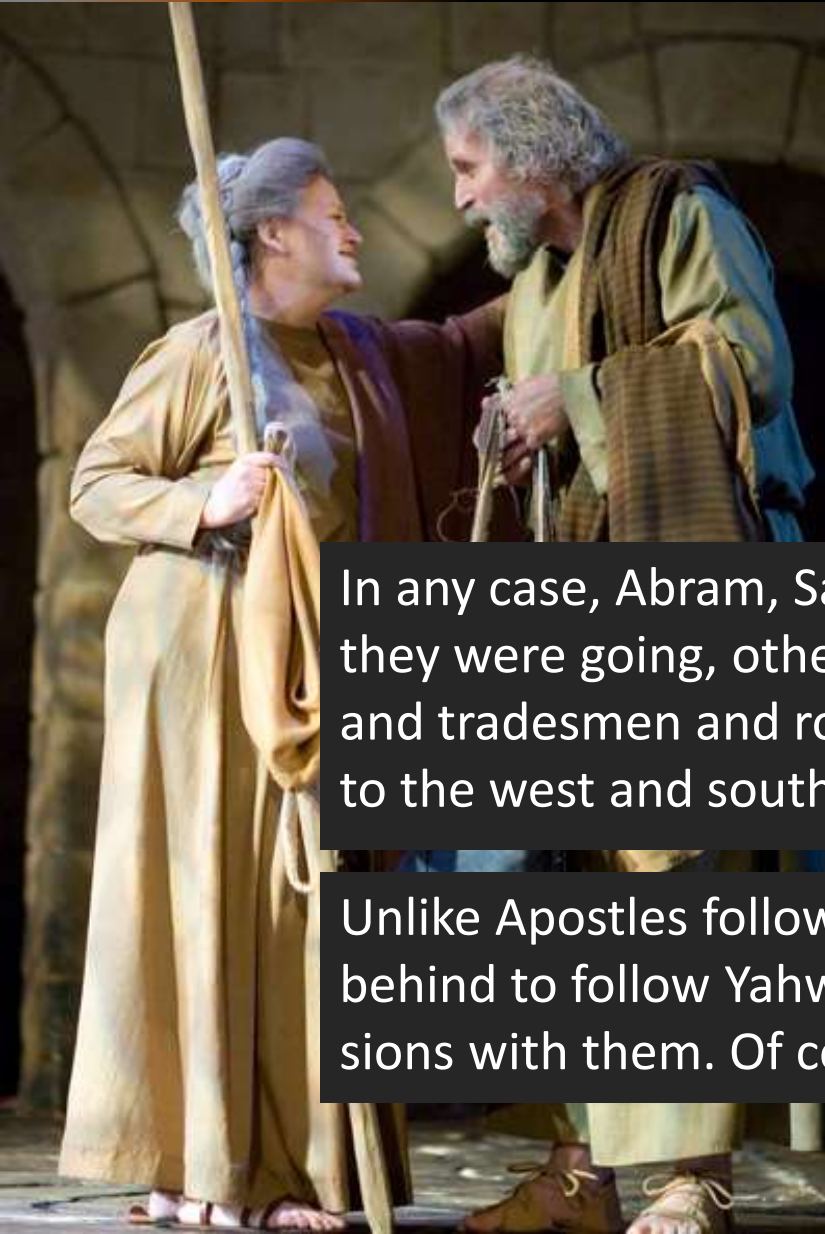
They set out for the land of Canaan and {at some undisclosed time later} they arrived {safely} there.

- Gen. 12:4-6

The text does not say so exactly but Abram appears to be continuing the journey that his father Terah did not finish.

If so, Terah also heard a call of God. Is he, then, the “Father” of the Israelite people?

Call --- Faith --- Promise



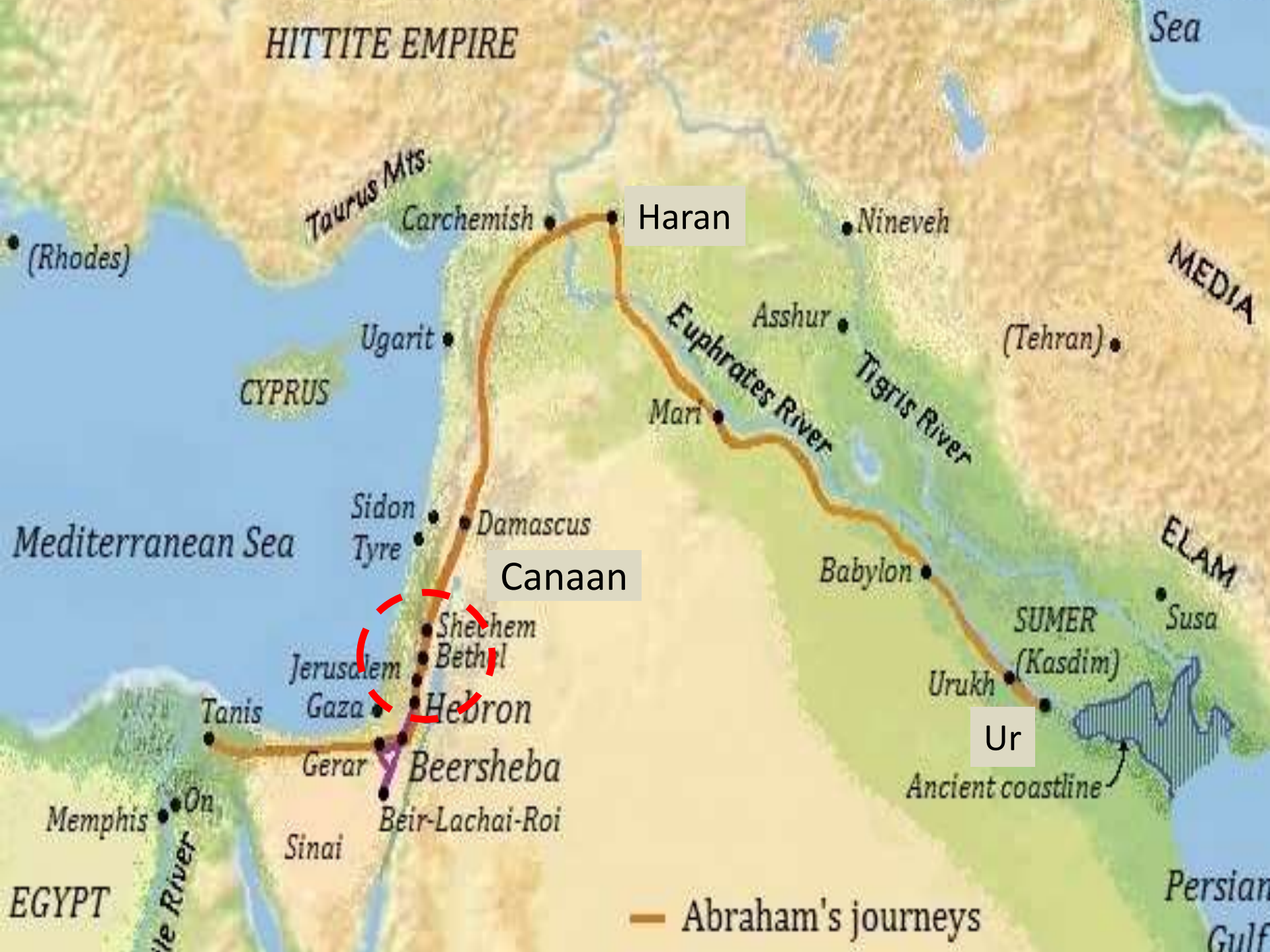
So Abram went, as the Lord had told him and Lot went with him.

He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran.

They set out for the land of Canaan, and

In any case, Abram, Sarai and Lot didn't know much about where they were going, other than, perhaps, stories from other nomads and tradesmen and rough directions ("just follow the fertile land to the west and south") to come in time to hill country....

Unlike Apostles following Jesus, they did not leave everything behind to follow Yahweh's command but took all of their possessions with them. Of course they did; they were nomadic herders.



HITTITE EMPIRE

Taurus Mts.

Carchemish

Haran

Nineveh

Sea

(Rhodes)

MEDIA

Ugarit

Asshur

(Tehran)

CYPRUS

Euphrates River

Tigris River

Mari

Sidon

Damascus

Canaan

Babylon

ELAM

Mediterranean Sea

Tyre

Shechem

Bethel

SUMER

Susa

Jerusalem

Hebron

(Kasdim)

Uruk

Ur

Gaza

Hebron

Ancient coastline

Tanis

Gerar

Beersheba

Beir-Lachai-Roi

Memphis

On

Sinai

Persian Gulf

EGYPT

Nile River

— Abraham's journeys

So... as the Lord had told them... they set out....

People cherish having their own secure home in a familiar place, perhaps with friends and family near.

Faith asks us to set aside this desire and place God's leading above all.

Not all of us need leave home, friends, town, and even country to serve.

The faith journey is more an internal one of the spirit than a physical one with a moving van.

Faith is not merely a journey
for the feet, but it is a journey for
The Heart

-A.W. Tozer

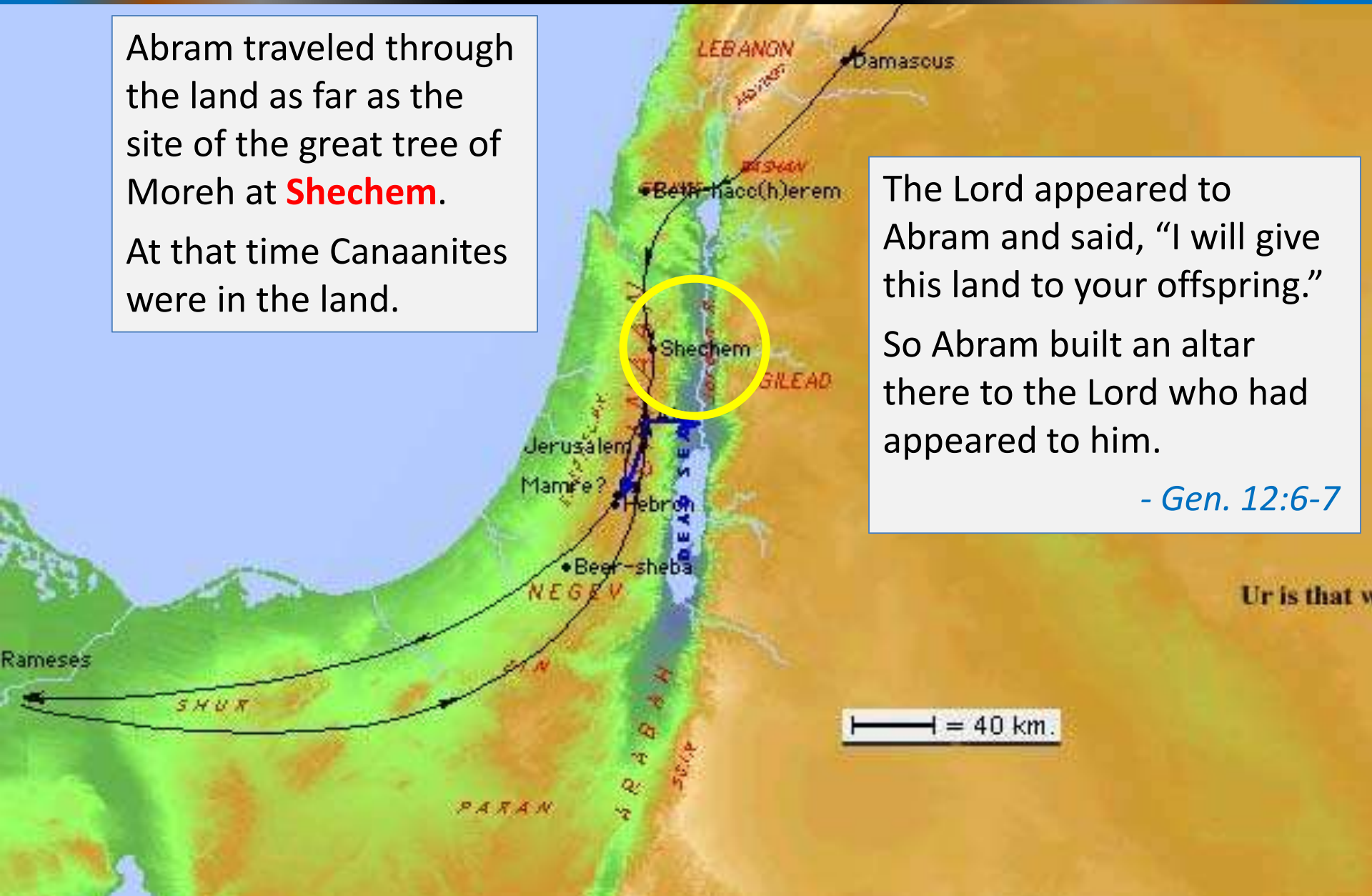
FYI: In 2014, ca. 45 M people moved with-in the US and ca. 1.9 M million people moved from outside the US.

Entering Canaan

Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at **Shechem**.
At that time Canaanites were in the land.

The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your offspring."
So Abram built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him.

- *Gen. 12:6-7*



Shechem (“shoulder”)

Shechem was situated in a narrow pass (the modern city is **Nablus**). [view to the west, **Mt. Gerizim**, left, **Mt. Ebal**, right].

The city of Shechem dates to ca. 2,000 BCE as a Canaanite commercial center due to its position in the middle of vital trade routes through the region. It traded in grapes, olives, wheat, livestock and pottery between the middle Bronze Age and the late Hellenic Period (1900-100 BCE).

In the hills of Bethel

...{Abram} went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord.

Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev. - *Gen. 12:8-9*



What is the significance of building an altar and of “calling on the name of the Lord?”
[Hint: see
Ps. 105, 116]

To Egypt and back

The odd “interlude” of Gen. 12:10-20 tells of the family’s travels through Canaan into Egypt and relates an even odder story featuring the beautiful Sarai, the upshot of which, the family becomes rather well-off but is kicked out of the country.

So Abram went from Egypt to the Negev* with his wife and everything he had. Lot went with him. Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold.

From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place... where his tent had been earlier and where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the Lord.

- Gen. 13:1-4

*Why didn't they stop there? Did God tell them to go to Egypt but then change His mind and have them return to Palestine? Seems unlikely.

Nice problem to have



Lot... also had flocks and herds and tents. But the land could not support them if they stayed together, as their possessions were great... And so quarreling arose between the herders of Abram and Lot.

Abram to Lot: “Let’s not have quarreling between you and me, between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives. This whole land is before us!

Let’s part company. If you go to the left, I’ll go to the right; if you go to the right, I’ll go to the left.”

- *Gen. 13:5-10*

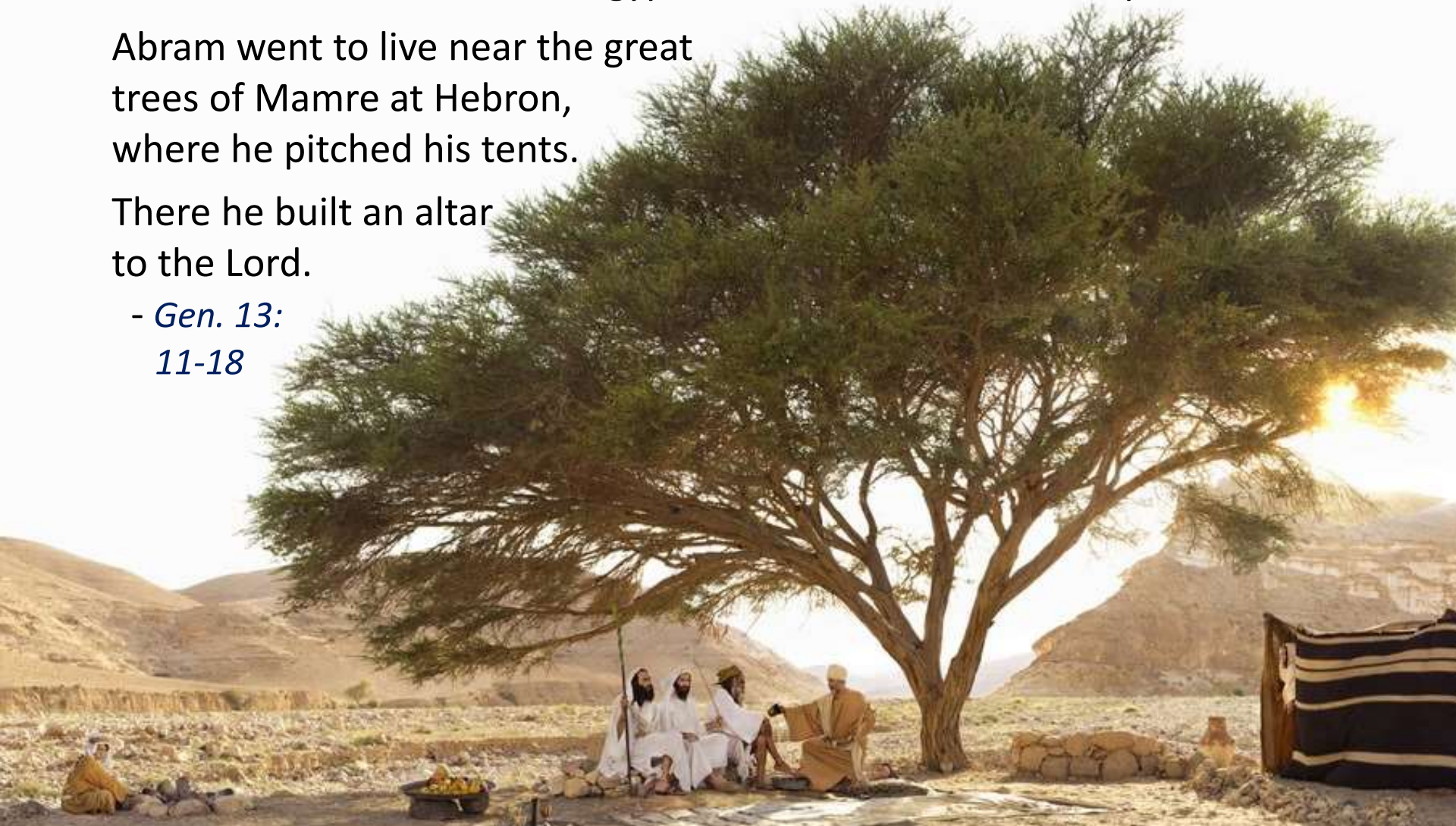
That settles that

Lot saw that the plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt. So he chose the eastern plain.

Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he pitched his tents.

There he built an altar to the Lord.

- *Gen. 13:*
11-18



The promise repeated

The two men parted company: Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom.

The Lord {then} said to Abram, “Look {all} around from where you are. All you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.



Abraham & Sarah



Call - Faith - Promise
End Part 1

Abraham & Sarah



Call - Faith - Promise
Part 2

In Part 1...

Yahweh, a Deity about which we are told little, but who is presumably the same God who created the heavens and the earth according to accounts given earlier in the Book of Genesis, makes a crazy promise to two ordinary nomadic herders of Upper Mesopotamia named Abram and Sarai....

... to make them into a great nation.

“You will be a blessing,”
He tells them.

“Whoever curses you,
them I will curse; and all
peoples on earth will be
blessed through you.”



In Part 1...

With their nephew, Lot, they trek west out of **Haran** then south through hill country called **Canaan**, then further south into a semi-desert area, the **Negev**, and into Egypt.

During this time, they prosper, acquiring stuff (more animals, more tents, more helpers and slaves) but, apparently, no children.

Egypt is not to their liking, it seemed (and vice versa), so they return to the Negev, south Canaan.



To read the story of Abraham and Sarah is to hear the voice of the later nation of Israel speaking long after the time of their ancestors about how and why their nation came into existence. This kind of origin saga is called an **etiology**.



Abraham's Journeys

Ur is that w



Abram and Lot then separate, Abram to live in the hills of Canaan, Lot to live on the plain.

The Lord {Yahweh} then said to Abram, “Look {all} around from where you are. All you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, only if someone can count the dust, could then your offspring be counted. - *Gen. 13:14-17*

It's about two things

The story of Abram and Sarai [Abraham and Sarah], the etiology or origin story of the Israelite people and nation, is centered around the two things you must have (at least) to have a nation:

people and land.

The promise of Yahweh centers on these two things.

Both are conspicuously absent, even laughable, for Abram and Sarai at this point in the saga.

But the Israelites who are telling and re-telling this ancient and sacred story have lived through both the glories of the powerful kingdom of David and Solomon and the tragedy of the Babylonian Exile.

They know the importance of a closely-knit community and of land under their control and under the Law of God.

It's about one thing

The story of Abram and Sarai [Abraham and Sarah], the etiology or origin story of the Israelite people and nation, is centered around the two things you must have (at least) to have a nation:
people and land.

The promise of Yehovah centers on these two things

Both are central to
this point in time

But the Israelite
story have
David and Solomon and the tragedy of the Babylonian Exile.

Doubtless, for them, the times were dark and the future uncertain, even scary.

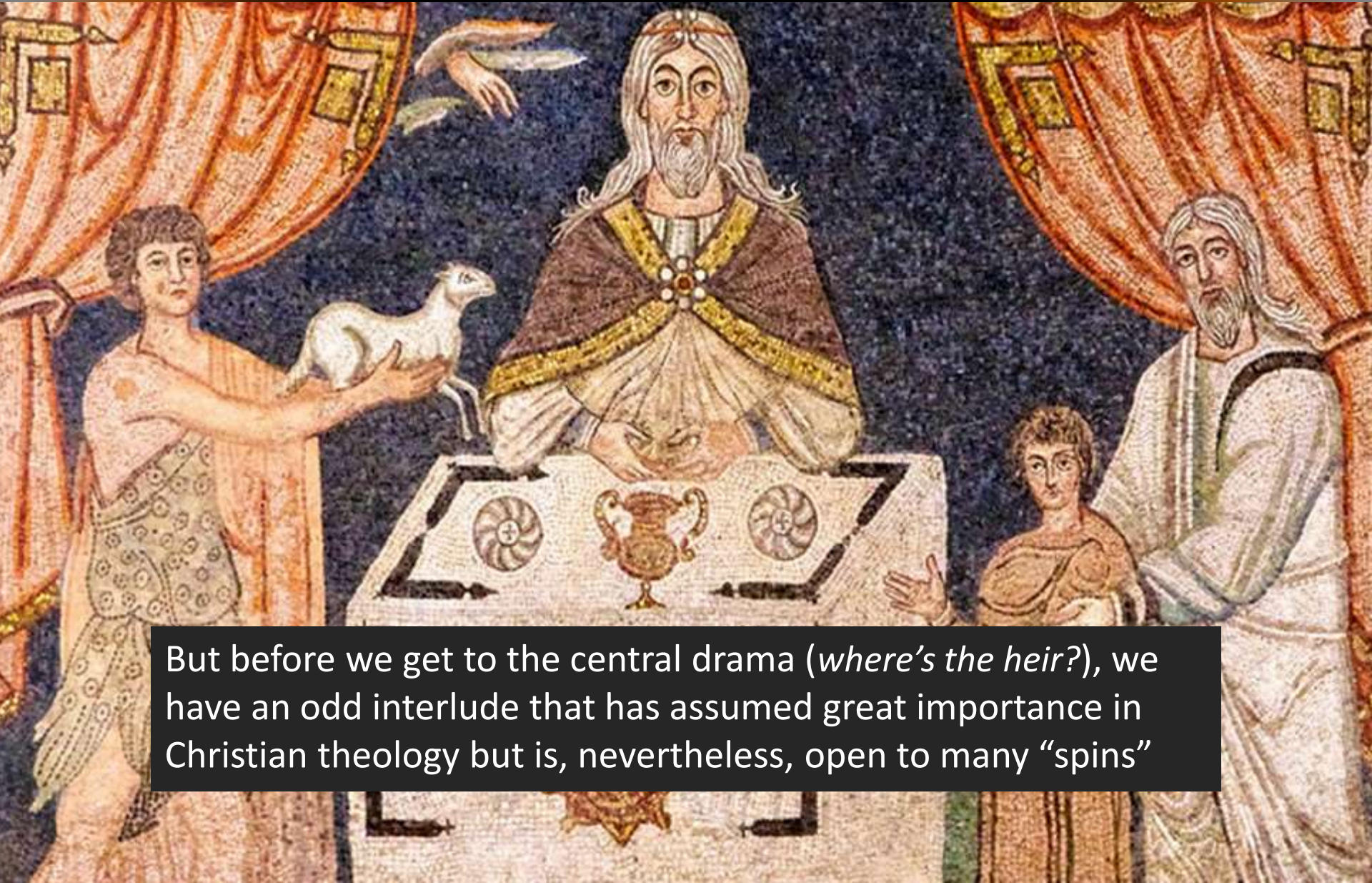
Were they telling these stories to remind themselves of **God's faithfulness** to those who faced formidable obstacles to their hopes?

They know the importance of a closely-knit community and of land under their control and under the Law of God.

and Sarai at

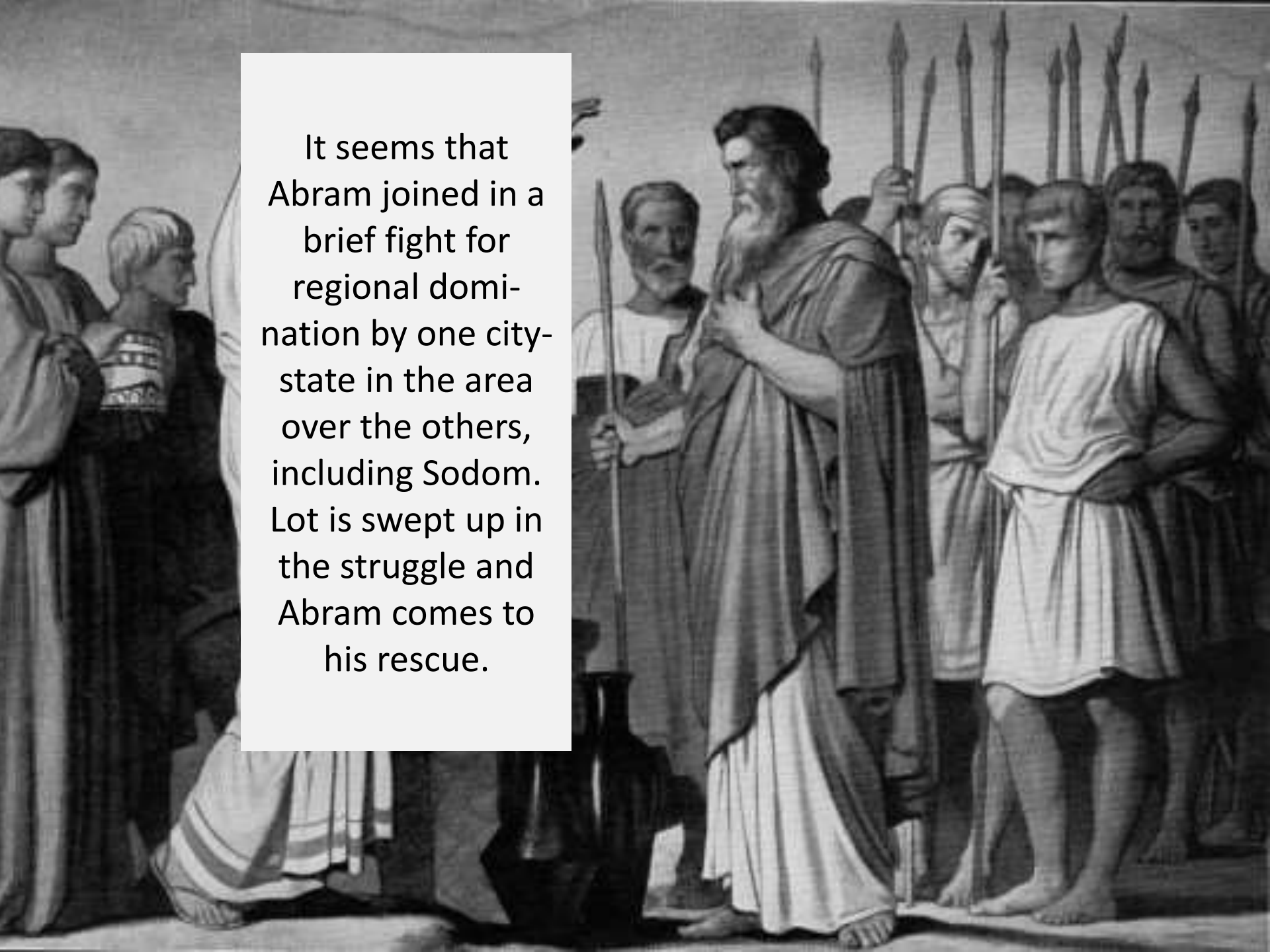
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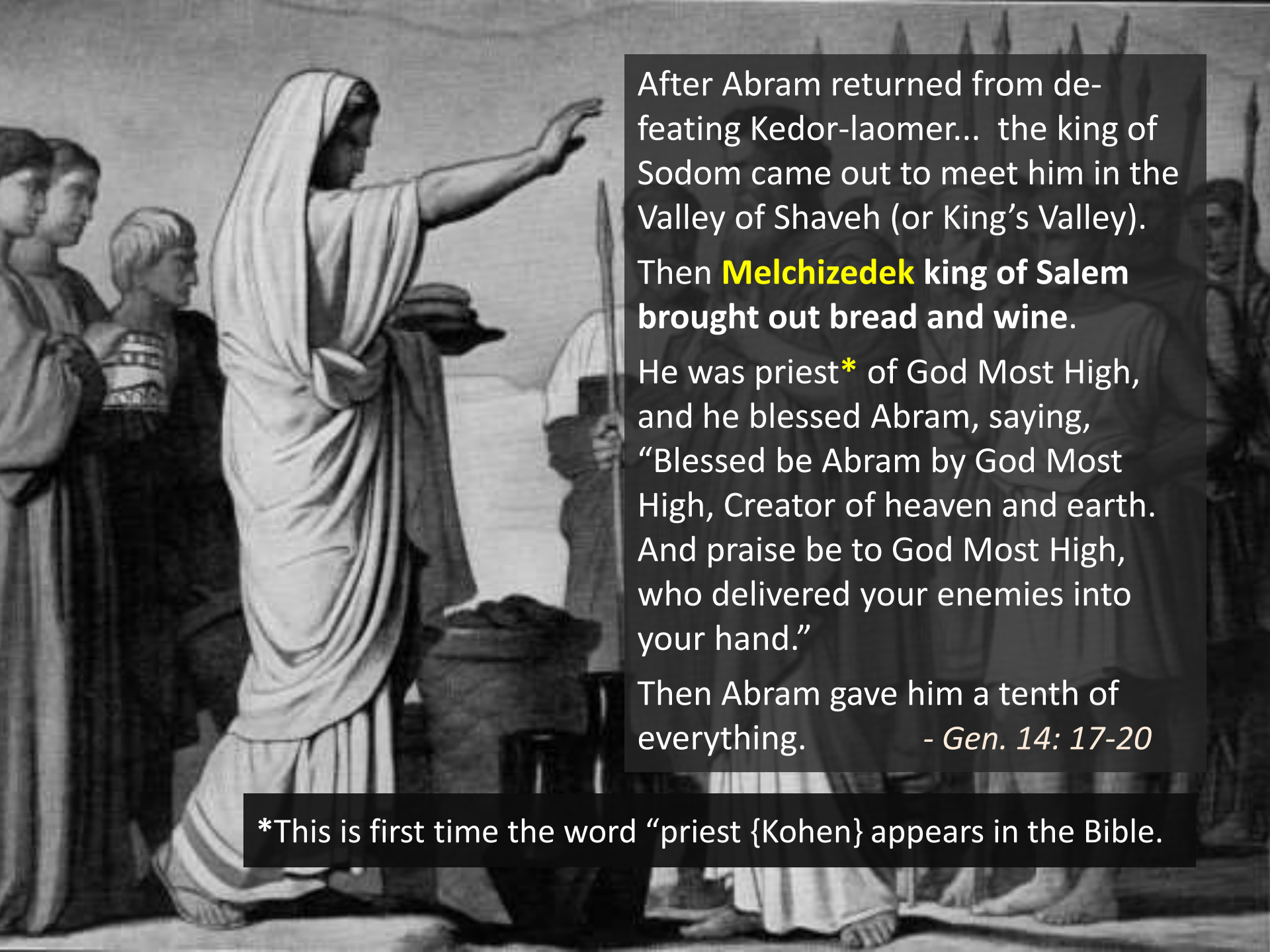
Melchizedek



But before we get to the central drama (*where's the heir?*), we have an odd interlude that has assumed great importance in Christian theology but is, nevertheless, open to many “spins”

It seems that Abram joined in a brief fight for regional domination by one city-state in the area over the others, including Sodom. Lot is swept up in the struggle and Abram comes to his rescue.





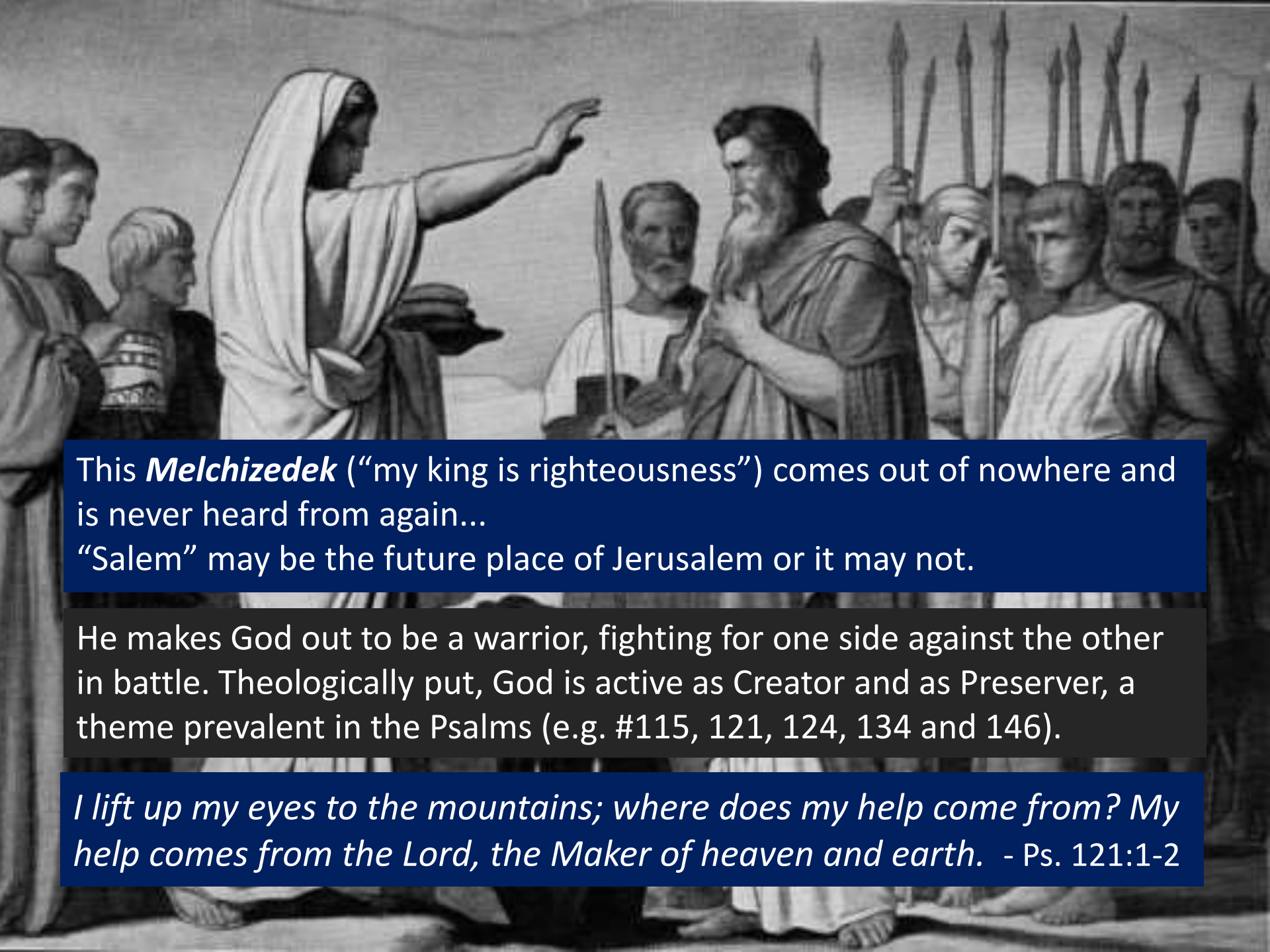
After Abram returned from defeating Kedor-laomer... the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (or King's Valley).

Then **Melchizedek** king of Salem brought out bread and wine.

He was priest* of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand."

Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. *- Gen. 14: 17-20*

*This is first time the word "priest {Kohen}" appears in the Bible.



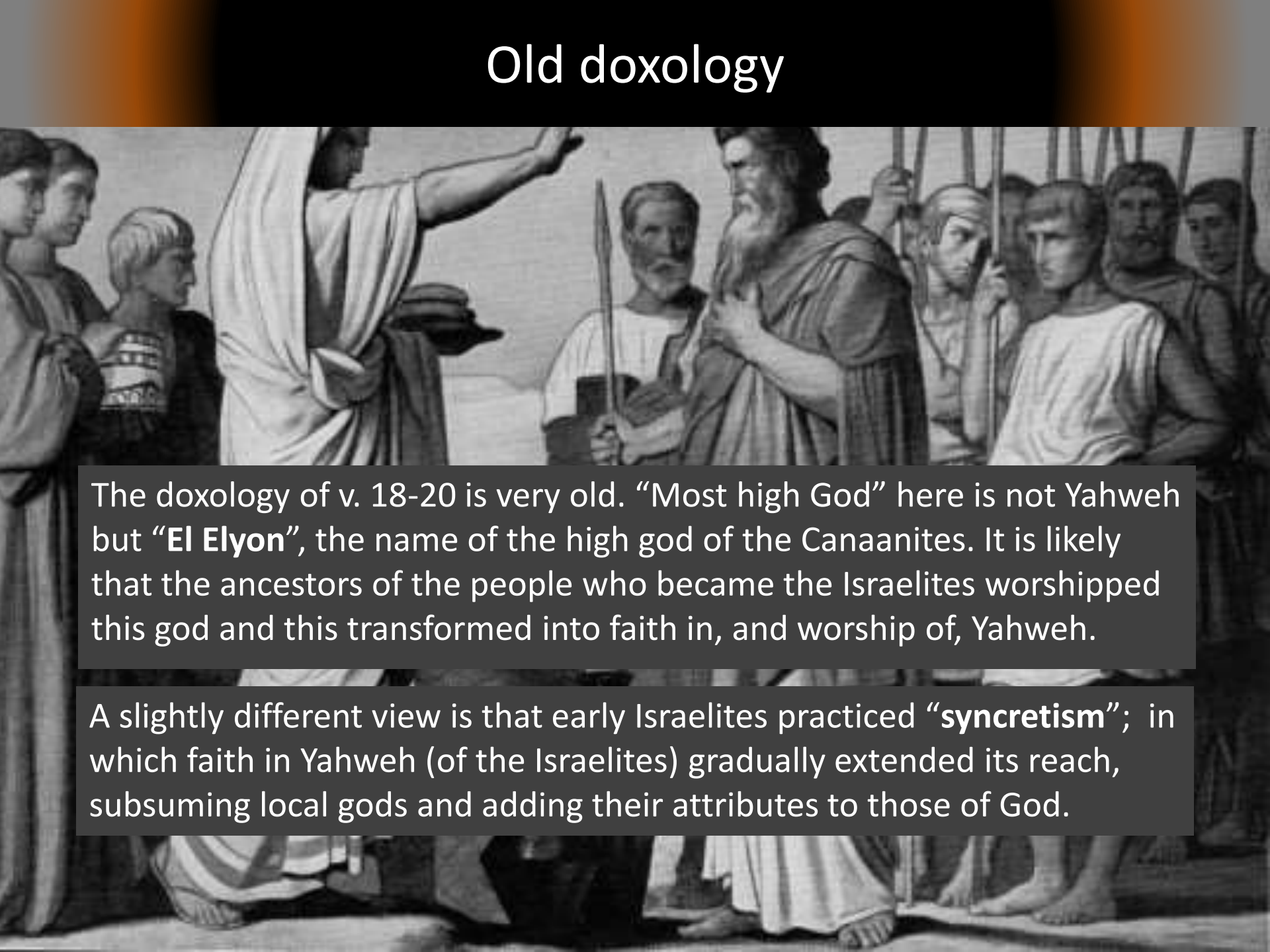
This **Melchizedek** (“my king is righteousness”) comes out of nowhere and is never heard from again...

“Salem” may be the future place of Jerusalem or it may not.

He makes God out to be a warrior, fighting for one side against the other in battle. Theologically put, God is active as Creator and as Preserver, a theme prevalent in the Psalms (e.g. #115, 121, 124, 134 and 146).

I lift up my eyes to the mountains; where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. - Ps. 121:1-2

Old doxology



The doxology of v. 18-20 is very old. “Most high God” here is not Yahweh but “El Elyon”, the name of the high god of the Canaanites. It is likely that the ancestors of the people who became the Israelites worshipped this god and this transformed into faith in, and worship of, Yahweh.

A slightly different view is that early Israelites practiced “**syncretism**”; in which faith in Yahweh (of the Israelites) gradually extended its reach, subsuming local gods and adding their attributes to those of God.

Melchizedek in the Psalms

The 2nd (& last) occurrence of the word *Melchizedek* in the OT is in **Ps.110**:

The Lord says to my lord (*the king*), "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a stool for your feet."

The Lord will extend your mighty scepter from Zion, saying, "Rule in the midst of your enemies!"

The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek."

The Lord is at your right hand; He will crush kings on the day of his wrath, He will judge the nations...

The encounter with Melchizedek follows the breaking of the power of local petty kings and the gathering of their possessions as booty.

Psalm 110 sees Yahweh acting through the king of Israel in a similar way; God and the king will together crush all the enemies of Israel.

The king of Israel is, then, **a kind of priest**. He acts for God on earth in meting out punishment to those whom God judges.

Melchizedek in Hebrews (6:18-7:3)

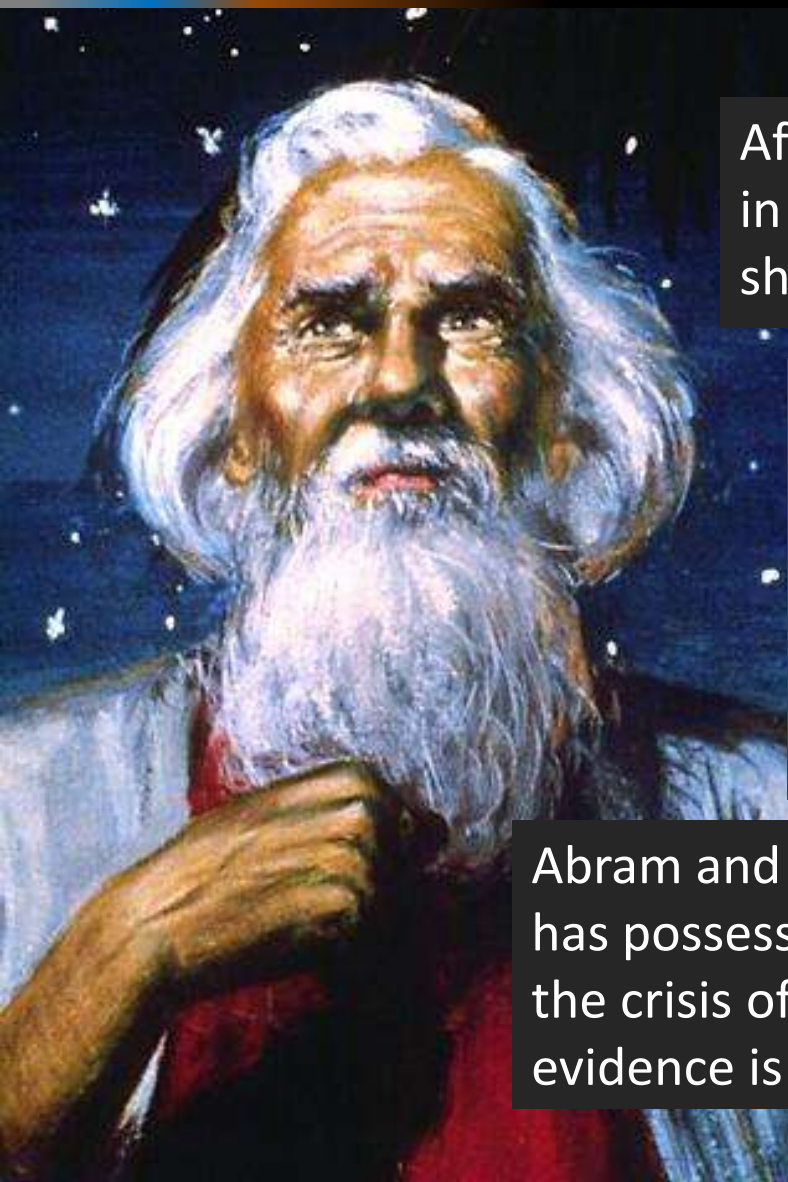
We... may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary... where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf... has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek... Without father or mother... genealogy... beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God... a priest forever.

The author of *Hebrews* writes his lengthy interpretive exposition based more on Ps. 110 than on the passage in Gen. 14, contending that because the superior blesses the inferior, therefore Melchizedek must be Abram's superior and therefore must be a High Priest representing God.

Melchizedek "resembles" Jesus and is therefore a "type" of Jesus. One is a great priest, so the other is also, but he was not of the tribe of Levi - this means the greatest priests are not of Levi... Well, Jesus was from Judah, not Levi, so his priesthood must also be of the superior kind.

The offering of bread and wine by the one is a forerunner of the eternal offering in the elements of Holy Communion of the other.

Look God, no heir



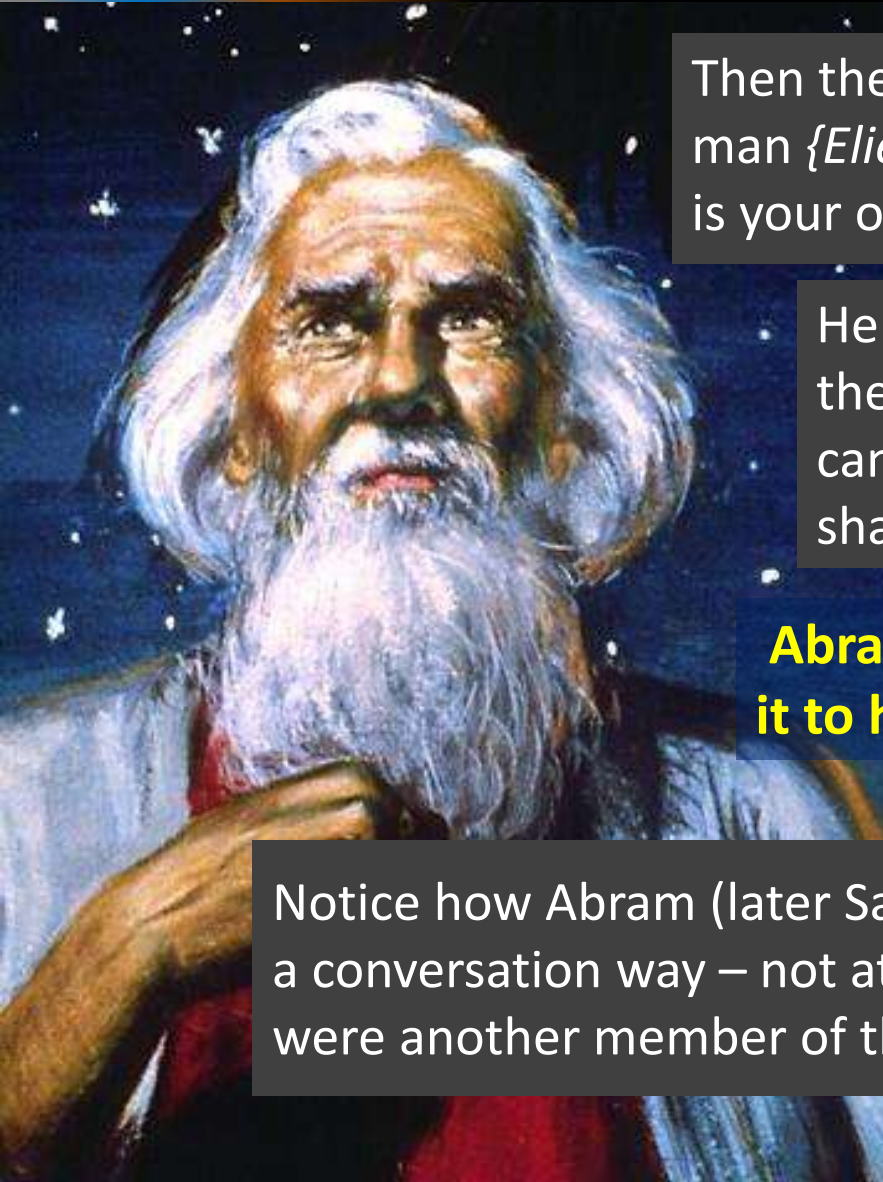
After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision. “Don’t be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”

But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, what can you give me? I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus. You have given me no children. A servant in my household will be my heir.”

- *Gen. 15:1-3*

Abram and Sarai are not getting any younger. The “clan” has possessions and servants but no children. Now is the crisis of faith, the point of very serious doubt. The evidence is compelling that the promise is empty.

Protest – Response - Acceptance



Then the word of the Lord came to Abram: “This man {*Eliezer*} will not be your heir, but son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.”

He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” - *Gen. 15:4-5*

Abram believed the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness. - *Gen. 15:6*

Notice how Abram (later Sarai also) feels free to talk to this God in a conversation way – not at all in “religious” language. It is as if He were another member of the clan; a companion, not a Lord.

Paul citation makes Gen. 15:6 famous

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter?

If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God.

What does Scripture say? **“Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”** ...

... It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.

- Rom. 4:1-4, 13

No doubt Abram and Sarai had faith but they also had to perform a hard “work”, that of waiting for the promises (an heir, land) to materialize. And, for them, the former was paramount.

A ritual seals the deal



heifer



goat



ram



Dove



pigeon

He {Yahweh} (then) said to him (Abram), “I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans* to give you this land to take possession of it.”

But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?”

The Lord said to him, “Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.”

Abram brought these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other (he did not cut the birds in half).

- *Gen. 15:7-10*

*God called Abram out of Haran not Ur. Why did God say this? Is He referring to Terah?

Theophany

As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him.... When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.

On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land.

- Gen. 15: 17-20



This curious ritual may be very old, an echo of a solemn binding of two parties to an agreement, like a blood oath. The flame moving between the sacrificed animals is spooky - is Yahweh Himself, though unseen, is walking before Abram? Why does God go through with this ritual?

Wait

But why does God delay giving the faithful couple an heir (a son)? The story does not tell. All we know is that Abram and Sarai must wait, wait and be faithful to each other and to Yahweh. Is this meant as a lesson to the people reading it? Is it now the lesson for all of us?

How long, LORD, must I call for help but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!", but you do not save?

Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, conflict abounds....

I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what He will say to me, what answer I am given to this complaint.

(The LORD's Answer)

Then the LORD replied: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. The revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. **Though it linger, wait for it- it will certainly come and not delay.**

- Hab. 1:2-3, 2:1-3

Wait

I WAIT
FOR THE Lord
my SOUL WAITS
& IN HIS Word
I PUT MY hope.

PSALM 130:5-6

Abram and Sarai had to accept God's promise and wait, even without hope.

Christians are not in this quandary. We have already received grace and already live in Christ.

If we are tempted to complain about something, we should take a "time out" to meditate on the goodness of God and offer a prayer to "increase our faith."

The saga continues; still no heir

There follows three separate narratives related to the promise of son for Abram and Sarai: Hagar and Ishmael (Ch. 16), Circumcision (Ch. 17), and The Three Visitors (Ch. 18).

Despite all that goes on in these passages there is no heir apparent by the end of Ch. 18 and despite the similarity of the theme in each chapter, they are not to be taken as following chronologically but are, apparently, unrelated tales.



Hagar, the surrogate mother

Sarai has waited too long and blames God for her infertility. She now takes decisive action with Abram's cooperation.

Sarai had no children but she did have a female Egyptian slave named **Hagar**. Sarai said, "Abram, the Lord {Yahweh} keeps me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave! Perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed and did what Sarai asked.

So, after they had been living in Canaan 10 years, Sarai gave Hagar, to {Abram} to be his {second} wife... and she conceived.

- Synopsis of Gen. 16:1-4

What do you think? Are Abram and Sarai now "counted as un-righteous" because they stopped believing God's promise?

What do you think? Did God ask too much of these two ordinary people? Does God ask too much of us? Did He forgive them (and does He forgive us) for sometimes being impatient and faithless?

The blessing is also a problem

Bearing the master's child endows the foreign slave girl "status" (if not freedom). She should not be treated like a lowly servant, but cannot be given equality with the first wife.

When {Hagar} knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me."

As it turns out, the mistress, Sarai, becomes the slave – to jealousy.

"Your slave is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best."
- *Gen. 16: 5-6*

In subsequent events, our sympathy lies with Hagar; it is her story now more than that of Sarai and Abram.



Then Sarai mistreated (*or, “afflicted”*) Hagar. As a result, Hagar fled from her.

- *Gen. 16: 6*

Sarai “afflicts” Hagar just as the Egyptians will “afflict” the Israelites a few generations from now (same Hebrew word).

Hagar flees to the same place (the wilderness of Shur, on the Sinai peninsula) to which the Hebrew people flee from Pharaoh.

And God succors her as He does the people of the Exodus.

“Sarai and Hagar”
by Cody F. Miller



A messenger from God found Hagar near a spring in the desert...

He said, “Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?”

“I’m running away from my mistress, Sarai,” she answered.

Then the messenger told her, “Go back to your mistress and submit to her...

I (*God?*) will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count.”

- *Gen. 16:7-10*

God hears Hagar

“You are now pregnant, and you will give birth to a son. You shall name him **Ishmael**, (“**God hears**”) for the Lord has heard your misery.”

God blesses Hagar and Ishmael, who receive a promise like that given to Abram and Sarai, that they will be the source of a great people, except there is no mention in this promise of a land grant.

So Hagar bore Abram a son and Abram gave (him) the name **Ishmael**. - *Gen. 16: 9-16*

What does this passage tell us about the faith of Hagar? Should we not count her as righteous because of her faith? Should we not honor both Hagar and Ishmael?



There are three Abrahamic faiths

Who is better in religion than he who submits himself entirely to God while doing good to others and follows **the faith of Abraham**, the upright one? God took Abraham for a friend. *- Surah 4:126 (Qur'an)*

What do you think? Share your reflections/reactions to these puzzling, even disturbing things in the story of Hagar and Ismael:

1. *Abram and Sarai are **not** faithful to the promise – they give up and make their own plans for an heir.*
2. *Ishmael, **not** Isaac, is the first-born son of Abram/Abraham. He should be heir to promises of God (he is, but only in part).*
3. *Ishmael becomes (in tradition) the father of the peoples of the Arabian peninsula and, in time, an important figure in **Islam**.*
4. *Sometimes Yahweh grants His most important blessing to the second son or even the youngest son – e.g. Jacob and, later, David*

Abraham in the Qur'an

{**Abraham** spoke to his people} “I have turned my face toward He who created the heavens and the earth as **one who is righteous** and I am no longer one of the idolaters.”
- *Surah 6:79*

But the firm in knowledge... the believers, believe in that which has been revealed... and those who keep up prayer and give to the poor... these it is to whom We shall give a mighty reward.

Surely We have revealed to you as We revealed to Noah... and to **Abraham and Ishmael** and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes and **Jesus** and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon...

- *Surah 4:163-4*

All told, Abraham is mentioned in >100 verses in the Qur'an



Promise repeated with 3 signs

When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to him...“I am ***El Shaddai*** {God Almighty}. Walk before me faithfully; be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.... You will be the father of many nations.

Sign #1

No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be **Abraham**, (*“Father of Many”*)... I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you and kings will come from you.

I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants... to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

The land of Canaan, where you reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you.”

- *Gen. 17:1-8*

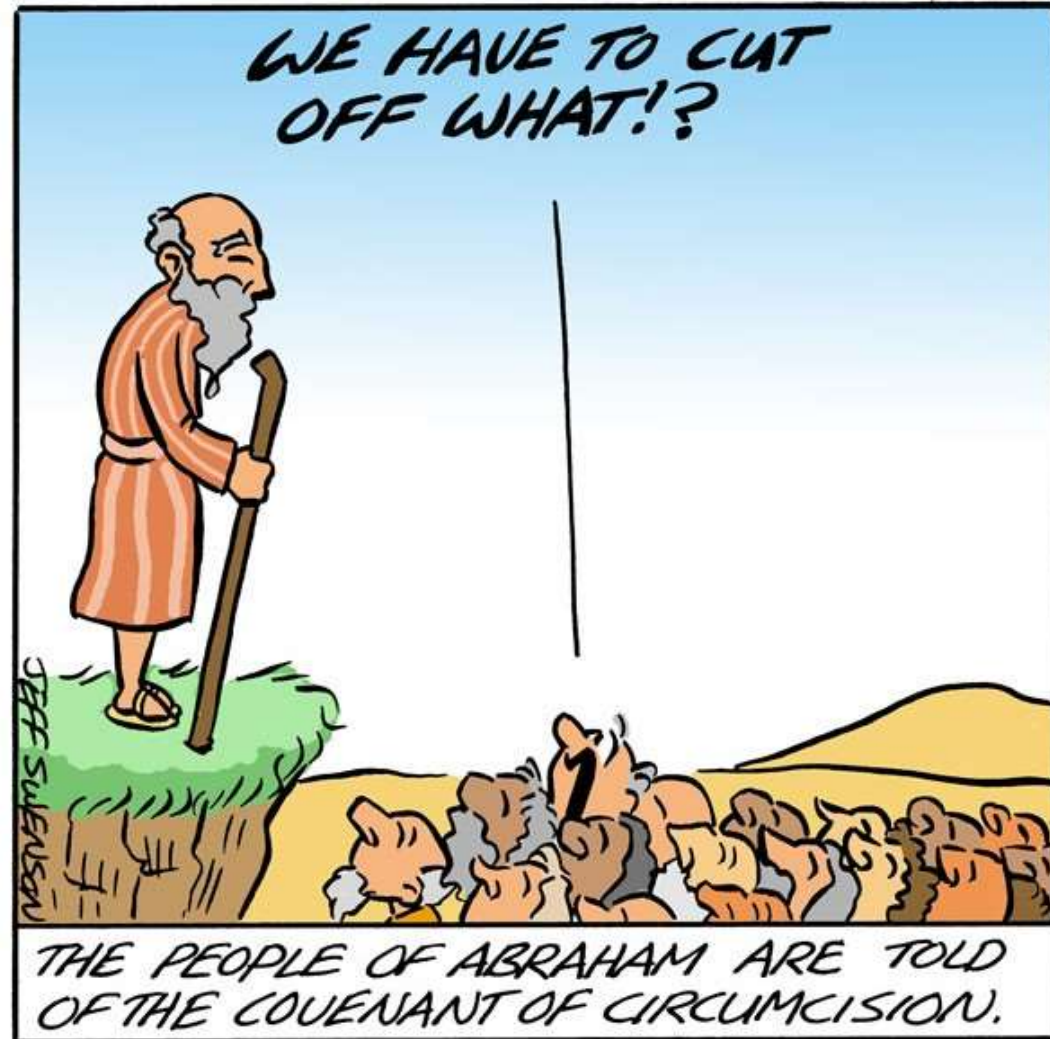
Circumcision is “in”

Sign #2

Then God said to Abraham,
“You must keep my
covenant, you and your
descendants after you for
the generations to come.

This is the **sign** of my
covenant with you and your
descendants after you: every
male among you shall be
circumcised....

- *Gen. 17:9-14*



An etiology of a customary practice

For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought from a foreigner...

My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant.

Any uncircumcised male who has not been circumcised... will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”

- Gen. 17:9-14

This story may well be an etiology that explains how the custom of circumcision came to be among the Israelites.

The NT makes a point of telling us that Jesus himself was taken into the people of the promise, Israel, at the proper time and in the proper way.

On the 8th day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him... *- Lk. 2:21*

“Circumcise your hearts!” - Paul

Circumcision has value if you observe the law. If you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised.

If those who are not circumcised keep the law’s requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised?

Paul is trying to show that the sign (cutting off a part of your body) is not the thing in itself (keeping God’s commands).

A person who is {like a Jew} only on the outside is not {really} a Jew. And circumcision is merely **outward**... No, a person is a {real} Jew who is one **inwardly**, who’s circumcision is circumcision of the heart **by the Spirit** not by some written code. - *Rom. 2:25-29*

This is much as Jesus taught when he said, “What goes into a man does not make him unclean....” True circumcision for men and women both, the true “mark” of God, is on the heart and by the Holy Spirit.

Abraham doubts, laughs

Sign #3

“As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be **Sarah** {“noblewoman”}.

I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her... so that she will be the mother of nations...”

Abraham fell facedown. He laughed and said to himself, “Will a son be born to a man 100 years old? Will Sarah bear a child at 90?”

Abraham said to God, “If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!”

Then God said, “Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him **Isaac**.”

I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.

- *Gen. 17:15-20*

God insists



As for **Ishmael**, I have heard you! I will surely bless him... and make him fruitful.... I will make him into a great nation. But my covenant I will establish with **Isaac**, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.” - *Gen. 17:20-21*

Commentaries often associate the story elements of doubting and laughter with Sarah not with righteous Abraham.

We need not choose which is “correct” - it could be that these were two versions of the same story. The important thing is that they magnify the incredible nature of the insistent promise of Yahweh.

Abraham & Sarah



Call - Faith - Promise
End Part 2

Abraham & Sarah



Call - Faith - Promise
Part 3

Recap: missing promises

THE STUDY TO THIS POINT Yahweh makes, then repeats two extraordinary promises to an otherwise ordinary couple living in Upper Mesopotamia named Abram and Sarai, that He intends to bless them with **land** [lots of land] and **descendants** [as the starry skies above].

But as time goes by, the childless, aging couple give up trying to believe the unbelievable, take procreation into their own hands.

Hagar the slave acts as surrogate Mom and **Ishmael** is the blessed result. Blessed, but with complications. Yahweh says “not My idea.” And to impress this on them, He changes their names.

This account explained to Hebrews why there were people in the region who weren't of the Twelve Tribes. But Christians, knowing now the history of enmity between Jews and Arabs, would do well to ponder Scripture regarding Hagar and Ishmael. As we will see, only one person holds any ill will toward them and it is not God or Abraham.

In Part 3

Parts 1-2 examined two of three stand-alone narratives woven into the broader Abraham-Sarah tapestry: that of Hagar and Ishmael, and of the etiology of the Jewish custom of circumcision.

Part 3 considers the charming story

of the Three Mysterious Visitors leading to everyone's favorite account of Divine retribution, the destruction of the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.



Company coming

The Lord appeared to Abraham near the trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day.

Abraham looked up and saw **three men** standing near, hurried from the tent to meet them, and bowed low to the ground.

He said, “If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought and you may wash your feet. Then rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed... Then you may go on your way”

“Very well,” they answered, “do as you say.”

- *Gen. 18:1-5*

Was there one stranger or three? “The primary critical question concerns the identity of the visitor...There is no need either to harmonize the two versions or to divide into sources or to seek a Christian statement of the Trinity here...{we} do well to present the story as it is...” - *OT scholar Dr. Walter Brueggemann*

The visiting strangers in art

The Abrahamic saga receives more than its share of attention by artists, past and contemporary. The arrival of three divine visitors at the tent of Abraham and Sarah is a favorite.

One element common to most of the paintings (a selection follows) is the obvious divine nature of the three visitors – many depict the visitors with angelic wings and one sits them on clouds in the air.

The Christian painter, **Rembrandt**, clearly intends his visitors to represent the Holy Trinity.

The two oldest works depict Abraham in an attitude of worship. All show Abraham serving them refreshments.

Sarah is included in most works; she is usually listening surreptitiously from a position of concealment.



Josse Lieferinxe (1495) "Abraham and the Three Angels"



Jacob Pynas (c. 1630) "Abraham and the Three Angels"



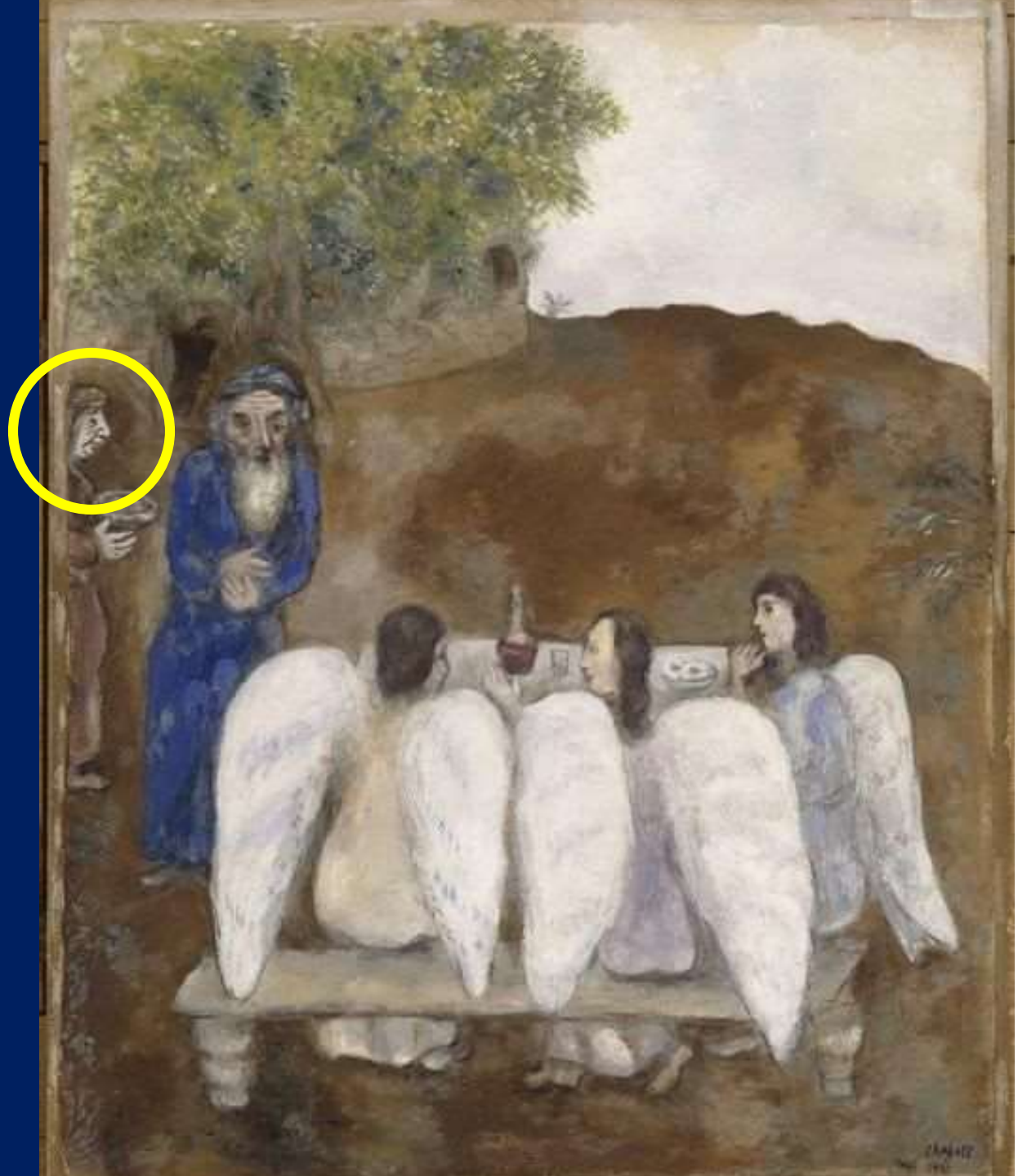
Rembrandt (1640) "Abraham and the Three Angels"



Rembrandt (1646) "Abraham Entertaining the Angels"



Marc Chagall
(1931)
“Three Angels visit
Abraham”



Marc Chagall (1933) "Abraham and the Three Angels"



Richard McBee (1995) "Three Strangers"



Richard McBee (1995) "Abraham, Sarah and Guests"





He Qi
"Three
Angels"

Bedouin hospitality

In those arid regions visitors were rare and hospitality a near-sacred duty. Abraham sprang into action. He ordered Sarah to use the best flour they had and bake fresh bread, then he personally selected a calf for a servant to prepare for a welcome feast.

He {Abraham} then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them.

While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.

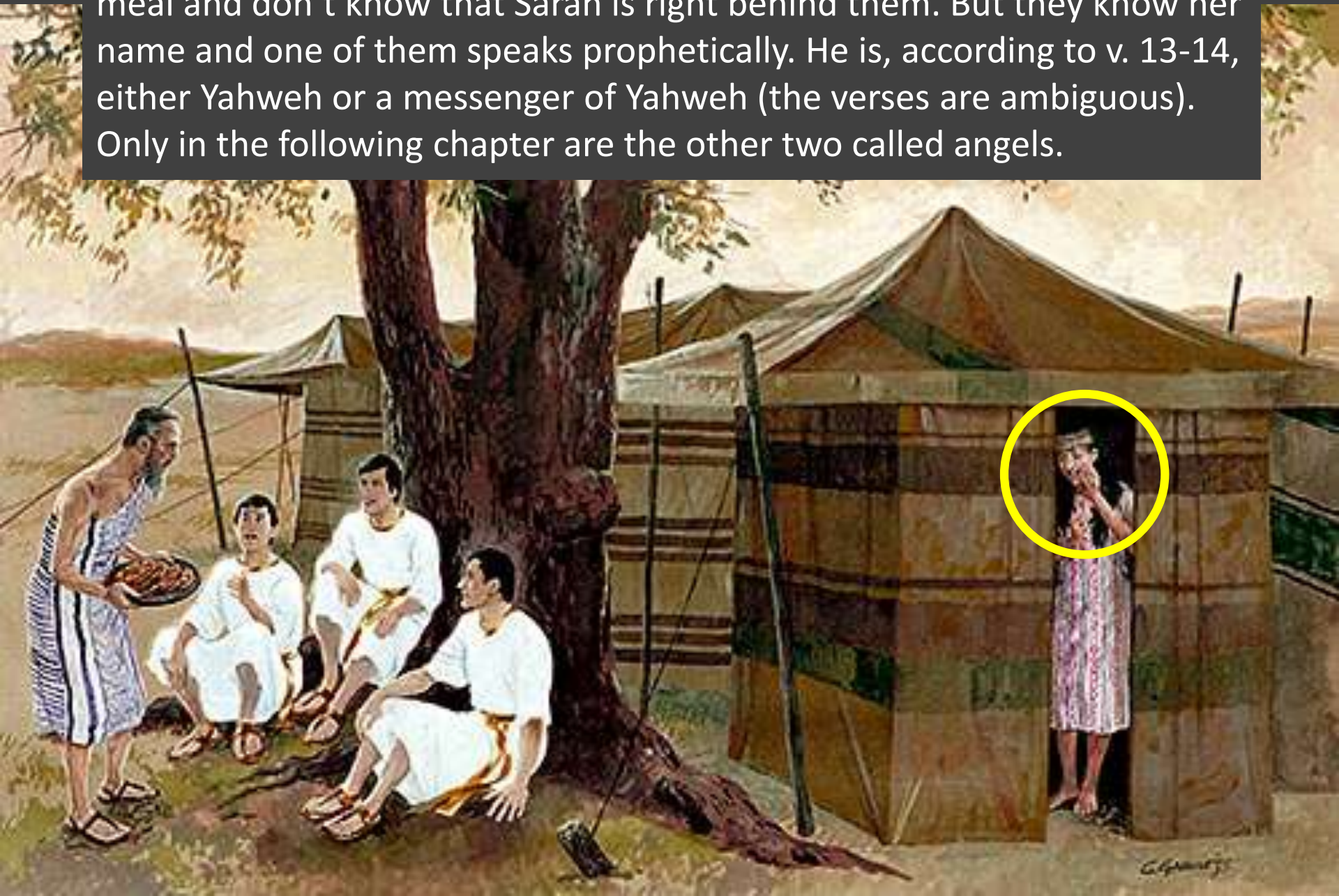
“Where is your wife Sarah?” they asked him.

“There, in the tent,” he said.

Then **one** of **them** said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.”

- *Gen. 18: 5-10*

The mysterious visitors are, to outward appearances, human. They eat a meal and don't know that Sarah is right behind them. But they know her name and one of them speaks prophetically. He is, according to v. 13-14, either Yahweh or a messenger of Yahweh (the verses are ambiguous). Only in the following chapter are the other two called angels.



Sarah laughs, yes, she did

Sarah was listening... behind him.

Abraham and Sarah were already very old. Sarah was well past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed {quietly} to herself, thinking, “After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?”

Then **the Lord** said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying ‘Will I have a child, now that I am old?’ Is anything too hard for **the Lord**? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son.”

Sarah was afraid so she lied and said, “I did not laugh.”

But He said, “Yes, you did laugh.”

- *Gen. 18: 10-15*

Neither Abraham nor Sarah speak/act as if aware they are entertaining a Divine Being (or three). Part of the charm of the story is the casual tone of the conversation, as if God is someone you can talk to as a friend (even as we teach today about prayer).

This study skips over Ch. 18:16-19, which tells of the salvation of Lot and his family from Divine destruction by burning sulfur of the two wicked cities, likely a pious fable with no connection to the Abrahamic saga.



What do you think? There is something in us that loves to hear about “frontier justice” when bad guys (never us) come to a well-deserved bad end. Yet, this is far from the Good News of Jesus, who welcomed sinners.

Finally, the promised son

{FINALLY} the Lord was gracious to Sarah and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age (he was 100 years old when his son was born) at the very time God promised him.

Abraham gave the name **Isaac** (“*He laughs*”) to the son Sarah bore. When his son was 8 days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God had commanded him.

- *Gen. 21: 1-7*

Even today we speak of children as “gifts” from God. Every baby is, in a way, a miracle.

The *Genesis* account, in repeatedly emphasizing the infertility and age of this couple, has gone to great lengths to make it clear without question that the birth of Isaac was God’s doing, truly a miracle baby.



Finally, the promised son

In Scripture, miracles are associated with the births of heroes.

Examples are Esau and Jacob (born of Rebekah) and Samuel (born of Hanna), and, in a way, Moses (saved from Pharaoh death decree by Pharaoh's own daughter).

The NT authors carried over this feature in telling of the birth of John (the Baptist) to Elizabeth and, of course, the birth of Jesus to Mary.

But we should not be surprised – it seems that every important thing God does is “out of nothing”: creation (ex nihilo), resurrection (from the dead) or justification by grace (not by works).

Come to think of it, are we not also, every one of us, brought into life from essentially nothing?



“We are all children of Abraham”- Paul

It was not through the law that Abraham... received the promise... but through the righteousness that comes by faith.... so that it may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring, those of the law and also those who have the faith of Abraham. **He is the father of us all**.... He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed, the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

Against all hope, Abraham... believed and so became **the father of nations**... he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead...and that Sarah’s womb was also dead.

Yet he did not waver... being persuaded that God had power to do what He had promised. This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.”

The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, but **also for us**, to whom God will credit righteousness for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

- Rom. 4:13-25

Well-deserved joyful laughter

Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.”

She added, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

- *Gen. 21: 1-7*

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,
We were like those who dreamed.
Our mouths were filled with **laughter**,
Our tongues with songs of **joy**.
Then it was said among the nations,
“The Lord has done great things for them.”
The Lord has done great things for us,
And we are filled with **joy**.

- *Ps. 126*

For Sarah, a well-deserved laugh

Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.”

She added, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

- Gen 21: 1-7

Sarah’s joy is also oddly stated – she seems to care more for having bragging rights than a real baby who will now grow into a man and carry the promise of God into another generation.

Yet, the fulfillment of promise and resolution of anguish is, here, oddly understated, almost as if there was no problem. Why?

In fact, the narrative mood now shifts abruptly. Joy and laughter are brief; suffering due to human conflict casts a long shadow.



{**Isaac**} grew... On the day he was weaned *{at ca. age 3}* Abraham held the *{traditional}* feast.

But Sarah saw that {**Ishmael**}, whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham, was mocking them *(or laughing at them)*, so she said to Abraham, “Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.”

This distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son.

But God said to him, “Do not be so distressed about the boy and your slave woman. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.

I will make the son of the slave into a nation also, because he is your offspring.”

-Gen. 21:8-13

The next morning Abraham took food and a skin of water, gave them to Hagar, and... sent her off with Ishmael. She... wandered in the desert....

When the water was gone she put the boy under a bush and went off {a distance}, thinking, “I cannot watch the boy die.” Then she began to sob. - *Gen. 21: 14-16*

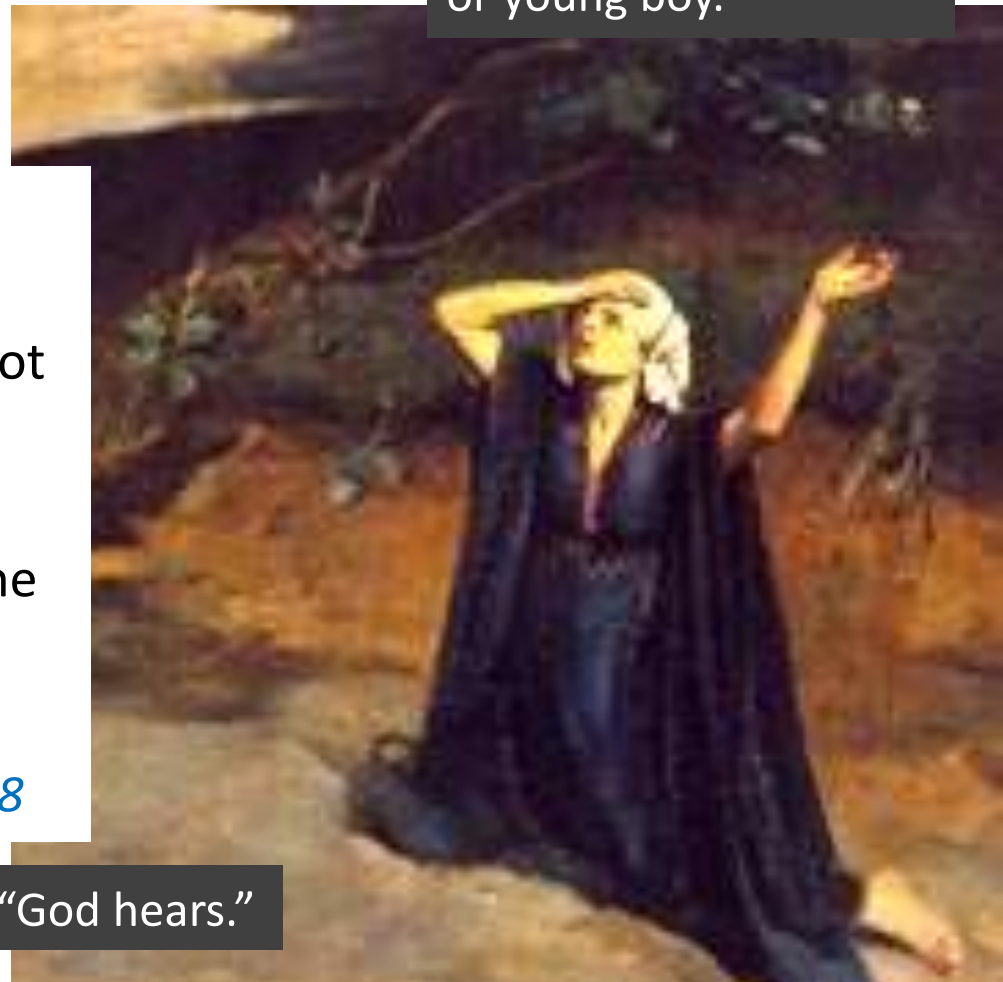
God **heard*** the boy crying.

The angel of God called to Hagar, “What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has **heard** the boy crying...

Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation.”

- *Gen. 21: 17-18*

Ishmael should be a teenager by this time but the stories are wildly inconsistent on this detail. Here he appears to be an infant or young boy.



*Reminds us that “Ishmael” means “God hears.”

Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water.

So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer.

Gen. 21:19-20



Drink from the well today

Islamic tradition recounts the same event with some additional details: Hagar, desperately seeking water for her infant son, could not find any in the hot dry valley.

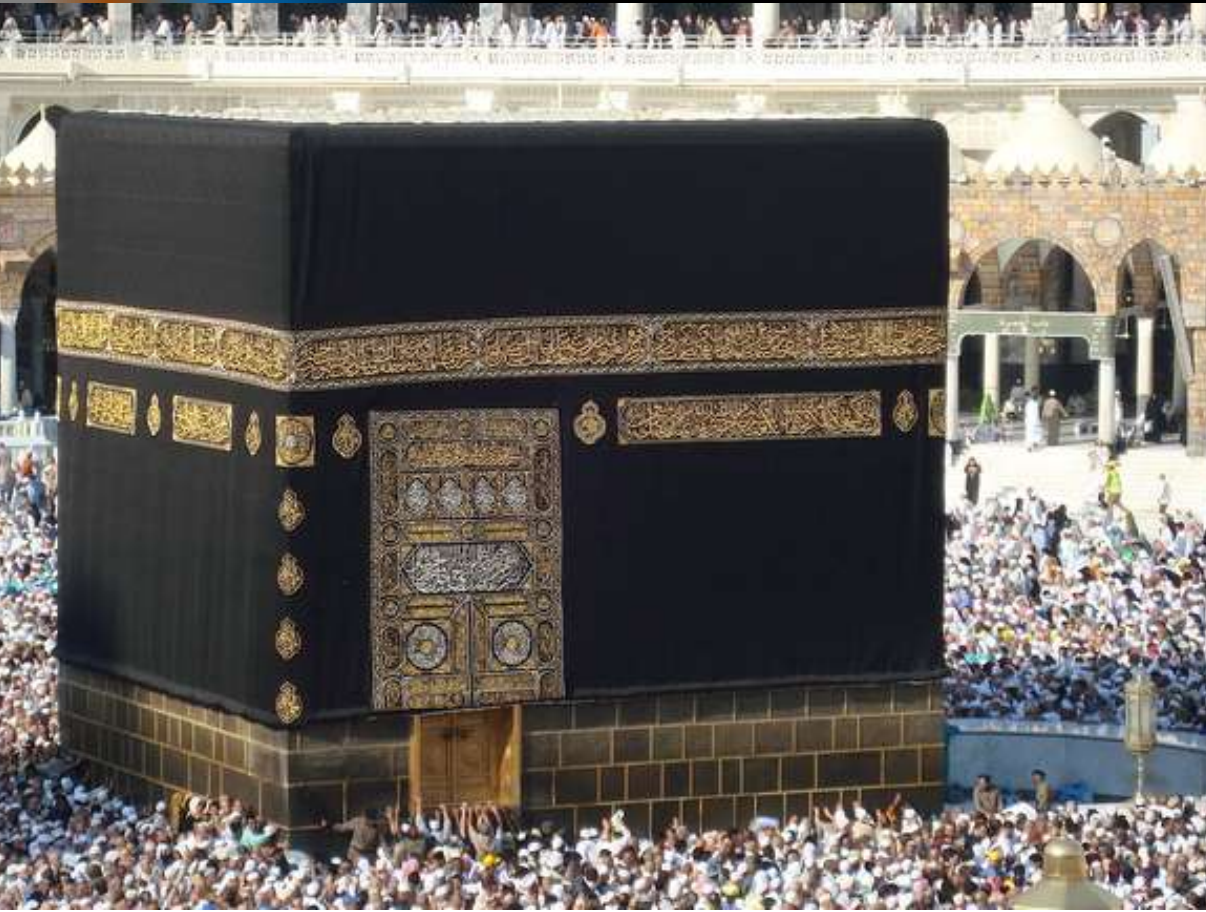
She frantically ran back and forth between two hills seven times looking for a spring, getting ever thirstier. The infant Ishmael saved them both; water gushed from the ground where he scraped the earth with his feet.

The name of the spring comes from the phrase *Zomë Zomë*, meaning "stop flowing", which Hagar repeated when she attempted to contain the exuberant gush of water.

Hajj pilgrims today reenact Hagar's frantic search.



In Mecca



According to tradition, Abraham re-built a structure originally erected by Adam, then housing idols, called the *Bayt Allah* ("House of God", cognate with Hebrew *bethel*) and located less than 100 feet from the well. He then re-dedicated it to God.

When they pray (5 times daily), Muslims all over the world turn to face this building, the **Kaaba**.

Western Bible readers will likely find it hard to accept that events in the life of Abraham took place on the Arabian peninsula, a long way away from Canaan, where Islamic this tradition locates them.

Everyone lives happily ever after?


So the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised and she... bore a son to Abraham... at the very time God promised him. And Abraham gave the name **Isaac** to the son Sarah bore him. - *Gen. 21: 6-7*

The long, sometimes impatient wait of the aged, barren couple is over when Isaac, the divinely conceived miracle baby, is born. Of course, one child does not mean God's promise of a *nation* is yet fulfilled.

In fact the narrative mood shifts abruptly from joy and laughter to brutality as Hagar and Ismael are cast out into the hostile desert to die. Tragedy is averted only when God provides water miraculously.

Nevertheless, you might think that the saga should close at this point, with everyone living happily ever after. What could possibly happen to escalate the dramatic tension of the narrative at this point?

Coming up in Part 4...



... A shocking dramatic escalation.
The most powerful, most celebrated, most
disputed and most debated episode in the
Abrahamic saga if not in all the Bible.

Abraham & Sarah



Call - Faith - Promise
End Part 3

Abraham & Sarah



Call - Faith - Promise
Part 4

At the end of Part 3...

Sarah, despite her age and history of infertility conceives and then gives birth to Abraham's second son, Isaac, the child of the promise.

And so the long wait is over, the miracle baby born, heir to the promise to be the start of a great nation controlling a fertile land and be a blessing to the entire world.

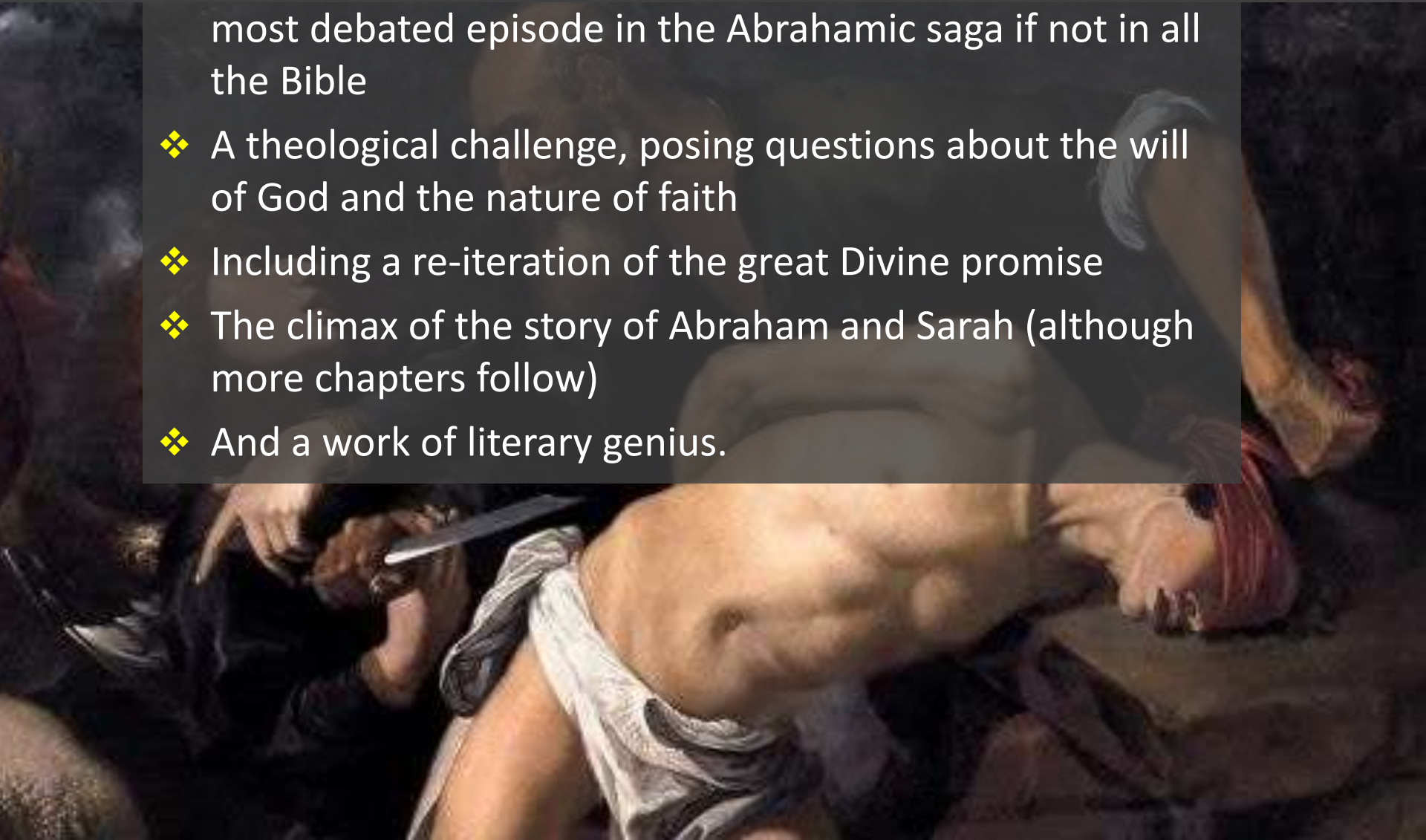
Of course, one child does not mean God's promise is as yet completely fulfilled; much more has to occur.



Nevertheless, you would expect the saga to close at this point, with everyone living happily together, growing old together, etc. What could possibly happen to upset God's perfect plan for His chosen clan?

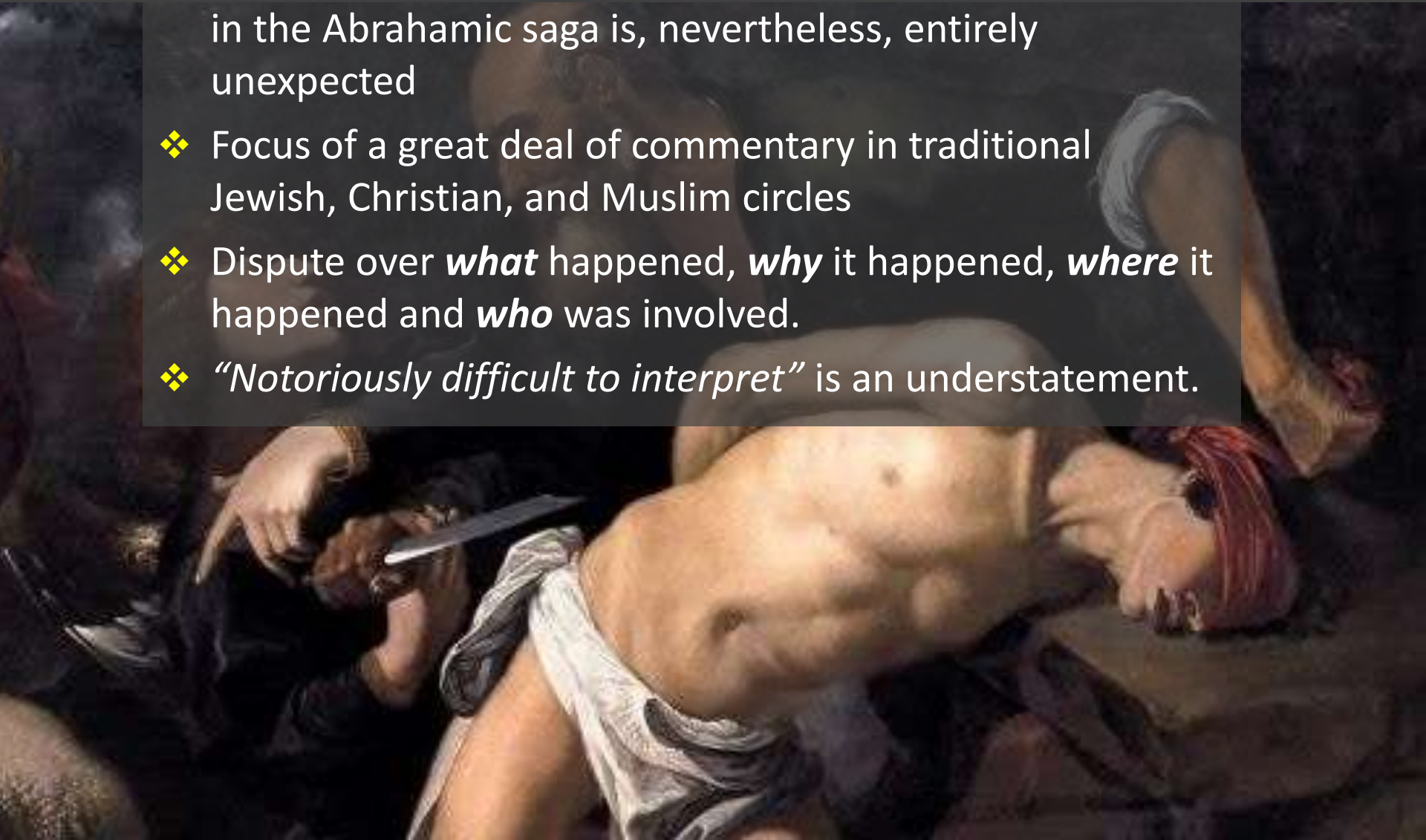
A shocking dramatic escalation

- ❖ The most powerful, most celebrated, most disputed and most debated episode in the Abrahamic saga if not in all the Bible
- ❖ A theological challenge, posing questions about the will of God and the nature of faith
- ❖ Including a re-iteration of the great Divine promise
- ❖ The climax of the story of Abraham and Sarah (although more chapters follow)
- ❖ And a work of literary genius.



The Binding of Isaac (*the Akedah*)

- ❖ This powerful, celebrated, disputed and debated episode in the Abrahamic saga is, nevertheless, entirely unexpected
- ❖ Focus of a great deal of commentary in traditional Jewish, Christian, and Muslim circles
- ❖ Dispute over **what** happened, **why** it happened, **where** it happened and **who** was involved.
- ❖ “*Notoriously difficult to interpret*” is an understatement.



Structure

The account is structured as three short cycles of a “summons” followed by a “response” (the middle one is doubled):

- By God
- By Isaac
- By an angel

The structure alerts us that this episode is carefully written; not the result of casual drafting. Like the other stories, this one surely has ancient roots and underwent many retellings before a written version set it in stone (as it were).

The story might as well begin “once upon a time” - there is scant indication of when the event takes place, how old Isaac is.

Summons #1

At some time, God tested Abraham.

He said to him, “Abraham!”

“Here I am,” {Abraham} replied.

God said, “Take your son, your only son, the one you love, Isaac. Go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice (or *offer*) him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”

- *Gen. 22:1-2*

Right at the start there is a suggestion (likely inserted by a late redactor) of a traditional interpretation (that what follows is a test). Abraham doesn't know it is “just a test” nor must we accept this explanation uncritically.

The command of God is shocking. How can the God of Love and Promise demand any human sacrifice, let alone the child of the Promise?

Using a four-way reference to Isaac, God makes sure there is no doubt who is to be sacrificed (or “offered”) – it is not Ishmael.

The demand is unexpected, unanticipated, outrageous, and out of character. It is, in an existentialist word, “absurd”. Luther wrote, “It is a contradiction with which God contradicts Himself.”

Objection!

Scripture is elsewhere crystal clear on this; God **condemns** human sacrifice. People, all people, are precious in His sight, all ages, genders, nations, physical characteristics, Jewish or Goyim.

When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. **Let no one be found**

among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium...

Anyone who does these things is **detestable** to the Lord... - Deut. 18:10-12



Response #1

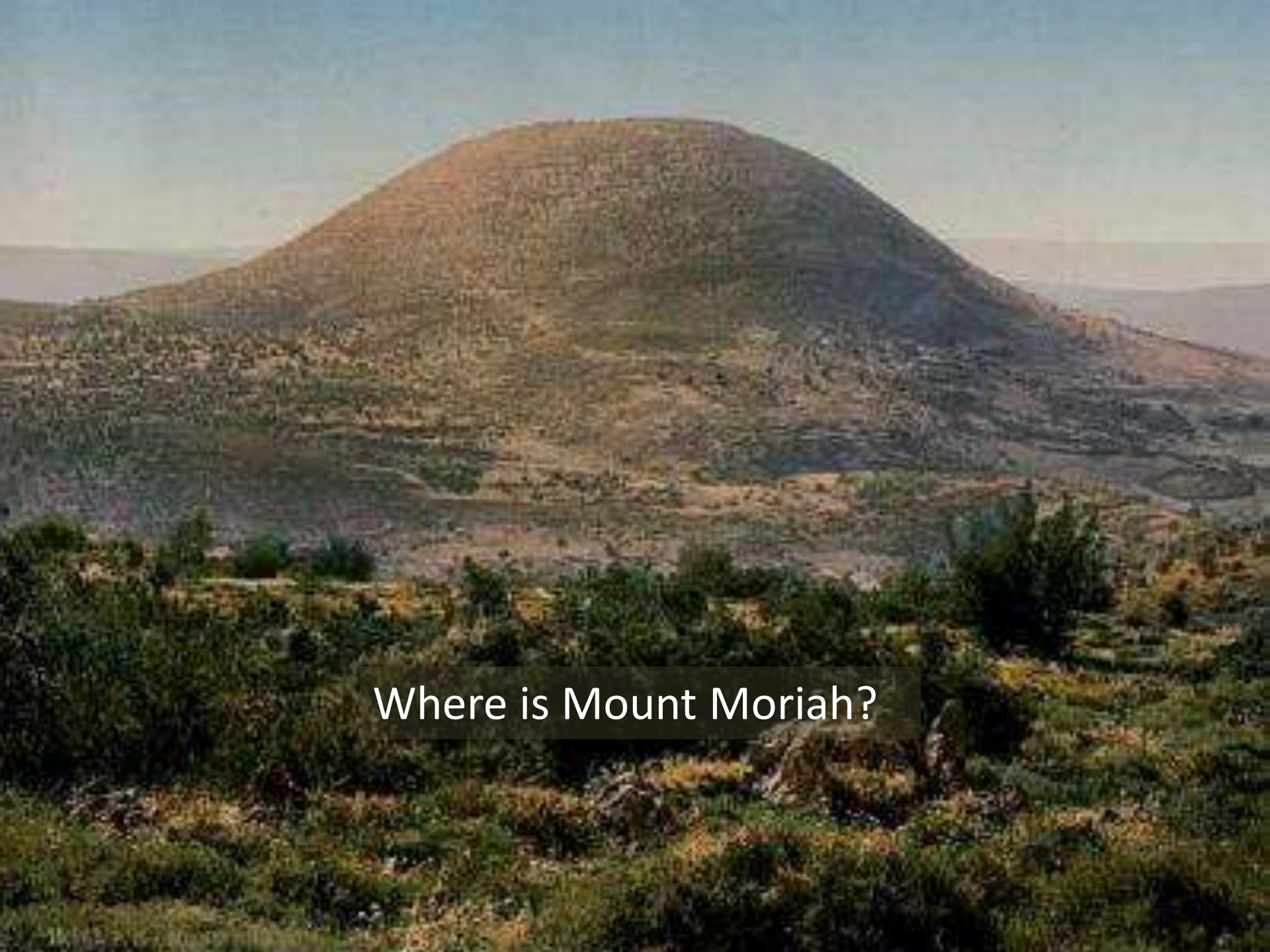
The next morning Abraham loaded a donkey for a journey and set out for the place God told him about accompanied by Isaac and two servants. He took plenty of dry wood for the pyre and smoldering embers to ignite it.

There is no further verbal response from Abraham, just quiet action, recalling his response to that summons long ago when God, unlooked for, commanded Sarah and him to journey to Canaan.

Where is the bold and clever fellow who debated with God to save the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah? Why no outcry, no argument?

On the 3rd day of travel Abraham, seeing the place in the distance, called a halt. He ordered the servants, “Stay with the donkey while the boy and I go ahead. We will worship there. We will then come back to you.”

Isaac took up the wood for the offering and Abraham carried the embers to start the fire and the sacrificial knife. *- Gen. 22: 3-5 (paraphrase)*



Where is Mount Moriah?

Solomon began to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem on **Mount Moriah**, where the LORD appeared to David his father...

– 2Chr. 3:1

This verse led to placing the Akedah at the same spot where the Temple was built in Jerusalem and, later, the Dome of the Rock, commemorating the visionary ascent of Mohammed to heaven.

There is debate as to whether the words in Gen. 22:2 and Chr. 3:1 are the same. The Septuagint, e.g. translated these verses as:

"Solomon began to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem in the **Mount of Amoria**, where the Lord appeared to his father David...."

Muslims identify "Mount Moriah" as Mount Marwah, which is in Mecca, near the Kaaba

Summons and response #2

As the two of them went on together, Isaac... said to his father Abraham, “Father?”

“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.

“The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

Abraham answered, “God himself **will provide** the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.”

And the two of them went on together.

- *Gen. 22:6-8*

The doubling of the structural element of summons (Isaac’s questions) and response (Abraham’s answers) here in the middle of the account intensifies the tension of the pending action.

Abraham reveals the depth of his faith with the simple statement “God will provide”. He does not *know*. It is not spoken with joy or hope, but with submission, with a kind of resignation.

It, does, however, make us pay close attention- will God indeed provide? How will He provide? Will He also provide for me and mine today in the trials I must face?

Sacrifice of the son

When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order.

He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son.

- Gen. 22: 9-10



Fear and Trembling

In his 1843 book "*Fear and Trembling*" that featured an analysis of the Akedah, Christian philosopher **Soren Kierkegaard** said:

"Infinite resignation is the last stage before faith, so anyone who has not made this movement does not have faith, for only in infinite resignation does an individual become conscious of his eternal validity, and only then can one speak of grasping existence by virtue of faith."

Once Abraham became conscious of his eternal validity he arrived at the door of faith and acted according to his faith. In this he became a "knight of faith."

In other words, one must give up all his or her earthly possessions in infinite resignation and must also **be willing to give up whatever it is that he or she loves more than God.**



Summons #3

But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for **now I know** that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.”

- *Gen. 22: 11-12*



Philip Ratner “The Binding of Isaac”

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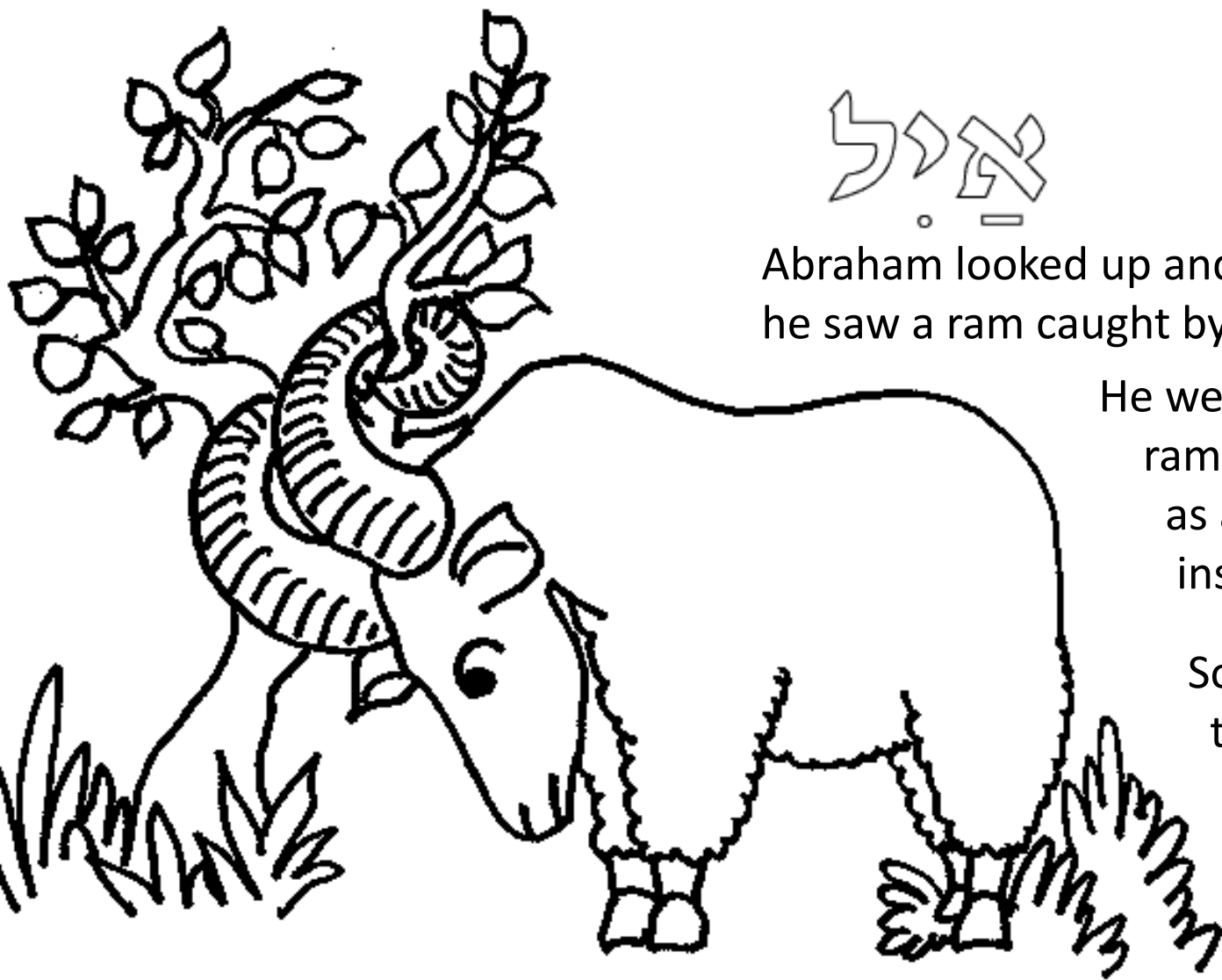
Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns.

He went over, took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.

So Abraham called that place “The Lord Will Provide”.

To this day it is said, “On the mountain of the Lord, it will be provided.”

- Gen. 22: 11-12

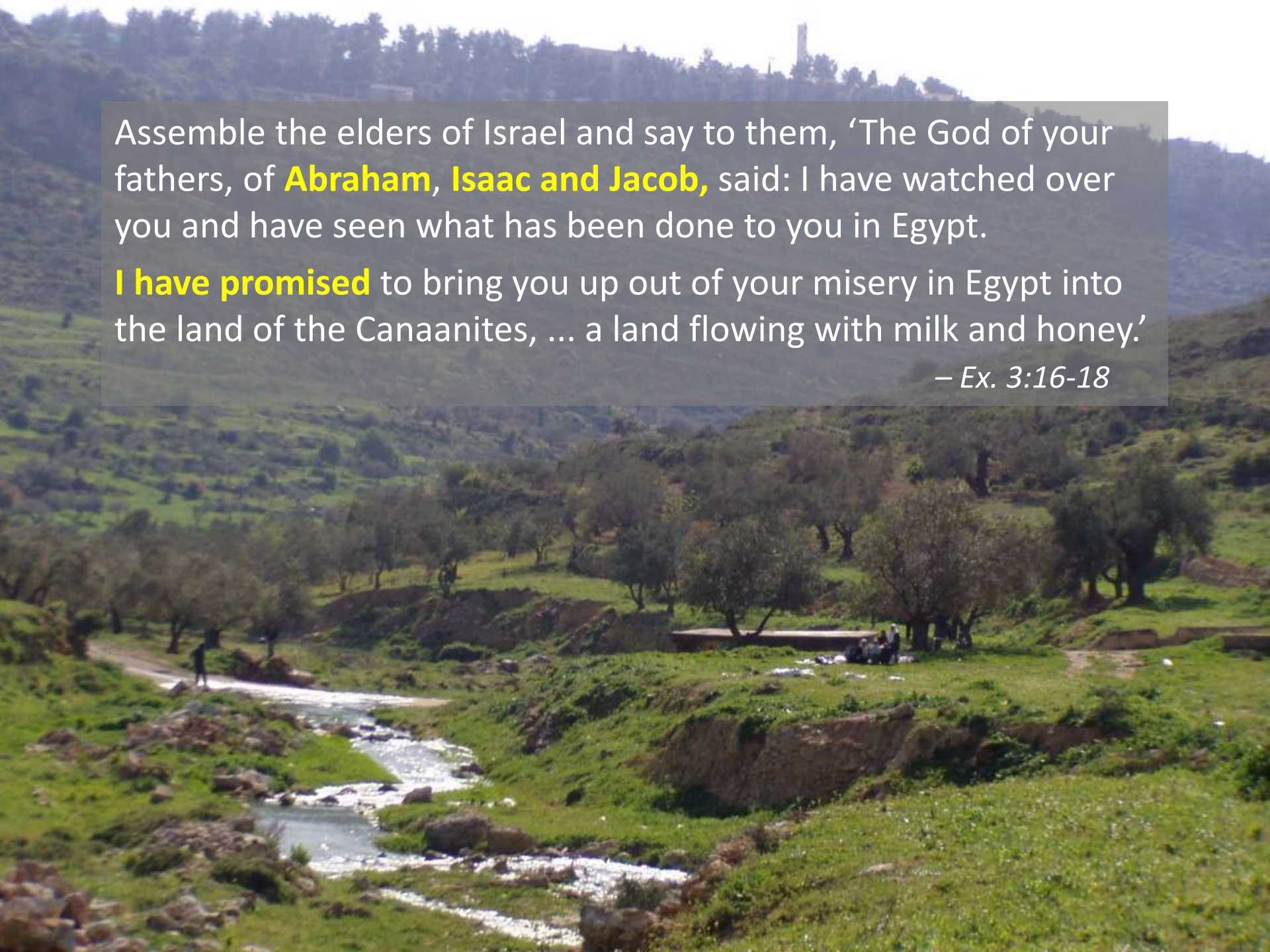


The promise, again

The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a 2nd time from heaven... “By myself I swear, because you have done this and have not withheld your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore.

And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.”

- *Gen. 22: 15-18*



Assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers, of **Abraham, Isaac and Jacob**, said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt.

I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, ... a land flowing with milk and honey.’

— *Ex. 3:16-18*

So Abraham returned to his servants.... *Gen. 22: 15-19*

...and, I imagine, neither he nor Isaac ever breathed a word about What happened to Sarah!



Will we also face a time of “testing”?

“...be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them... Whenever you are arrested and brought to **trial**, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time... *- Mk. 13:9-11*

Praise be to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he gave us new birth into a living hope... and into an inheritance that can never perish... In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of **trials**. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith... may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed... *- 1Pe. 1:1-7*

For Christians, Abraham is a model

What then shall we say that Abraham... discovered in this matter?

If... Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about...

What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

...To the one who... trusts God (who justifies the ungodly) their faith is credited as righteousness.

Under what circumstances was it credited? After he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! ... So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised....

It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the **promise** that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by **faith**.... so that it may be by grace, ... not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham.

- Rom. 4: 1-16 (abridged)

..and Isaac is a “type” of Jesus and of us

God so loved the world that he gave **his one and only Son**, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

God did not send **his Son** into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.... *- Jn. 3:16-17*

What Jesus and Isaac had in common: innocent / willing / promised / “one and only” / beloved of God / offered as a sacrifice / set on a wooden scaffold (cross) / given back alive (resurrected)

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.. *- 1 Jn. 4:9*

You, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son born according to the flesh {Ishmael} persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. *- Gal. 4:28-29*

One God → Two People → All Mankind

“How odd of God to choose the Jews.”

- William Ewer
(British journalist 1885-1976)

“Not odd of God – Goyim annoy Him.”

- Leo Rosten

“Not odd of God – His Son was one.”

- unattributed



The Abrahamic saga teaches us that this is not correct. God **called** a single couple to obey Him in a challenging way, He did not force a choice on a nation. And who knows how many He called before and since?

“God so loved the world” not just one tiny clan.

What do you think? Does He “choose” each of us (or only a few) today?

The passing of the founding generation

Sarah lived to be a 127 years old. She died at Kiriath Arba, that is, Hebron, in Canaan. Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her. Then he rose from beside his dead wife and spoke to the Hittites.

“I am a foreigner and stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here so I can bury my dead. Intercede with **Ephron son of Zohar** on my behalf so he will sell me the cave of Machpelah.”

- Gen. 23:1-9

So Ephron’s field in Machpelah near Mamre (the field and the cave in it and the trees within the field) was deeded to Abraham in the presence of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of the city. *- Gen. 23: 17-20*



Sarah is laid to rest



Then Abraham buried his wife Sarah {there} in the land of Canaan.

- *Gen. 23: 20*

Narrative has deeper meaning?

....so he will sell me the cave of Machpelah...”

There is a big stretch of Ch. 23 between Sarah’s death and her burial with some legal and cultural import but lacking spiritual substance.

Why waste papyrus to include such a long dry narrative?

Perhaps it *has* deeper meaning.

Perhaps Abraham’s securing land:

purchased with cash / given a deed / witnessed by local people...

...is signaling the concrete start of the realization of God’s promise to him of the entire land of Canaan (still a very long way off in time).



Machpelah again

Abraham lived 175 years. Then he breathed his last, at a good old age, full of years. And he was gathered to his people.

His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him next to Sarah in the cave of **Machpelah** near **Mamre**, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar, the field Abraham bought from the Hittites.

-Gen. 25:7-10

We note with interest that the account specifically mentions that *both* sons together perform the sad but necessary and solemn duty of the burial of the first Patriarch of Israel.

Would this cooperation set a binding precedent for the brothers and their many descendants to live in peace and harmony?

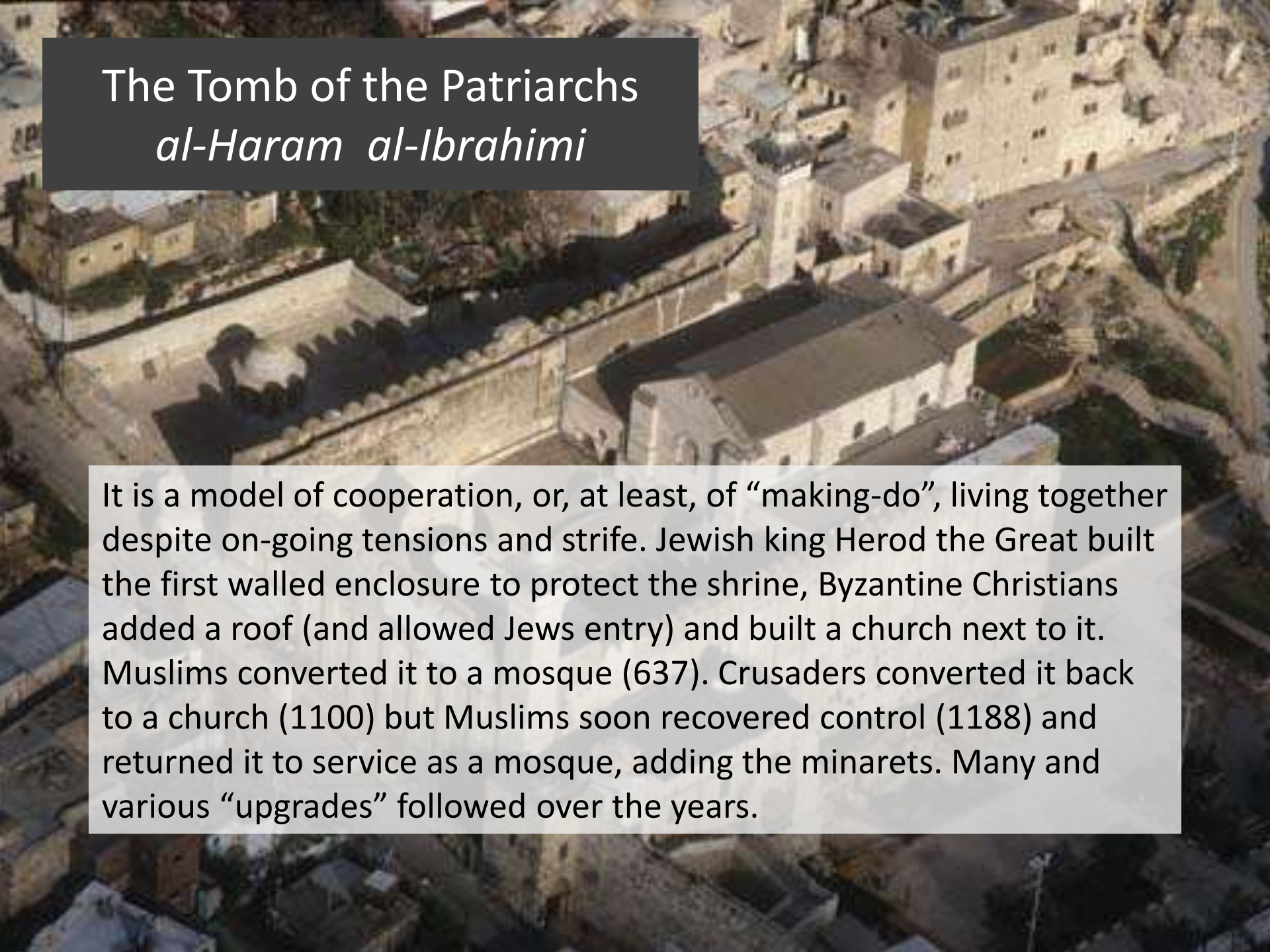
At least in Hebron near the grave of Abraham and Sarah?

Hebron today

Located just 19 miles south of Jerusalem in the Judaeen Mountain, Hebron is the second largest city in the Palestinian territories (after Gaza) and the largest city in the “West Bank” area, home to over 200,000 people only a few hundred of whom are Israeli “settlers”.

Is it a city of peace and harmony? The city is divided so that 80% is controlled by the Palestinian Authority and 20% is administered by Israel. All security arrangements and travel permits for local residents are coordinated between the Palestinian Authority and Israel.

To this day the city is venerated by Jews, Christians, and Muslims for its association with Abraham and Sarah and maintains the traditional burial site of the biblical Patriarchs and Matriarchs, within the Cave of the Patriarchs. In Judaism it is considered the second-holiest city after Jerusalem while Islam regards it as one of the four holy cities.

An aerial photograph of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The image shows the Temple Mount Compound, a large walled enclosure. In the center, the Dome of the Rock is visible, a large circular structure with a golden dome. The surrounding area is densely packed with buildings, and the city's layout is visible from above.

The Tomb of the Patriarchs *al-Haram al-Ibrahimi*

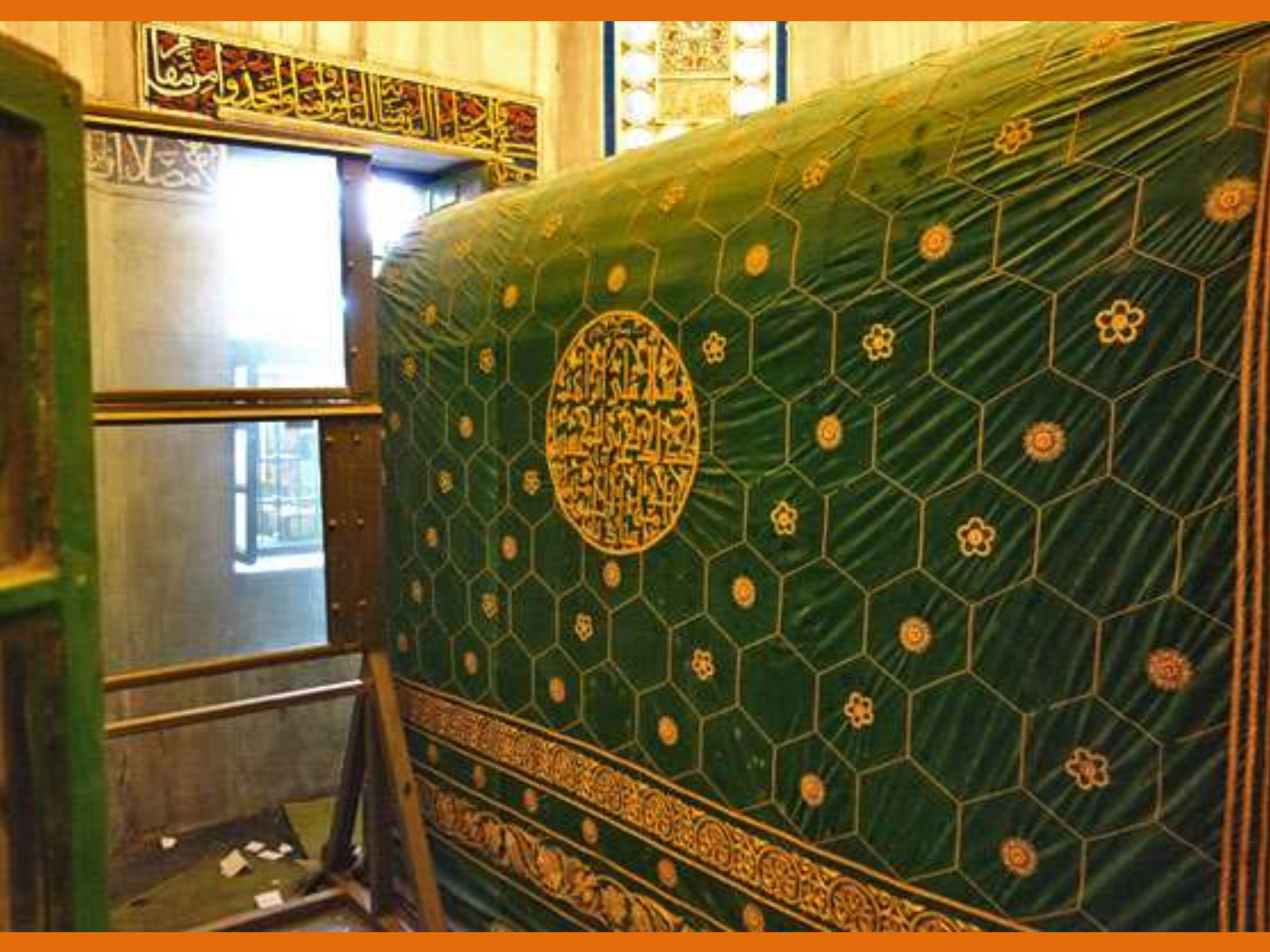
It is a model of cooperation, or, at least, of “making-do”, living together despite on-going tensions and strife. Jewish king Herod the Great built the first walled enclosure to protect the shrine, Byzantine Christians added a roof (and allowed Jews entry) and built a church next to it. Muslims converted it to a mosque (637). Crusaders converted it back to a church (1100) but Muslims soon recovered control (1188) and returned it to service as a mosque, adding the minarets. Many and various “upgrades” followed over the years.



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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
وَأَمْرًا

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
وَأَمْرًا

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
وَأَمْرًا

Terrorism

On February 25, 1994, an **American-Israeli** named **Baruch Goldstein** opened fire with an automatic rifle on Palestinian Muslims praying inside the mosque during Ramadan.

The attack left 29 people dead, several only 12 years old, and 125 wounded. Goldstein was overpowered, disarmed and beaten to death by survivors.

This **Massacre at the Cave of the Patriarchs** set off violent Palestinian protests. During ensuing clashes another ca. 25 Palestinians and 9 Jews died.



Goldstein was widely denounced by Jews inside and outside Israel. Israeli PM Yitzhak Rabin condemned the attack, describing Goldstein as a "degenerate murderer", "a shame to Zionism and an embarrassment to Judaism".

Wary cooperation

Today security patrols keep peace but local businesses never recovered.

The tomb building is divided in half, with separate entrances for Jews and Muslims.



Kamal Al-Abadi, then 20 and working his family's shoe-making business, survived a bullet in his spine but cannot walk. He has since dedicated his life to promoting sports for the disabled.



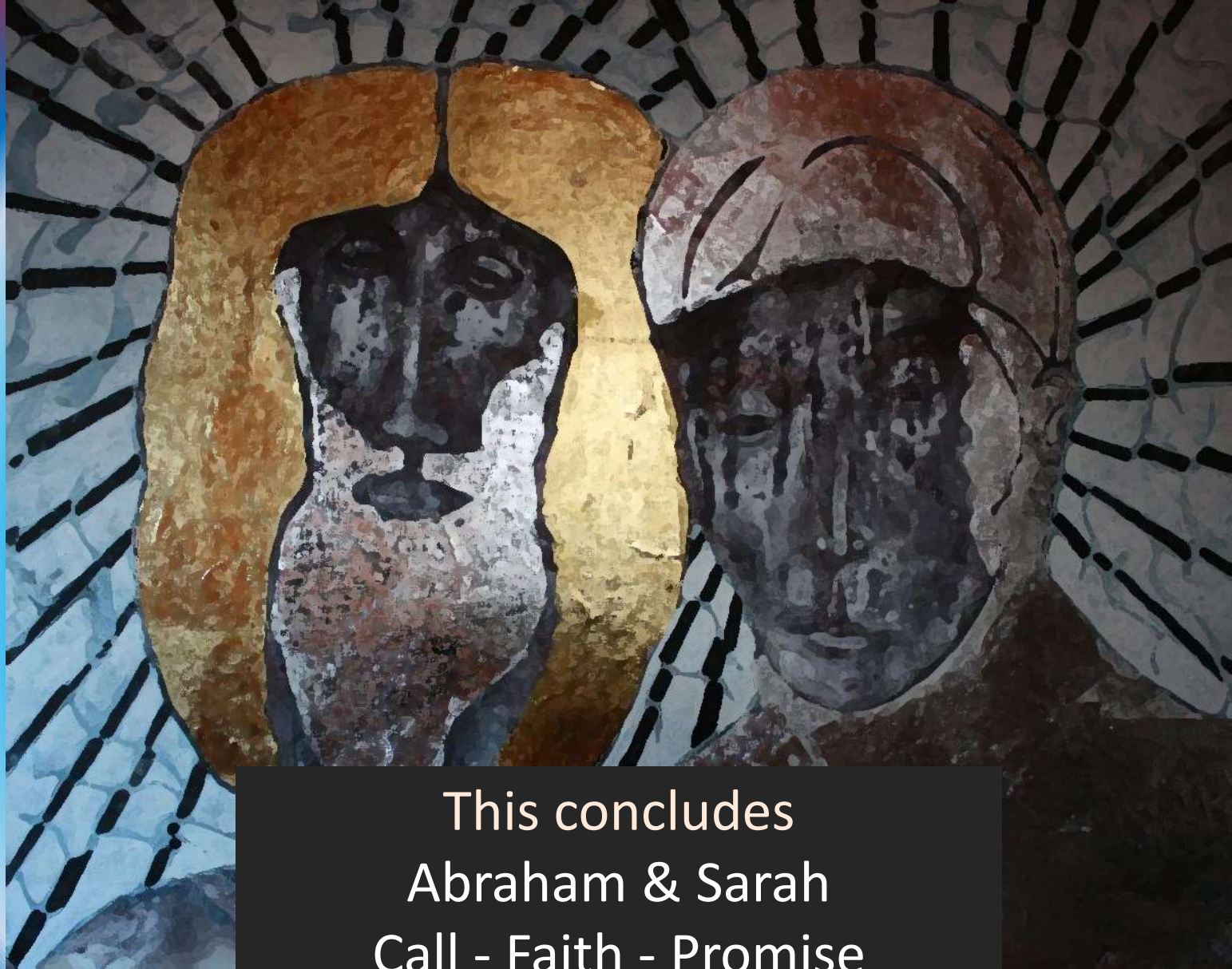
Pray for peace in the land of the patriarchs
Abraham and Sarah, Ishmael and Isaac





Abraham & Sarah

Call - Faith - Promise
End Part 4



This concludes
Abraham & Sarah
Call - Faith - Promise

You can find more "Lessons-To-Go" studies at [SlideShare.com](https://www.slideshare.com)