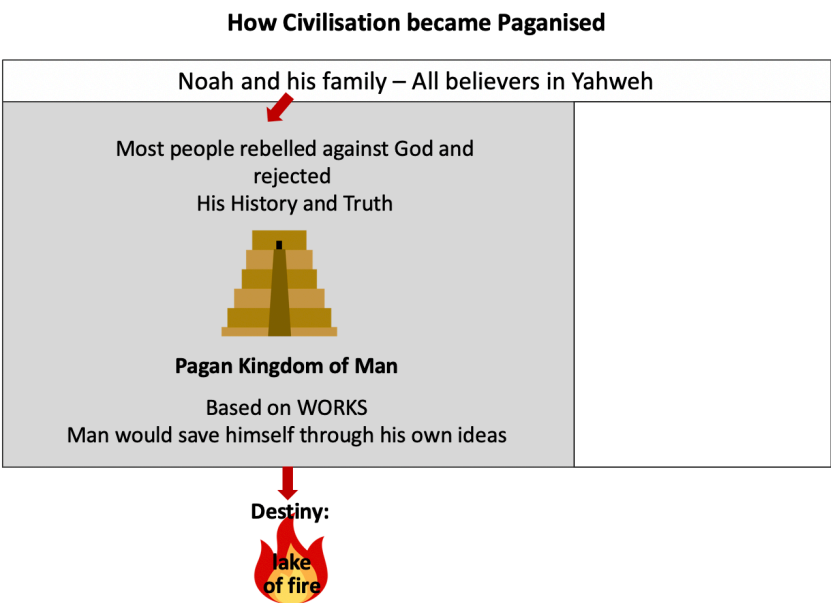


Lesson 9: The Call of Abraham

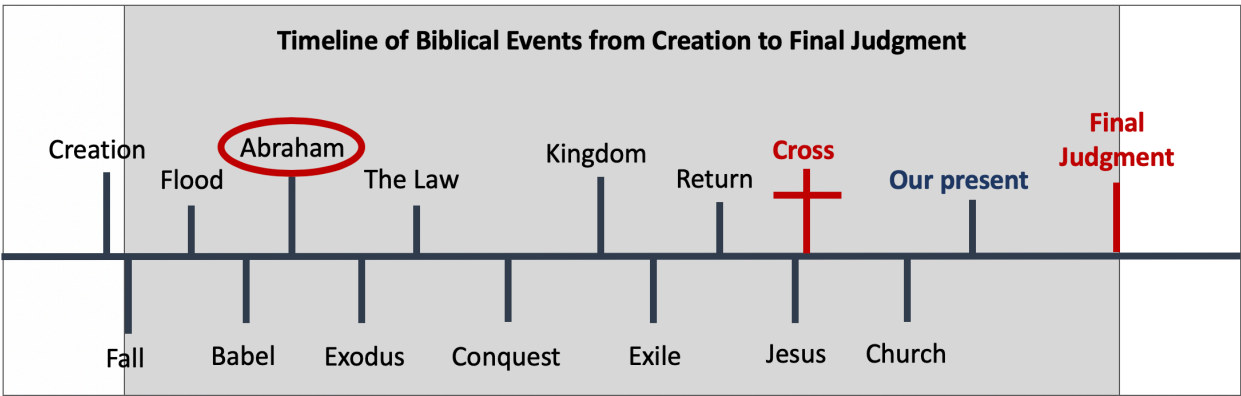
Previously...

Right after the Fall, God had promised that He would send a Saviour who would destroy sin and evil and rescue mankind. For God to save man, He would need to keep a pure and accurate record of history and His message of salvation, and He had to make it available so that people would have it, be able to understand it, and be saved by it.

At one time, everyone knew the account of Adam and Eve, and of Noah and the Flood. All people could choose to trust God or choose to rebel. After the Flood, even though civilisation started with righteous Noah and his family, mankind chose to rebel against God. So the memories of God and the understanding of God’s story became corrupted, mixed up and forgotten as people chose instead to believe myths and made-up stories.



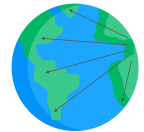
The Word of God was no longer clearly and easily available to everyone. But people needed the truth in order to be saved. How would God do this? How would He ensure that people would know real history and have the truth?



Who Will Tell God's Story

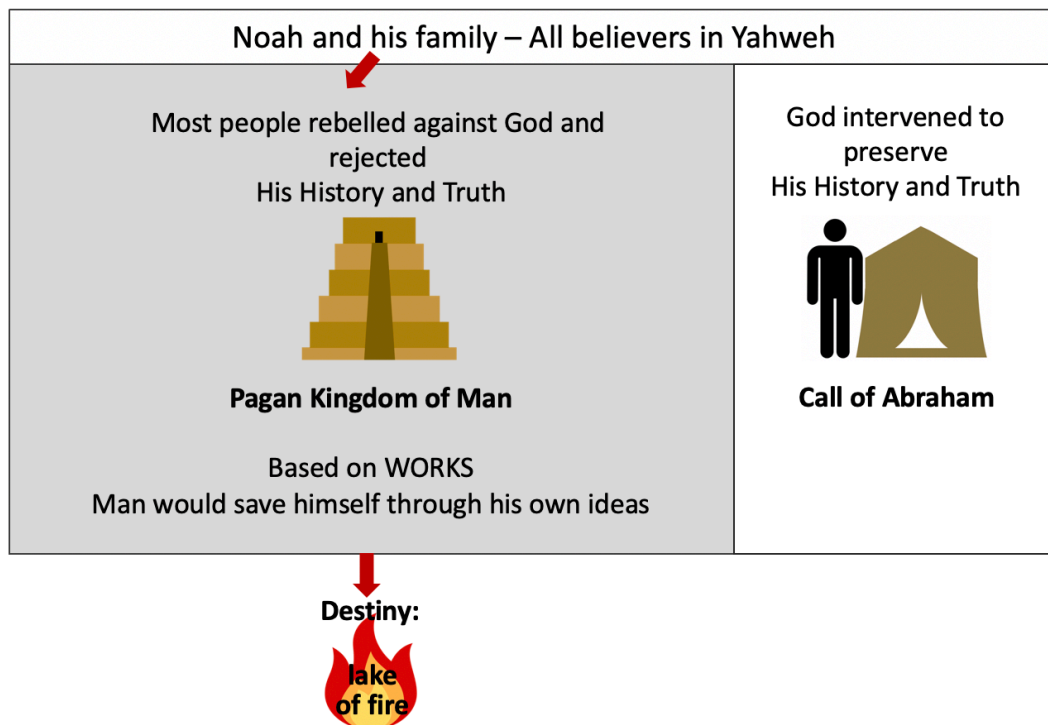
These were some of the big problems after the Flood:

- A. Noah, Shem, Ham and Japheth lived through the Flood and knew of man's early history. But they would be **dead** 500 years after the Flood. Who would continue telling God's story?
- B. Just as it was before the Flood, people were wicked and rebellious towards God after the Flood. At Babel, they created their own "god" (that is, worshipped themselves) and created their own truth (for example, a man-made tower can reach heaven). They would not tell God's story. They were **not interested in the truth**.
- C. When God judged the people at Babel, He created many languages. This meant there was **no more global language** that everyone understood. Who would be able to tell God's story to the world?
- D. As the Ice Age ended, tribes and nations were **spread out all over the world**. Who would go to all the ends of the world to tell them God's story?



These were big challenges. But God was not stuck. God disrupted history through a man called Abram.

How God Intervened



God's Plan with Abraham

Out of all the people on earth at that time, God chose to work with a man named Abram (later called Abraham). God was going to preserve His history and truth through him.

Why did God choose him? Was he someone special or different or was he particularly righteous? No, God is the one who is special and righteous. God sovereignly chose to disrupt man's downward spiral into sin by stepping into history and engaging with Abram. Yahweh approached him, called him out and ask Abram to trust Him.

Abram lived in a place called Ur, which is in southern Babylon. People from that place were known as Chaldeans.

Genesis 12:1

The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you.”

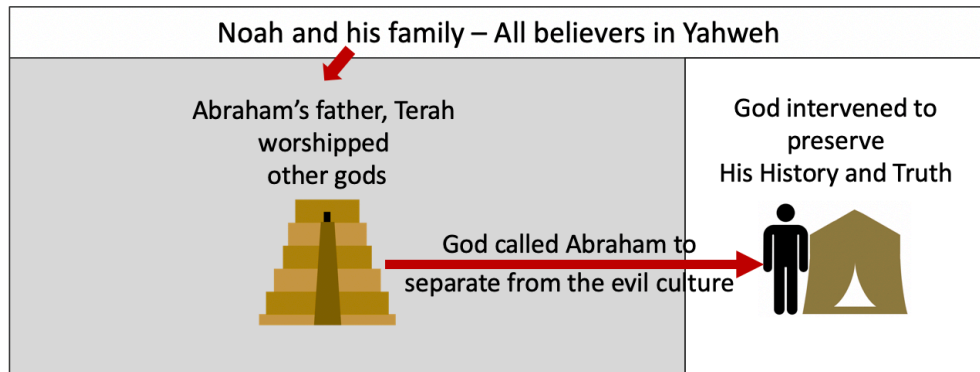


God wanted Abram to leave Ur. Why? He wanted Abram to **separate** himself and his family from the pagan, anti-God culture they were living in. People there worshipped idols. Even Abram's own father, Terah, worshipped other gods. For Abram to live there, he would also have to serve these gods.

Joshua 24:2

Joshua said to the people, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Long ago your ancestors, including Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River, and they worshiped other gods.”

How God Intervened



These people knew the truth of God but they wilfully chose to reject it. They did not want friendship with God, so God left them alone to do whatever they wanted.

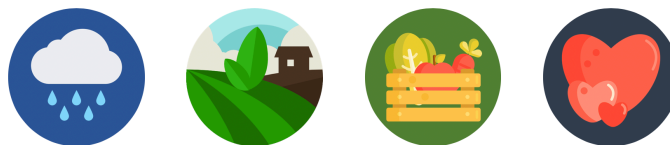
Romans 1:23–24

²³ And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles. ²⁴ So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other's bodies.

God did not stop loving and caring for these evil people. It was still His heart's desire that they would someday be saved. So, He left them with evidence of Himself including His continued loving-kindness in the form of rain and good crops, food and even joy.

Acts 14:16–17

¹⁶ In the past he permitted all the nations to go their own ways, ¹⁷ but he never left them without evidence of himself and his goodness. For instance, he sends you rain and good crops and gives you food and joyful hearts.



Nevertheless, because of their rebellious hearts, God would not be able to rely on them to ensure all future generations in the world would hear His history and truth and be saved.

So God started a different plan. He chose Abram. In order to enact His plan, He needed Abram separated from the culture he grew up in. He did not want His truth corrupted or mixed up with the pagan beliefs of Abram's society. So first, God told Abram to leave his homeland. This would get Abram far away from the pagan culture. Then God made Abram some very remarkable promises!

Genesis 12:1–4

¹ The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you. ² I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. ³ I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.” ⁴ So Abram departed as the LORD had instructed, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.

God was saying to Abram that:

1. He would give him **LAND**.
2. He would make him into a great nation, meaning he would have many **DESCENDANTS**.
3. But most remarkably, he would make Abram famous and Abram would be a **BLESSING to the entire world!**



Where did God want Abram to go? God didn’t even tell him where!

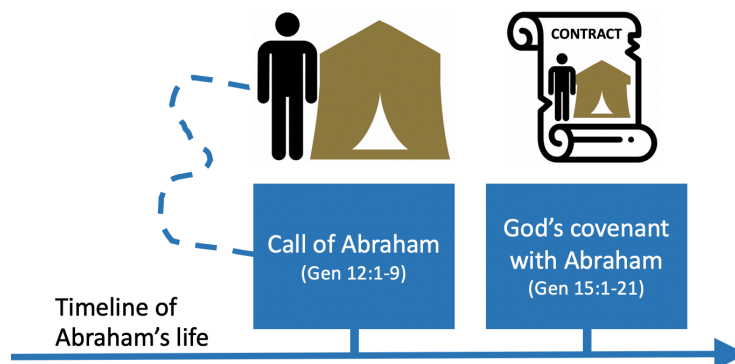
But Abram responded to Yahweh’s words with faith and trust and he obeyed. Though God did not reveal all the details of His plan, Abram trusted God enough to pack up his family and leave Ur.

Hebrews 11:8–9a






⁸ It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going. ⁹ And even when he reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith—for he was like a foreigner, living in tents.

After Abram showed faith in God, at a later time and place, God made a covenant (or contract) with him.

This is the second contract that we see God make in the Bible. The first contract Yahweh made was the Noahic Contract.



What are the details of this contract God made with Abram?

	 Noahic Covenant	 Abrahamic Covenant
 Parties	God, mankind, animals	God, Abraham and descendants
 Promises	No future global floods	Land, descendants, worldwide blessing
 Signatories	God alone (with the rainbow)	God alone (by passing between the animal halves)
 Type	Unconditional (God will keep His promise. It is not dependent on anything or anyone else)	Unconditional

Abrahamic Covenant



1. The Parties to the Abrahamic Covenant

The earlier covenant that God had made with Noah, the New World Covenant, was not only for Noah and all his family, but for all mankind and all the animals and creatures too.

However, the covenant that God made with Abram was just between God on one hand, and Abram and his descendants on the other hand. It was for no one else.

Genesis 17:7

"I will confirm my covenant with you and your descendants after you, from generation to generation. This is the everlasting covenant: I will always be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

Note that God promised that the covenant would be everlasting, meaning it goes on forever. It is therefore still valid today and has not expired.



2. The Legal Terms of the Abrahamic Covenant

The three promises that God made to Abram were (i) land, (ii) descendants, and (iii) a worldwide blessing.



I. Land

God promised Abram that his descendants would have eternal possession of actual, physical land that God was giving them. And they would own it forever. The boundary of this land starts from near Egypt northwards up to at least Syria.

Genesis 13:14–15

¹⁴ After Lot had gone, the LORD said to Abram, “Look as far as you can see in every direction—north and south, east and west. ¹⁵ I am giving all this land, as far as you can see, to you and your descendants as a permanent possession.”

Genesis 15:18–21

¹⁸ So the LORD made a covenant with Abram that day and said, “I have given this land to your descendants, all the way from the border of Egypt to the great Euphrates River—
¹⁹ the land now occupied by the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, ²⁰ Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, ²¹ Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.”

Genesis 17:8

And I will give the entire land of Canaan, where you now live as a foreigner, to you and your descendants. It will be their possession forever, and I will be their God.”

**II. Descendants**

God promised Abram that he would have so many descendants that they could not be counted. And He promised that his descendants would survive. As a people group, they would never be wiped out.

Genesis 22:17

I will certainly bless you. I will multiply your descendants beyond number, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will conquer the cities of their enemies.



III. Worldwide Blessing

God promised Abram that his descendants would be a blessing for the whole world.

Genesis 22:18

And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed—all because you have obeyed me.”

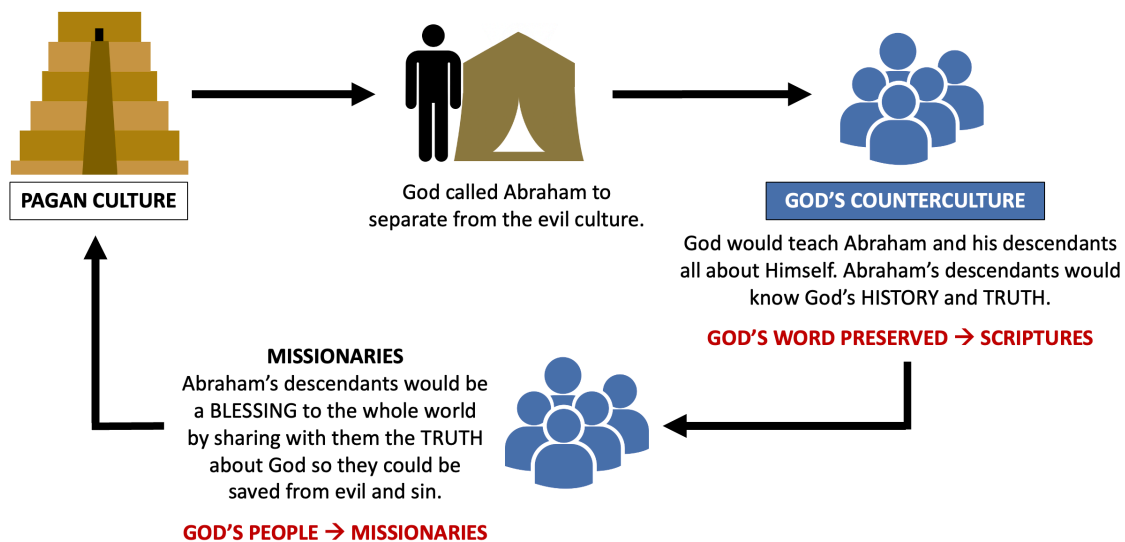
What did God mean? How would this one man and his family bless the whole world?

A. They would preserve God’s history and truth for the world

First, God was going to ensure His Word and His truth would be kept pure, accurate and available to all generations. How? He would **separate** Abram and his descendants from the paganism and the evil culture of their day. Through them, He would build a counterculture, a culture that was built on His Word instead of the pagan worldview. And importantly, God would use Abram’s family to **preserve His Word** in the form of Scriptures.

Romans 3:2b

First of all, the Jews were entrusted with the whole revelation of God.



And Abram’s descendants, the nation of Israel, would be responsible to eventually take God’s Word and **go back** to the pagan society as missionaries, to share God’s truth with the world. Their job would be to tell the world about the one true God, Yahweh.

Isaiah 43:10–12

¹⁰ “But you are my witnesses, O Israel!” says the LORD.

“You are my servant.”

You have been chosen to know me, believe in me, and understand that I alone am God.

There is no other God—

there never has been, and there never will be.

¹¹ I, yes I, am the LORD,
and there is no other Savior.
¹² First I predicted your rescue,
then I saved you and proclaimed it to the world.
No foreign god has ever done this.
You are witnesses that I am the only God,
says the LORD.

B. The promised Saviour would be Abram's descendant

Second, God's intention was to have the promised Saviour be born as one of Abram's descendants! After the Fall, in the garden of Eden, God gave the first pieces of information about the Saviour, the promised offspring of the woman who would crush Satan and save the world.

Genesis 3:15

And I will cause hostility between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring.
He will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel."

In making the promise of descendants to Abram, God intended for this offspring of the woman to come from his family line. The Saviour would be Abram's descendant. Jesus Himself pointed this out when He was speaking to a gentile Samaritan woman.

John 4:22

You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews.

(Note: Jews are descendants of Abram while Gentiles refer to people who are not Jews [that is, not from Abram's family]. The Jews do not consider the Samaritans as Jewish since they are a mixed people group.)

In this way, Abram's descendant, the promised Saviour, would be the global blessing! Through Him, God would reconcile the whole world to Himself. The apostle Paul's explanation makes this clear.

Galatians 3:8–9

⁸ What's more, the Scriptures looked forward to this time when God would make the Gentiles right in his sight because of their faith. God proclaimed this good news to Abraham long ago when he said, "All nations will be blessed through you." ⁹ So all who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith.

When Abram put his faith in God, God made him righteous in His sight. These verses tell us that when Gentiles believe in Christ the Saviour, God will also make these Gentiles righteous in His sight. (We'll explore this more in the next lesson.)



In the book of Romans, Paul writes again that Christ would come to save Gentiles too:

Romans 15:8–11

⁸ Remember that Christ came as a servant to the Jews to show that God is true to the promises he made to their ancestors. ⁹ He also came so that the Gentiles might give glory to God for his mercies to them. That is what the psalmist meant when he wrote:

“For this, I will praise you among the Gentiles;
I will sing praises to your name.”

¹⁰ And in another place it is written,

“Rejoice with his people,
you Gentiles.”

¹¹ And yet again,

“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles.
Praise him, all you people of the earth.”

So Abram would be a blessing to the whole world in two very important and specific ways: God would deliver His Word to the world through Abram’s family and the Saviour of the world would be one of Abram’s descendants.



3. The Signing of the Abrahamic Covenant

Contracts or covenants are signed by the parties responsible for carrying out the agreement. In the Bible, there are two kinds of covenants.

- A **conditional or bilateral (two-way) covenant** is an agreement that two parties agree to and where both have responsibilities or obligations to fulfil.
- An **unconditional or unilateral covenant** is an agreement between two parties but only one party has responsibilities to fulfil. The other party doesn’t need to do anything.



The New World Covenant was an unconditional covenant. **God alone was responsible** for the promise of not flooding the earth again. So God alone signed the covenant with the rainbow. Noah did not sign it. There was nothing Noah could do to fulfil the promise of not flooding the earth. It would be God’s work, not man’s.

The Abrahamic Covenant was also an unconditional covenant. **God alone was responsible** for fulfilling the promises He made to Abram of (i) land, (ii) descendants and (iii) a worldwide blessing. The ceremony for this covenant showed that God alone signed it.

Genesis 15:7–12, 17

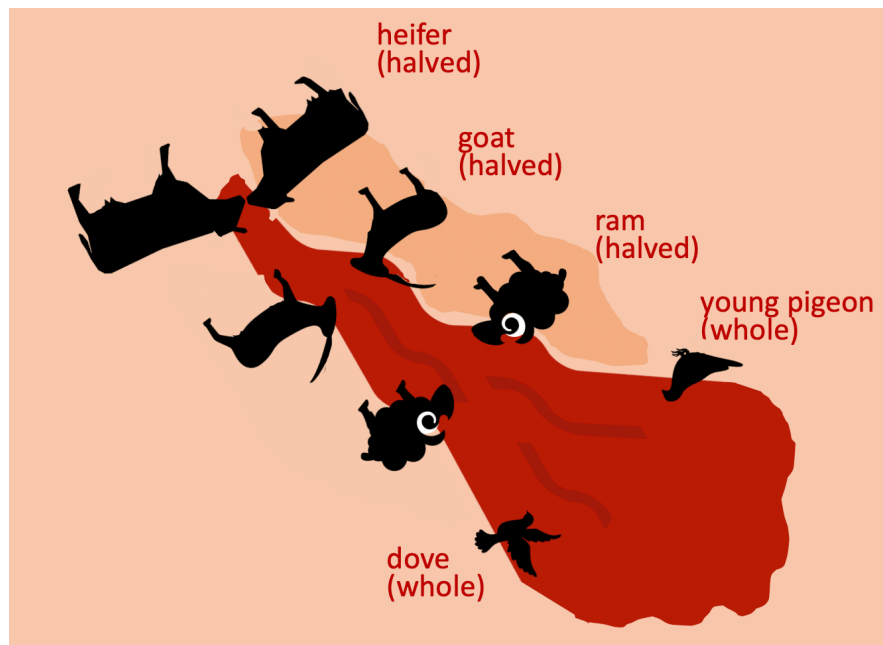
⁷ Then the LORD told him, “I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as your possession.”

⁸ But Abram replied, “O Sovereign LORD, how can I be sure that I will actually possess it?”

⁹ The LORD told him, “Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” ¹⁰ So Abram presented all these to him and killed them. Then he cut each animal down the middle and laid the halves side by side; he did not, however, cut the birds in half. ¹¹ Some vultures swooped down to eat the carcasses, but Abram chased them away.

¹² As the sun was going down, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a terrifying darkness came down over him.

¹⁷ After the sun went down and darkness fell, Abram saw a smoking firepot and a flaming torch pass between the halves of the carcasses.



In this “signing” ceremony, God Himself, represented by the smoking firepot and flaming torch, passed between the halves of the animals that Abram slaughtered.

Why so gruesome? What is the meaning of this?

In Bible times, passing between halves of cut animals was a way of signing very serious contracts. The meaning of walking between the slaughtered animals is this: it says that a curse will fall on the one who breaks the contract or covenant.



We learn about this practice from another contract that was mentioned in the Old Testament.

Jeremiah 34:18–19

¹⁸ Because you have broken the terms of our covenant, I will cut you apart just as you cut apart the calf when you walked between its halves to solemnize your vows. ¹⁹ Yes, I will cut you apart, whether you are officials of Judah or Jerusalem, court officials, priests, or common people—for you have broken your oath.





The punishment for breaking a covenant that had been signed by walking between animal halves is that the party who violates the agreement may also be cut in half!

So Yahweh, in signing this covenant alone, was saying that He was totally responsible for the covenant. **He Himself would be cursed and damned or “cut in half” if what He promised to Abram did not happen.**

Abram did not sign the covenant. He could not. He was asleep! God put him into a deep sleep because God was saying that Abram could do nothing to accomplish the promises made in the contract. God Himself would do everything.

In his vision, Abram saw Yahweh alone signing it. The message was clear: Yahweh was doing it all. This covenant is based on God’s grace. It would be entirely God’s work, not man’s.

This signing ceremony was very significant. And it echoed God’s signing of the Noahic Covenant. How?

	 Noahic Covenant	 Abrahamic Covenant
 Signatories	God alone (with the rainbow)	God alone (by passing between the animal halves)
 Punishment for failure to fulfil	Curse on God	Curse on God

In the New World Covenant, God made a contract with mankind and nature. He promised never to flood the whole world again. And He signed the contract with the rainbow.

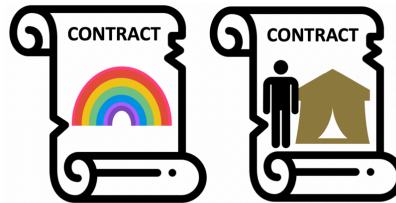
Interestingly, in Hebrew, there is no special word for “rainbow”. It is simply “bow” (*qesheth*), the same word as in the weapon of war for firing arrows. So visually, God placed a bow pointing upwards toward Himself! The arrow, so to speak, was targeted at God Himself. It appears as if God placed Himself under a curse if He failed to keep away another global flood.



In the same way, with the Abrahamic Covenant, God made a contract with Abram and his descendants. He promised land, descendants and a worldwide blessing. Failure on God’s part would place God under a curse!

Why would Yahweh come up with contracts that would monitor His behaviour and measure whether He has kept His obligations? Why would He curse himself if He failed to keep His promises? This doesn't sound like a good arrangement for God.

Yahweh did this because He wants us to know that **He intends to fulfil His contracts fully**. He wants us to see that **He can be trusted to keep all the promises He makes**.



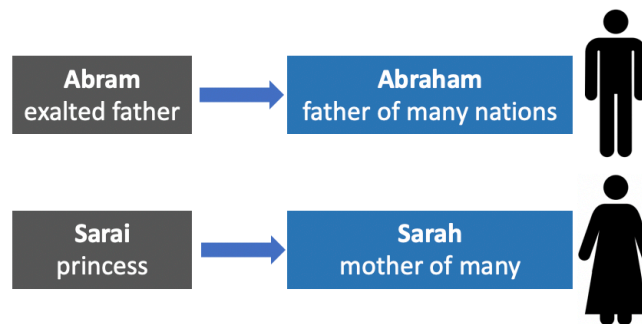
Fulfilled? God can be trusted!

Later on, God changed Abram's name to Abraham to reaffirm what He would indeed do.

Genesis 17:3–5

³ At this, Abram fell face down on the ground. Then God said to him, ⁴ “This is my covenant with you: I will make you the father of a multitude of nations! ⁵ What's more, I am changing your name. It will no longer be Abram. Instead, you will be called Abraham, for you will be the father of many nations.”

The name Abraham means “father of many nations”. God also changed Abraham's wife's name from Sarai (meaning “my princess”) to Sarah, meaning “mother of nations”.



Because God's promise of descendants would affect all of the families of Abraham's descendants, God told Abraham to circumcise all the males in his family. This would show their submission to the contract and would be like a “sign of membership” for this covenant that God made with Abraham.

While Abraham and his family were not responsible for delivering on the promises of land, descendants and worldwide blessing, the sign that they would benefit from the covenant is the physical sign of circumcision. They were to do this to show their faith and trust in God.

Physical circumcision:
Outward sign of God's
Covenant with Israel



Genesis 17:9–14

⁹ Then God said to Abraham, “Your responsibility is to obey the terms of the covenant. You and all your descendants have this continual responsibility. ¹⁰ This is the covenant that you and your descendants must keep: Each male among you must be circumcised. ¹¹ You must cut off the flesh of your foreskin as a sign of the covenant between me and you.

¹² From generation to generation, every male child must be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. This applies not only to members of your family but also to the servants born in your household and the foreign-born servants whom you have purchased. ¹³ All must be circumcised. Your bodies will bear the mark of my everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ Any male who fails to be circumcised will be cut off from the covenant family for breaking the covenant.”

This means that all males in Abraham’s family line would carry with them a visible reminder on their bodies of the promise that God would bless the world through Abraham’s family. Each male would be reminded of the role Abraham’s family would play in preserving **God’s message of salvation** and the **family’s responsibility of taking it to the world**.

However, of all the possible signs of agreement to this contract, why did God choose circumcision? Since the Fall, the Bible tells us that it is the man that passes on the sin nature to his descendants.

Romans 5:12

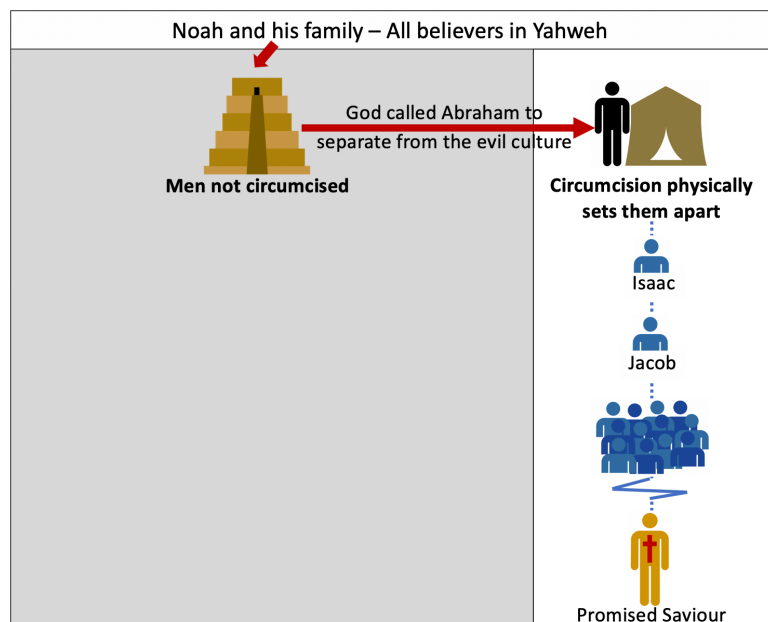
When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam’s sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.

In other words, there is something wrong with men: they apparently keep passing on this awful sin nature to their descendants through the act of having children! This means that men would need to be “repaired surgically” to deal with the sin problem. But God would have to be the One to do this “spiritual surgery”.

So, what God was doing with Abraham was to start a special line beginning with Abraham’s only miraculously conceived son, Isaac. It would be through Isaac that the promised Saviour would come. And it would be this promised Saviour who would deal with mankind’s sin problem.

Through circumcision then, God was giving a physical picture of how He Himself would do this repair work involving “spiritual surgery”.

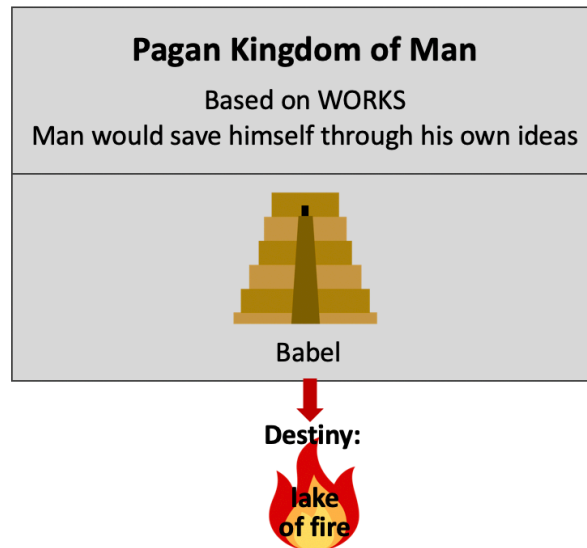
We will discuss this further in Lessons 15, 17 and 29.



It is sufficient for now to understand that God was not random in choosing circumcision as the sign of the covenant He made with Abraham. It was chosen specifically to make a point on how He Himself would provide the solution to mankind's sin problem.

Election: God Chose Abraham

What was Yahweh doing in choosing this one man? In wilful rebellion against God, mankind had built a "Kingdom of Man" where man was "god".



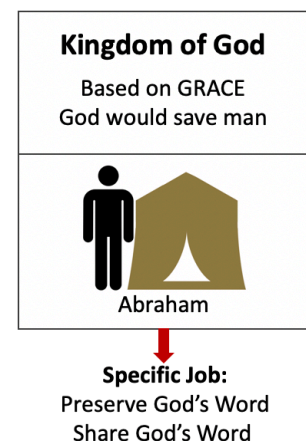
Mankind decided on right and wrong, good and evil, free from God's interference. People believed that they could control their own life through their own ideas, effort and "work".

Proud and arrogant mankind runs the Kingdom of Man, but it leads to eternal death. Because people already chose to reject God, God left them in the choices that they made.

So God interrupted history by doing something totally new. In His sovereignty, God chose Abraham through whom He would do this new thing. Abraham's family would become the nation of Israel, whose role in history was to preserve Scripture, usher in the promised Saviour and be missionaries to the rest of the world.

This is what God did in "electing" Abraham. He was creating a nation with a specific job in history. God sovereignly deciding to use Abraham is known as the concept of election. It is God calling out a man (and his family) for a special purpose.

However, God's purpose in choosing Abraham was never because He did not care for the rest of the world. It was through Abraham that He was going to bless and save the whole world.

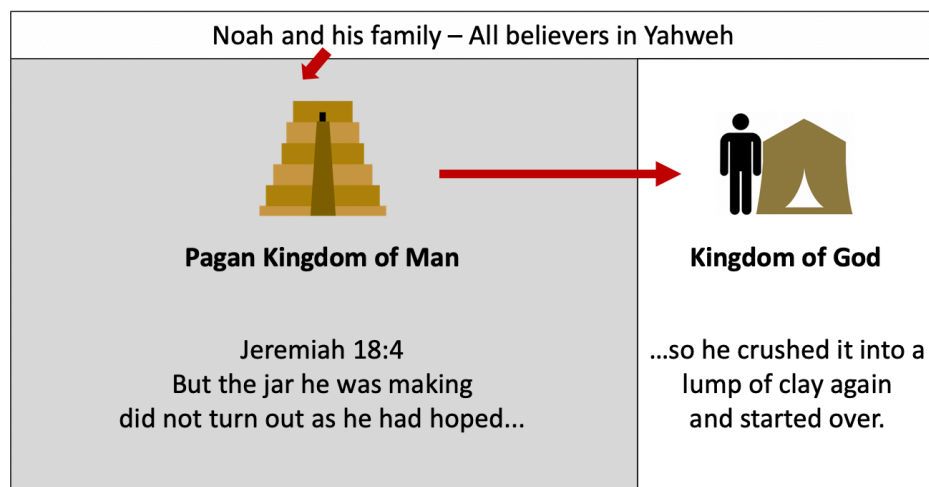


God explained election to the prophet Jeremiah using the illustration of a potter. He said that after the original pot is marred, the potter can transform it into another vessel. While this passage is referring to what God did with Israel prior to and in the exile, this principle is helpful for us to understand what God means in election.

Jeremiah 18:2–6

² “Go down to the potter’s shop, and I will speak to you there.” ³ So I did as he told me and found the potter working at his wheel. ⁴ But the jar he was making did not turn out as he had hoped, so he crushed it into a lump of clay again and started over. ⁵ Then the LORD gave me this message: ⁶ “O Israel, can I not do to you as this potter has done to his clay? As the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand.

What God did with Abraham



People may reject God’s will and purposes and live in rebellion (“the jar did not turn out as he had hoped”) but God can step in to start again. At this point in history, God “left” the Babel group in their rebellion.

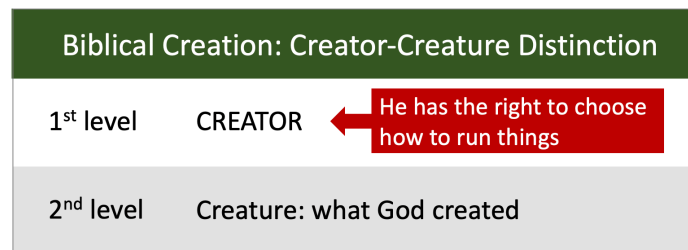
Instead, He called another group and made plans for them (He “started over”). Yahweh’s election plan for Abraham and the nation of Israel was for them to fulfil a specific purpose He had in mind.

This didn’t mean that every offspring of Abraham would be part of that plan. What God elected was the nation of Israel and its role in history. Every person was still responsible for their personal response to God.

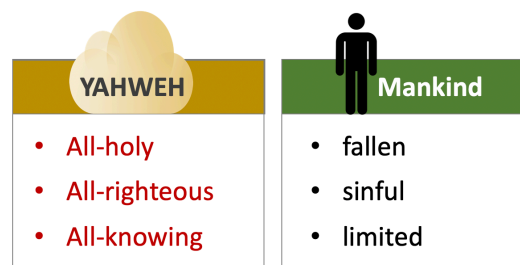
Is God unfair? How can He choose one man and not offer the same thing to others? What about equality?

Some people have the idea that God should be fair and should practise equality: whatever is offered to one person should also be made available to everyone else. They attack God as being biased.

First, we need to first understand that Yahweh is sovereign. Being a sovereign God means He has the right to choose how He wants to run things. That is the basic right of any creator and owner. He does not need mankind's permission to do anything. However, some people love to deny God that right. They reject the Creator-creature distinction and the fact that God is on a totally different level of existence. They treat Him like they would any other human being. They believe God needs to abide by the human rules they make up in their minds.



Second, God is holy, righteous and all-knowing. Man, on the other hand, is fallen, sinful and limited in every aspect. So God is the only one who can determine what is truly good and right. Man's idea of "fairness" and even "equality" is tainted by sin and driven by self-centred desires. We are in no position to judge God.

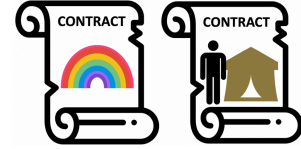


Third, God is loving. It is important to remember that God had originally started out His communication and revelation to the world in general. How did man respond to His revelation? It did not turn out well. Mankind collectively rejected Him as recorded in the events that happened at Babel.

If God were not loving, He could have left fallen mankind on the road to self-destruction and the lake of fire. But because of His love, God intervened with the solution that would be sufficient to rescue man.

How did He intervene?

1. **He sovereignly chose to make a contract with man.** Of all the religions in the world, the biblical God is the only One who makes contracts with mankind. He “inconvenienced” Himself by giving Himself obligations. He did not need to, but He started a programme to save mankind. This is because Yahweh is a loving, infinite, personal Creator-God who wants to have a genuine relationship with man.



2. **He sovereignly chose Abraham out of everyone alive at that time.** Why Abraham? Why not someone else? The Bible tells us that there were pockets of believers in Abraham’s time, people who still believed in the God of Noah.

In fact, the King-Priest of Salem (later known as Jerusalem), King Melchizedek, was one of them. After Abraham led the rescue of his nephew Lot from enemy kings (Genesis 14:1–16), the Bible records a meeting between Melchizedek and Abraham.

Genesis 14:18–20

¹⁸ And Melchizedek, the king of Salem and a priest of God Most High, brought Abram some bread and wine. ¹⁹ Melchizedek blessed Abram with this blessing:

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Creator of heaven and earth.

²⁰ And blessed be God Most High,
who has defeated your enemies for you.”

Then Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of all the goods he had recovered.



King Melchizedek was a believer. Why didn’t God choose Melchizedek and make a covenant with him instead? Surely he would have been better than Abraham who grew up in a culture that worshipped the moon god.

Yet, once again, we see that the sovereign God as Creator and Owner of the world, has the right to freely choose.

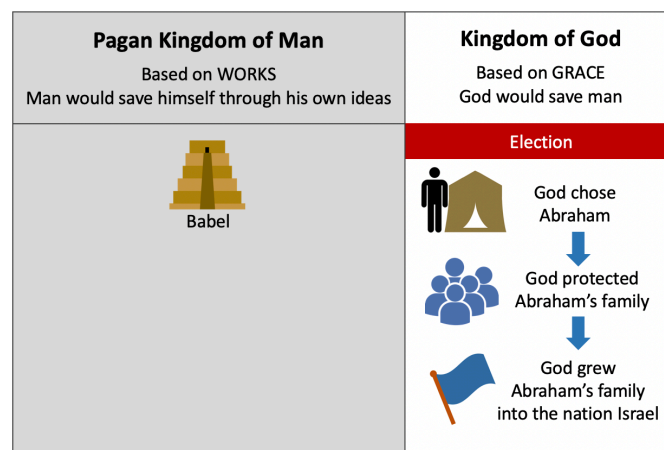
3. **The call of Abraham was a means to an end: it was for the sake of all mankind.** Abraham’s family had a job to do. They had to preserve God’s history and truth in the form of Scriptures and they had to bring God’s message back to the world. They were not chosen just because God played favourites. Through God’s relationship with Abraham and his offspring, God would show mankind how all can be reconciled to Him.

In fact, even the promises God gave to Abraham were not for him and his family alone. While there are aspects that apply only to Abraham, there are other aspects that apply universally to all mankind. We will study this out in later lessons, but here's an overview.



Promise	Abraham and his descendants	All mankind
	They will possess eternal land title to physical land in the Middle East. (Genesis 13:14–17; 15:18–21; 17:8)	This same physical land on earth will be the location of the New Jerusalem where all mankind will come to worship God. (Revelation 21–22)
	The family will be numerous and survive throughout history. And the promised Saviour will descend from his family line. (Genesis 12:2; 13:15–17; 15:5,13–16,18; 17:1–8, 22:17)	In the future, believers in Christ from every nation will be adopted into Abraham's family, and along with believing Jews, enjoy the spiritual blessings that God has for them. (Romans 11:17–18; Ephesians 2:12–13)
	God will bless Abraham's family.	The blessings on Abraham's family will bless all mankind. (Genesis 12:3; 22:18). Abraham's family will give the world: (i) the Bible (ii) the promised Saviour and (iii) the global, peaceful and prosperous Kingdom of God on earth.

In choosing Abraham, God's plan was to make His rescue plan available to all mankind. All mankind would have opportunity to be reconciled to Him. And God in His sovereignty, chose to do it through Abraham and his offspring.



God is not "unfair". God graciously provides a solution to rescue mankind. But it is done His way and not the way that people, in their own minds, want.

As we read the rest of the story of Abraham and his descendants Isaac, Jacob and Joseph in the book of Genesis, we will see that all the stories are like a drama. This is because the incidents that befall Abraham's descendants threaten these three promises that God made to Abraham. For example:

- **LAND:** Abraham was born in Ur (Genesis 15:7). When God first called him, Abram moved with his family, including his father Terah. But when they arrived at Haran, they settled there until Terah died. God then appeared again to Abraham and told him to move on. Abraham travelled to Canaan and began living there, at place called Shechem (Genesis 12:6). In Genesis 12:10, there was a famine, so Abraham had to leave the land that God promised to him and his descendants. He went to live in Egypt and became a wanderer. He later returned but even when his wife Sarah died, Abraham did not own any land. He had to buy her a burial site. Could Abraham trust that God would really give him the land He promised?



- **DESCENDANTS:** In Genesis 20 and 26, both Abraham's and his son Isaac's wives end up in the harem of gentile kings. How would God keep His promise that Abraham and Isaac would be able to have descendants with their wives? What if their wives had children with the gentile kings? How was God going to save the women and return them to their husbands? How was God going to ensure that Abraham and Isaac would have sons with their wives, Sarah and Rebekah?



God chose to record these accounts in the Bible because He wanted us to see that Abraham and his descendants had to ask themselves every day if they could trust God. They got themselves in the most dangerous and bizarre situations that threatened God's promise of land, descendants and a worldwide blessing. Could they trust God to fulfil His promises?

The Bible reports on both God's and mankind's actions with regards to the contracts or covenants He made. In fact, the name "Old Testament" means "Old Covenant" or "Old Contract". It includes this Abrahamic Covenant that God made with Abraham. As we read what God did regarding the covenants, He wants us to see that He is indeed faithful to the covenants He made, always intervening to ensure He would be faithful to deliver on His promises. As we see His record of faithfulness to His promises, He wants us to see that we can trust Him to fulfil His promises to all mankind because He is a promise-keeping God.

Kingdom of Man versus the Kingdom of God

After the Flood, people wanted to build a life without God. It is clear from the account of the Tower of Babel that they wanted to do their own thing. Their pride made them focus on "us" and "ourselves". They didn't want anyone to interfere, especially God. **This is the evil culture and mindset that prideful people have.** But even then, they failed in their attempt to make their own name famous and they failed to reach heaven.

On the other hand, this contrasts greatly with what God did with Abraham. It was God who said He would make Abraham famous. He promised to give Abraham a great reputation if Abraham would trust Him. And God promised to bless all peoples through Abraham. God was the one doing the work. He would bring this about and not Abraham, Abraham's descendants nor any other human. God wants us to see this comparison very clearly.

Pagan Kingdom of Man Based on WORKS Man would save himself through his own ideas	Kingdom of God Based on GRACE God would save man
<div data-bbox="430 1186 558 1312"></div> <p data-bbox="467 1318 521 1339">Babel</p> <p data-bbox="256 1396 391 1417">Genesis 11:4</p> <p data-bbox="256 1425 743 1541">Then they said, "Come, <u>let's</u> build a great city for <u>ourselves</u> with a tower that reaches into the sky. <u>This will make us famous</u> and keep <u>us</u> from being scattered all over the world."</p>	<div data-bbox="1073 1222 1187 1327"></div> <p data-bbox="1016 1339 1227 1360">God chose Abraham</p> <p data-bbox="846 1396 1003 1417">Genesis 12:1–3</p> <p data-bbox="846 1425 1385 1663">¹ The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that <u>I will</u> show you. ² <u>I will</u> make you into a great nation. <u>I will bless you and make you famous</u>, and you will be a blessing to others. ³ <u>I will</u> bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."</p>
Trust in: finite, sinful man	Trust in: Infinite, Righteous, Sovereign God

This same contrast between the Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God is repeated throughout history. The Bible very intentionally records this difference:



- **Mankind tries to save themselves** by creating meaning and purpose in their life without God. We will see that they always fail.
- **God says that He is the One who will save** and give us meaning and purpose in life. He is able to do this because He is the Creator-God and He is sovereign. As the offended party, He can tell us how to be reconciled with Him. He knows how to end evil forever and how to restore mankind and nature to a perfect state. And to help us trust Him, God made promises and wants us to see that He is faithful in fulfilling them.

Today, we continue to see many plans to save mankind and the world.

- Scientists work to eradicate health issues and save the environment.
- Politicians work to solve crime, poverty, social issues and social injustice, and they strive to usher in world peace and some kind of utopia where everyone can be happy.
- Religious leaders strive to invent ways to bring inner peace.

This is the pride of mankind thinking they are able to solve the sin problem and restore the world to its perfect state. They are trying to build their version of Babel.

But just as God did with Abraham, today, He continues to promise reconciliation with Him if we would put our trust in Him. He is the One who can save.

Pagan Kingdom of Man Based on WORKS Man would save himself through his own ideas	Kingdom of God Based on GRACE God would save man
 Babel	Election
	 God chose Abraham
When man is presented with the witness of God, man can choose:	
Unbelief in God Trust in man	Faith in God (like Abraham) Trust in God

Will we choose the Kingdom of Man or the Kingdom of God?

Discussion Questions

Discuss the following questions as a group or use them for personal reflection.

1. Instead of broadcasting His truth to the world as He had done previously, God now selected one man and his family to preserve His history and truth, and then to take His truth back to the world. Why do you think God chose to work this way and what do you think of this plan?
2. What are your thoughts about the legal agreements that God makes with mankind? What do these contracts reveal about God?
3. Consider how God has His plans for the earth, mankind and history. How should we respond when we see or experience evil, suffering or injustice? How does knowing God's character and His plans guide our thinking and actions?



Pre-reading for next lesson: Genesis 17:15–21, 22:1–19