

Dr. Elaine Phillips, Old Testament Literature, Session 7, The Patriarchs – Isaac, Jacob, Joseph Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Phillips, Old Testament Literature, Session 7, The Patriarchs – Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This document presents a lecture on Abraham from an Old Testament Literature course. The lecture begins with greetings in Hebrew and exam announcements. **The main focus shifts to exploring God's covenant with Abraham**, including the promises, reaffirmations, and increasing specificity of God's word to him. **The lecture examines challenging aspects of Abraham's life**, such as his dealings with Pharaoh and Abimelech, as well as the near sacrifice of Isaac. **The lecturer incorporates maps, definitions of key terms like "covenant", and discussions of the historical and cultural context** to give the students a better perspective on the narratives. **Various theological interpretations are offered, with connections made to the New Testament**, particularly Romans and Galatians.

2. 12 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Phillips, Old Testament Literature, Session 7 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → OT Introduction → OT Lit).



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on07.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Phillips, Old Testament Literature, Session 7, The Patriarchs – Isaac, Jacob, Joseph

Okay, here's a briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided excerpt of Dr. Elaine Phillips' Old Testament Literature Lecture 7 on Abraham:

Briefing Document: Dr. Elaine Phillips, Old Testament Literature, Lecture 7 – Abraham

I. Overview:

This lecture focuses on the life of Abraham (initially Abram) as a foundational figure in the Old Testament, emphasizing God's covenant with him and exploring both his faith and moments of moral ambiguity. Dr. Phillips stresses the importance of understanding the Abraham narratives within their wider historical and cultural context. She sets up the lecture to first discuss God's communications to Abraham, and then to return to those points in Abraham's life which present more challenges to faith.

II. Key Themes and Ideas:

- **The Covenant:** A central concept is the covenant (Hebrew: *berit*), an agreement between two parties involving obligations and sanctions (rewards and punishments). The lecture emphasizes that *berit* isn't just a theological term but also refers to treaties in the ancient Near East. Dr. Phillips states, "Covenant, an agreement between two parties establishes a relationship, entails obligations on both sides, and is accompanied by sanctions. In other words, rewards and punishments." God's obligation is to keep his word.
- **Suzerainty Treaties and Land Grants:** Phillips connects the Abrahamic covenant to the wider cultural practice of suzerainty treaties, where a powerful ruler (suzerain) grants land to vassals. This context helps understand the significance of God's promise of land to Abraham and his descendants. "Suzerainty treaties in which a major part of the treaty was a land grant. Hang on to that because land, as you probably know if you've read Genesis 12 and beyond, land is a major part of what God promised to Abraham and his descendants."
- **Covenant Cutting:** The lecture explains the practice of "cutting the covenant," involving the slaughter of sacrificial animals. The parties involved would walk between the cut-up parts, essentially enacting a symbolic declaration that the same fate should befall them if they broke the covenant. The significance of Genesis 15 is that God himself, represented by the smoking fire pot and blazing

torch, passes between the pieces, signifying that God is taking on the promise to be destroyed if the covenant is not kept. Phillips states, "It's God himself, who takes upon himself the promise to be destroyed, if you will, if the covenant is not kept." This is seen as a foreshadowing of the crucifixion.

- **Levels of Narrative Interpretation:** Drawing from Doug Stewart's work, Phillips emphasizes interpreting Old Testament narratives on three levels: universal plan of God, chosen people and their relationship with God, and individual narratives. "First of all, we need to realize that every narrative, no matter what it is, is teaching us something about God and his universal plan... It's also worked out throughout human history, particularly in the tribes of Israel, and then there are going to be individual narratives as well."
- **God's Promises and Faith:** The lecture outlines the increasing specificity of God's promises to Abram (later Abraham), from the initial call in Genesis 12 to the promise of a son (Isaac) and countless descendants. Emphasis is placed on Abraham's belief in God, which is credited to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6).
- **Romans 4 and the Nature of Faith:** Phillips connects the Abrahamic covenant to Paul's teachings in Romans 4, highlighting that Abraham's faith serves as a model for believers today. The key is that Abraham believed God had the power to fulfill his promises. "Being fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he had promised. That's the key."
- **Abraham's Moral Ambiguity (The Sarah narratives):** The lecture addresses the challenging incidents where Abraham asks Sarah to present herself as his sister to protect himself. Phillips presents an alternative interpretation (drawing on Gordon Hugenberger) suggesting Abraham might have been trying to protect their marriage through a legal custom ("adopting a sister") and that Pharaoh and Abimelech are punished not for what Abraham did, but because they should have gone through him if they wanted Sarah.
- **The Binding of Isaac (Genesis 22):** This is presented as the ultimate test of Abraham's faith. Phillips draws on Hebrews 11 to emphasize that Abraham reasoned God could raise the dead. The ram caught in the thicket is seen as a substitutionary sacrifice, with parallels to Jesus.

III. Important Facts and Details:

- **Hebrew Greetings:** *Boker tov* (good morning), *Boker or* (morning light).
- **Exam Information:** Essay question focusing on sovereignty and elections.

- **Abraham's Age:** 75 when first promised descendants.
- **Name Changes:** Avram (exalted father) to Abraham (father of many).
- **Matriarchs:** Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, Rachel
- **Shechem:** First place Abraham appears in Canaan and a politically sensitive area today.
- **Melchizedek:** King of Salem (Jerusalem), priest of God Most High, a precursor to Jesus.
- **Isaac's name:** "Yitzhak" in Hebrew which almost sounds like a derisive laugh.
- **Ishmael's Identity:** Not the son of promise, but a blessing

IV. Key Quotes:

- "At what point did Avram believe God, and it was credited to him as righteousness?" (Setting up Genesis 15).
- "Covenant, an agreement between two parties establishes a relationship, entails obligations on both sides, and is accompanied by sanctions." (Defining Covenant)
- "Suzerainty treaties in which a major part of the treaty was a land grant." (Connecting the Abrahamic covenant to wider cultural practices).
- "It's God himself, who takes upon himself the promise to be destroyed, if you will, if the covenant is not kept." (On God's role in the covenant cutting ceremony)
- "First of all, we need to realize that every narrative, no matter what it is, is teaching us something about God and his universal plan..." (Explaining the three levels of Narrative Interpretation)
- "Being fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he had promised. That's the key." (Connecting Abraham's faith to contemporary belief)

V. Questions Raised:

- How do we reconcile Abraham's great faith with his moments of moral failing (e.g., the Sarah narratives)?
- What are the implications of God's promise of land to Abraham and his descendants for contemporary politics in the Middle East?
- What is the significance of Melchizedek in relation to Jesus?

VI. Further Study:

- Genesis chapters 12-22
- Romans 4
- Galatians 3
- Hebrews 11
- Psalm 110
- Gordon Hugenberger's study on the Park Street Church website (regarding the Sarah narratives).

This briefing document provides a comprehensive overview of the main points covered in the excerpt. Remember to consult the original source for a more complete understanding.

4. Study Guide: Phillips, Old Testament Literature, Session 7, The Patriarchs – Isaac, Jacob, Joseph

Abraham: Covenant and Faith

Study Guide

I. Key Concepts and Themes

- **Covenant:** Understand the concept of a covenant as a binding agreement, particularly in the ancient Near Eastern context. Differentiate between covenants between equals (treaties) and suzerainty treaties (between a ruler and a vassal). Consider how God's covenant with Abraham aligns with and differs from these models.
- **Faith and Righteousness:** Explore the connection between Abraham's belief in God's promises and God crediting it to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). Consider the implications of this for understanding faith in the Old Testament and the New Testament.
- **Land Promise:** Recognize the significance of the promise of land in the covenant with Abraham and its implications for the people of Israel and contemporary politics.
- **Blessing to the Nations:** Understand the universal dimension of the Abrahamic covenant, specifically that all peoples on earth will be blessed through him (Genesis 12:3).
- **God's Faithfulness:** Analyze the emphasis on God's faithfulness to his promises throughout the Abraham narrative, even in the face of challenges and delays.
- **Tests of Faith:** Examine the various trials and tribulations in Abraham's life as tests of his faith and obedience, including his willingness to sacrifice Isaac.

II. Important Figures

- **Abraham/Abram:** The central figure of the Abraham narrative, known for his faith, obedience, and covenant relationship with God. Trace his journey from Ur to Canaan and his interactions with God.
- **Sarah/Sarai:** Abraham's wife, whose barrenness and eventual miraculous pregnancy are central to the narrative. Consider her role in the unfolding of God's promises.

- **Lot:** Abraham's nephew, whose choices and experiences in Sodom provide a contrasting example.
- **Melchizedek:** The king of Salem and priest of God Most High, who blesses Abraham after his victory in battle. Understand his significance as a precursor to Jesus.
- **Hagar:** Sarai's maidservant, who bears Ishmael with Abraham.
- **Isaac:** The promised son of Abraham and Sarah, whose birth fulfills God's covenant promise. Understand the significance of the near-sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22.

III. Important Places

- **Ur:** The original home of Abraham and his family.
- **Haran:** Where Terah, Abraham's father, dies.
- **Shechem:** The first place Abraham arrives in Canaan, a site of God's promise.
- **Bethel:** A significant location in the land of Canaan where Abraham builds an altar.
- **Hebron:** Another stopping point of Abraham in Canaan.
- **Negev:** A dry region where Abraham spends a lot of time.
- **Egypt:** Where Abraham sojourns during a famine.
- **Sodom:** The wicked city where Lot settles and is later destroyed. Consider its symbolic significance.
- **Moriah:** The region where Abraham is commanded to sacrifice Isaac, later the site of the Temple in Jerusalem.

IV. Key Passages

- **Genesis 12:1-9:** God's initial call to Abram and the promise of land, descendants, and blessing.
- **Genesis 15:** The covenant ceremony and God's promise of numerous descendants and possession of the land.
- **Genesis 17:** The establishment of the covenant of circumcision and the changing of Abram and Sarai's names.

- **Genesis 18-19:** The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.
- **Genesis 22:** The binding of Isaac and the test of Abraham's faith.
- **Romans 4:** Paul's interpretation of Abraham's faith and its implications for justification.
- **Hebrews 11:** A summary of Abraham's faith and obedience as an example for believers.

Quiz

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. What is the significance of the name changes from Abram to Abraham and Sarai to Sarah?
2. Explain the concept of "cutting a covenant" in the ancient Near Eastern context and how it relates to Genesis 15.
3. Summarize Paul's argument in Romans 4 regarding Abraham's faith and righteousness.
4. Why is the land of Canaan so central to God's covenant with Abraham?
5. Describe the test Abraham faces in Genesis 22 with the command to sacrifice Isaac.
6. How does Genesis 12:3 relate to the idea of covenant people having a mission?
7. What role does God's faithfulness play in the Abraham narrative?
8. What is the significance of Melchizedek?
9. How did Lot end up in Sodom, and what can we infer from this choice?
10. How does God communicate to Abram in Genesis 12:1-9?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Abram means "exalted father," while Abraham means "father of many." The name change signifies God's promise of numerous descendants. The name Sarai's meaning is not specified in the provided text, while Sarah means "princess" and denotes her status in the Abrahamic line.
2. "Cutting a covenant" involved the slaughter of sacrificial animals, with the cut pieces representing what would happen to the covenant partner if they broke the

agreement. In Genesis 15, God alone passes between the pieces, signifying that he is taking on the responsibility of the covenant, not Abraham.

3. Paul argues that Abraham was justified by faith, not by works, before he was circumcised, making him the father of all who believe, both circumcised and uncircumcised. Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness, and this serves as a model for how Christians are justified through faith in Jesus Christ.
4. The land of Canaan is central to God's covenant with Abraham because it is the physical inheritance promised to his descendants. It symbolizes God's provision and the fulfillment of his covenant promises, establishing a tangible connection between God, Abraham's family, and their future.
5. In Genesis 22, God commands Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, whom he loves, as a burnt offering. This tests Abraham's faith in God's promise to make his descendants as numerous as the stars through Isaac, forcing him to choose between obedience to God and the fulfillment of God's earlier promise.
6. Genesis 12:3 states that all peoples on earth will be blessed through Abraham, indicating that the covenant people have a mission to be a blessing to others. This verse highlights the universal scope of God's plan and the role of Abraham's descendants in bringing blessing to the world.
7. God's faithfulness is a central theme in the Abraham narrative, as he consistently fulfills his promises despite challenges and delays. This is particularly evident in the miraculous birth of Isaac, which demonstrates God's power to do what he has promised, even when it seems impossible.
8. Melchizedek is the king of Salem and priest of God Most High who blesses Abraham, and Abraham gives him a tithe. He represents a pre-Levitical priesthood and is later seen as a type or precursor of Jesus Christ, who is also a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.
9. Lot chose to settle in Sodom because he saw that the Jordan Valley was well-watered and fertile, demonstrating a prioritization of material prosperity over spiritual considerations. This choice exposes him and his family to the wickedness of Sodom, ultimately leading to tragic consequences.
10. God initially communicates with Abram in Genesis 12:1-9 through a direct command to leave his home and go to a land that God will show him. In response to his obedience, God promises to make him a great nation, bless him, make his name great, and bless all peoples on earth through him.

Essay Questions

1. Explore the tensions and ambiguities within the Abraham narratives, particularly regarding Abraham's moral decisions. How do these complexities contribute to a richer understanding of faith and God's relationship with flawed individuals?
2. Analyze the significance of the covenant in shaping the identity and destiny of Abraham's descendants. How does the covenant influence their relationship with God, their understanding of the land, and their interactions with other nations?
3. Discuss the ethical implications of the command to sacrifice Isaac in Genesis 22. How has this passage been interpreted throughout history, and what does it reveal about the nature of faith, obedience, and divine testing?
4. Compare and contrast the portrayals of Abraham in the Old Testament and the New Testament, focusing on how Paul in Romans 4 and the author of Hebrews utilize Abraham as a model of faith and righteousness.
5. Examine the role of women in the Abraham narrative, focusing on the experiences of Sarah, Hagar, and Lot's daughters. How do their stories challenge or reinforce traditional gender roles and contribute to the overall themes of the narrative?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Patriarch:** The male head of a family or tribe, especially in biblical history (e.g., Abraham, Isaac, Jacob).
- **Matriarch:** The female head of a family or tribe, especially in biblical history (e.g., Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, Rachel).
- **Covenant (Berit):** A formal agreement between two parties, often involving promises, obligations, and sanctions. In the biblical context, it refers to the agreement between God and his people.
- **Suzerainty Treaty:** A type of covenant in the ancient Near East between a powerful ruler (suzerain) and a less powerful vassal, often involving land grants and obligations of loyalty.
- **Righteousness:** Moral uprightness or conformity to God's standard of justice and holiness. In the Abraham narrative, it refers to God's acceptance of Abraham's faith.
- **Circumcision:** The surgical removal of the foreskin of the penis, a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham and his descendants.
- **Negev:** A desert region in southern Israel, where Abraham spent a significant amount of time.
- **Shechem:** An important city in Canaan, the first place Abraham settled and a site of covenant renewal.
- **Moriah:** The region where Abraham was commanded to sacrifice Isaac, later the site of the Temple in Jerusalem.
- **Adumbration:** A foreshadowing or prefigurement of a future event or person. In the Abraham narrative, certain events and characters foreshadow aspects of Jesus Christ and his ministry.

5. FAQs on Phillips, Old Testament Literature, Session 7, The Patriarchs – Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Biblealearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Abraham and the Old Testament Narratives

- **What does "boker tov" mean, and what is the appropriate response?**
- "Boker tov" is Hebrew for "good morning." The polite response is "boker or," which means "morning light."
- **What are the names of the Old Testament patriarchs and matriarchs mentioned?**
- The patriarchs are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The matriarchs are Sarah, Rebecca, and Leah, with Rachel also being included.
- **What is a covenant ("berit") in the Old Testament context, and what are its key characteristics?**
- A covenant ("berit") is an agreement between two parties that establishes a relationship, entails obligations on both sides, and is accompanied by sanctions (rewards and punishments). In the case of God's covenant, his obligation is to keep his word. The term is also used for treaties between political entities, such as treaties between a suzerain (overlord) and a vassal. Covenants were often "cut," involving the slaughter and cutting of sacrificial animals, symbolizing what would happen if the covenant obligations were not kept.
- **What was significant about God passing between the cut-up animals in Genesis 15?**
- In the wider cultural context, the vassal was to walk between the cut-up parts, declaring that this should happen to him if the obligations were not kept. In Genesis 15, God passes between the cut-up animals while Abram sleeps, signifying that God himself is taking on the promise to be destroyed if the covenant is broken. This is seen as a foreshadowing of the crucifixion.
- **What is the three-level approach to interpreting Old Testament narratives?**
- According to Doug Stewart, narratives teach about God and his universal plan, the relationship between God and his chosen people (Israel), and the individual narratives themselves.

- **What is the alternative interpretation of Abraham's actions in Genesis 12 and 20, where he asks Sarah to say she is his sister?**
- The traditional view sees this as a moral lapse where Abraham is endangering Sarah's sexual purity to save his own life. However, an alternative interpretation, drawing on ancient Near Eastern customs (Hurrian custom), suggests that Abraham is trying to protect their marriage and wealth. By presenting Sarah as his adopted sister, he is creating a legal situation where she would not be seen as fair game for kings seeking to increase their power through marriage. The problem arises because Pharaoh and Abimelech are so heinous that they transgress this and abduct her without permission.
- **Who is Melchizedek, and why is he significant?**
- Melchizedek, whose name means "king of righteousness," is the king of Salem (Jerusalem) and a priest of God Most High. He blesses Abraham, who gives him a tithe. Melchizedek is seen as a literary precursor to Jesus as the great high priest, as discussed in the book of Hebrews.
- **What was the nature of the test that God put Abraham through in Genesis 22 (the binding of Isaac), and what was Abraham's response?**
- The test was that God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, his only son, whom he loved, despite God's earlier promise that Abraham's descendants would be countless through Isaac. Hebrews 11 explains that Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead and thus willingly offered Isaac, demonstrating his faith that God would be faithful to his promises. The ram caught in the thicket provided a substitutionary sacrifice, foreshadowing Jesus's sacrifice.