

## Main Themes of the Abraham Cycle (Genesis 12-36)

**LAND** – Abraham’s migration to, travels around, and settlement in Canaan, his dealings with the people in the Land, God’s promises about his progeny’s future inheritance of the Promised Land

**PROGENY** - Drama of the inheritance of the Promise and the emergence of the Chosen Line, as marked by barrenness, the endangerment of potential mothers, miraculous births, sibling rivalries, and – lastly – the endangerment of children.

LAND	PROGENY
	11:26-32, <b>Toledot Notice:</b> Abram is first introduced in the course of genealogical list, as son of Terah; the only non-geneological information that we learn about Abram is that his wife, Sarai, is barren.
11:31-32, <b>Itinerary notice:</b> Terah takes Abram, Abram’s nephew Lot, and Abram’s wife Sarai from their homeland in Ur of the Chaldees to Haran	
12:1-3, <b>Command to migrate + Promise of progeny:</b> In the first of a series of promises, God tells Abraham: “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation....”	
12:4-9, <b>Itinerary notices + Promise of land,</b> Abram complies and travels to the Promised Land with Sarai and Lot. Upon his arrival God tells him “I will assign this land to your offspring” (12:7); Abram builds an altar to God and continues his journey around the Land.	<i>Implicit, in light of Sarai’s barrenness, is the possibility that Lot is a possible heir for Abram</i>
12:10-20, <b>Wife-Sister Motif #1,</b> In a surprising twist, Abram no sooner receives promises of progeny and land than he flees the land and endangers his wife! Due to famine, Abram and Sarai depart for Egypt; fearing for his own life, Abram asks Sarai to pretend she is his sister. She is taken into the house of the Pharaoh, and Abram is given riches in return. Pharaoh then figures out the deception and angrily dismisses Abram. This endangerment of Sarai furthers the sense of implausibility at the idea that Abram will have an heir, let alone be the father of nations!	
13:1-13, <b>Itinerary notice + Separation of Lot and Abraham</b>	<i>The separation of Abram and his nephew Lot negates the possibility that Lot will be the one to inherit the Promise</i>
13:14-18, <b>Promise of Land</b> (“Raise your eyes now, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever”) <b>and Progeny</b> (“I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth; so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted”) + <b>Itinerary notice</b> (Mamre; at which Abraham builds an altar)	
14:1-24, <b>Abram and the Kings</b> – This chapter recounts Abram’s unfolding relationships with people of the land in which he’s settling, albeit in a very different way than the surrounding material. Abram here is depicted – not as a nomad as in the rest of the chapters – but as a leader with many troops, which enables him to save Lot from a battle between kings.	

## Main Themes of the Abraham Cycle (Genesis 12-36), cont'd.

LAND	PROGENY
15:1-21, <b>Promises of Progeny and Land + Establishment of Covenant</b> , Abram asks God about his childlessness, and God responds by promising an heir of his own flesh, reiterating the promise of progeny and the promise of land. The mutual connection between God and Abram is sealed with the Covenant of the Pieces.	16:1-16, <b>Hagar and the birth of Ishmael</b> - Since Sarai is barren, she offers her Egyptian handmaid Hagar to Abram as a concubine – effectively taking the fulfillment of the promise into her own hands! Abram accepts Hagar, and she bears him a son, Ishmael, but then Sarai accuses Hagar and mistreats her. Hagar runs away with Ishmael, but then an angel appears to her and sends them back.
	17–19: <b>Covenant of circumcision + Annunciation of Isaac</b> , Abram is commanded to change his name to Abraham and to circumcise himself and his household as a sign of the covenant. Sarai becomes Sarah, and we are told (in a doublet; once by God and once by 3 visitors) that she will give birth, even despite her advanced age. The second account of Isaac's annunciation leads to Abraham's intercession for Sodom and the story of how Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed.
20, <b>Wife-Sister Motif #2</b> , When traveling in Gerar, Abraham yet again asks Sarah to pretend to be his sister. As before, she's taken into the house of the land's leader, this time Abimelech. Lest the fatherhood of the child to be born in the next chapter (i.e., Isaac) be in any doubt, it is stressed that Abimelech "had not approached her" when he learned directly in a dream from God (!! ) that she was actually already married, despite what he'd been told by the purportedly righteous Abraham. Moreover, God had reacted to Sarah's sojourn in his household by closing up the wombs of the women in Abimelech's household. Abimelech is understandably upset but gives Abraham wealth and land nonetheless; in the end, this strange interlude is thus another step of progress in his establishment of relations with the people of the land.	
	21, <b>Birth of Isaac and Expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael</b> , Isaac is finally born, and the tension of the tale apparently resolved, as Abraham now has a proper. This leads, however, to the first of two tales of endangered children, which point to how fragile the process of bearing progeny remains. This tale focuses on Ishmael. Sarah wishes to expel Hagar and Ishmael, and Abraham reluctantly agrees; God saves them from danger and gives Ishmael promises of his own.
	22, <b>Binding of Isaac</b> : The second tale of endangered children focuses on Isaac and involves many of the same themes as the first. Here, God asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, the very son whose birth was the aim and motivation of the previous chapters! Abraham agrees but God tells him to stop at the last minute. The chapter ends with genealogy of Rebekah, the future wife of Isaac—the line, in other words, will go on.