

READING THE BIBLE February

GENESIS 11:28-50:26

This is the story of the Patriarchs (and the Matriarchs) of Israel. It forms the base history, or story, for the people of Israel, a little like King Arthur for Britain.

At the end of Chapter 11 we have a chronology or family tree, which introduces us to Abraham.

We move now from the general story of humanity and God to the start of the people of God, chosen, called out, as Abram (Abraham) and his family are from Ur of the Chaldees (now in Iraq but more commonly called Mesopotamia in Bible history which means the land between the rivers, Tigris and Euphrates.)

This part is divided into **Abraham's Story** (11:28- 25:18), **Jacob's Story** (25:19-36:43) and **Joseph's Story** (37:1- 50:26).

In February I think you could read all of this, but I will point out particular parts if you want to dip in.

All the stories develop the promise made to Abraham of a people and land and its fulfilment.

Abraham's Story.

After the family tree at the end of Chapter 11 (a mark of the Priestly source) God calls Abram and makes a promise of land and becoming a great nation. Five blessings follow. In his faithful response to God's call Abram himself becomes a blessing to all. It is this promise (and response) that is the foundation of God's people.

The story was told orally: see 12:10-20, 20:1-18 and 26:6-11, and compare the stories and Abram's less than chivalrous behaviour. The characters are always very human.

14:1-24, Abram meets Melchizedek. Not a Jew, and king and priest, who offers bread and wine, and who blesses Abram. (See Letter to the Hebrews in New Testament Ch.7.)

Covenant is always central to our story. Compare 15: 1-21 and 17: 1-14. The first is based on God's oath (Abram's descendants will be as the stars in the sky.) The second is from the Priestly source: chronology, theology and circumcision. Here Abram receives a new name Abraham.

See 18:1-15 Abrams speaks with God (angels) both numbered as one and three. (Basis of the Rublev icon on the Trinity.)

19:1-29 Sodom and Gomorrah and Lot's wife.

22:1-19 Sacrifice of Isaac. Isaac, a gift of God in Ch. 18 and the people's only future, is offered back to God. A troubling story with great significance for the New Testament.

Jacob's Story is a more cohesive as a story. The sons who head the 12 tribes are born. The 12 tribes will be the basis for everything. (12 apostles.)

25: 19- 27:46 Esau and Jacob and the craftiness of Jacob. The inheritance stolen.

28:10-22 Jacob's dream. The promise is renewed, and Jacob responds with a vow.

See John's gospel 1:51.

29:15-30 Jacob's wives.

32:22-33 Jacob wrestles with God and receives a new name 'Israel' which is 'one who contends with God.' From this moment Jacob changes and becomes a man of integrity and honour. No longer crafty. The struggle of the people, our struggle with God in trying to live the covenant is graphically described here.

Joseph's Story.

More sophisticatedly written as a story.

37:1-36 "The coat of many colours." Story of brotherhood and its fracture and rebuilding. Joseph in the well and sold into slavery.

38:1-30 Story of Judah and Tamar. Tamar will appear in Matthew's gospel chapter 1 as a matriarch, but like the others has a very tough life.

41: 1-57 Joseph interprets dreams. (See also in Matthew where the new Joseph dreams.) Joseph as agent of God.

42-45 The brothers find Joseph in Egypt, the cup hidden in Benjamin's sack, and reconciliation.

48 Jacob adopts Joseph's children, Ephraim and Manasseh. They become heads of tribes. Ephraim is often used as a name for Israel in poetry, psalms.

49 The sons, the tribes, are blessed by Jacob.

The people find themselves outside the Promised Land, so they must return. Exodus will begin this.