THE UNSEEN GENESIS

Week 6 · Genesis 12 - 25

Abraham, The Two Powers, Covenant

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Summary Handout · Genesis 11:27–25:11 · *Follow along, then take it home.*

One hundred years from a moon-god city to a purchased grave. Genesis kept about twenty scenes out of that century — which means every one of them was chosen.

> **WHERE THIS WEEK SITS**
> At Babel the **Most High** divided the nations and kept none of them for Himself (Deuteronomy 32:8–9). Genesis 12 is the answer. God keeps no nation — so He makes one, out of one childless man from the ziggurat heartland.

The life at a glance

Age	Scene	Genesis
—	1. Ur and Haran; the family serves other gods	11:27–32
75	2. The call, and the departure from Haran	12:1–5
75+	3. Famine, Egypt, and Sarai taken by Pharaoh	12:10–20
—	**5. The rescue of Lot; Melchizedek of Salem**	13:1–18, **14:1–24**
—	**6. The stars, and the reckoning**	**15:1–6**
—	**7. The covenant between the pieces**	**15:7–21**
86	**8. Hagar, Ishmael, and the God who sees**	**16:1–16**
99	9. Circumcision; Abram and Sarai renamed	17:1–27
99	**10. Three visitors; the plea for Sodom**	**18:1–33**
—	**11. Fire from the LORD out of heaven**	**19:1–29**
—	12. Gerar, and the same failure a second time	20:1–18
100	13. Isaac is born	21:1–7
—	**14. Hagar and Ishmael sent away**	**21:8–21**
—	**15. The test on Mount Moriah**	**22:1–19**
~137	16. Sarah dies; the cave of Machpelah is bought	23:1–20
~140	17. A bride is found for Isaac	24:1–67
175	18. Abraham dies; Isaac and Ishmael bury him	25:1–11

The Reel

1. Ur and Haran Genesis 11:27–32

Ur and Haran were both centres of moon-god worship, and Joshua 24:2 says plainly that the family served other gods. God calls Abram out of the exact religious world Genesis 11 has just finished satirising. The call had already reached him in Ur, before Haran — God spoke first, and the household moved slowly.

Also: Genesis 11:31; Joshua 24:2; Acts 7:2–4.

2. The call Genesis 12:1–5

Babel said, let us make us a name; God says, I will make thy name great — the thing they grasped at is given, to a man who did not reach for it. Babel said, lest we be scattered; God says, I will make of thee a great nation. And the families of the earth are folded back into blessing. Country, kindred, father's house is a triple severance, and he is seventy-five and childless: every natural security surrendered before a single promise is banked.

Also: Genesis 10:32; 11:4; Philippians 2:9; Galatians 3:8; Hebrews 11:8.

3. Famine, Egypt, and Sarai taken Genesis 12:10–20

Seven verses after the land is promised, there is a famine in it. This is a covenant crisis, not just a character flaw — Sarai is the woman through whom the seed must come, and the motive is stated coldly: "that it may be well with me for thy sake." Then the rebuke comes from the pagan king (12:18). The seed line is preserved against its own bearer.

Also: Genesis 20:1–18; 26:6–11; Galatians 4:4.

4. Lot chooses the valley Genesis 13:1–18

The elder man, holding the promise and entitled to choose first, gives his nephew first pick. Lot takes the plain and pitches his tent toward Sodom — and the moment he leaves, God tells Abram to lift up his eyes: all the land he can see is his (13:14–15).

5. Melchizedek of Salem Genesis 14:1–24

Three verses interrupt a war: a king-priest arrives without introduction, blesses, receives a tithe, and vanishes from the Old Testament until Psalm 110. He is priest of El Elyon, God Most High — not El Shaddai — which is the same title used in Deuteronomy 32:8 of the God who allotted the nations. Before Israel exists, inside Canaan, the Most High has kept a Gentile priest who knows Him. Abram settles the identification himself in 14:22, lifting his hand to "the LORD, the most high God."

The office. King and priest in one man — an office Israel kept separate, and which cost Uzziah his health when he combined them (2 Chronicles 26:16–21). Psalm 110:4 swears David's Lord into it. Hebrews 7 completes the argument: the lesser is blessed by the greater (7:7), Levi paid tithes in Abraham's loins (7:9–10), and the order has no beginning or end of days — so no succession and no expiry (7:3, 7:16).

Was he Christ Himself? Some read Hebrews 7:3 that way. But if Melchizedek is Christ, Psalm 110:4 has God swearing to the Messiah that He is a priest after the order of Himself, and Hebrews 7 — whose whole argument compares two figures — has nothing left to reason from. He is a real priest-king whose office prefigures Christ.

Also: Deuteronomy 32:8–9; Psalm 110:4; 2 Chronicles 26:16–21; Hebrews 7:1–28.

6. The stars, and the reckoning Genesis 15:1–6

The word of the LORD is seen in a vision, speaks in the first person as God, and then physically brings Abram outside to count stars. A word that can be seen, speaks as God, and walks a man out of a tent is not a message — it is a figure. Then verse 6: righteousness credited, not earned. The order matters, and Paul builds on it — this happens thirteen years before circumcision and 430 years before Sinai.

Also: 1 Samuel 3:21; Jeremiah 1:9; John 1:1, 14; Revelation 19:13; Romans 4:3, 9–11, 22; Galatians 3:6, 17; James 2:23.

> **GENESIS 15:17–18 (KJV)**

> *And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.*

7. The covenant between the pieces Genesis 15:7–21

The Hebrew is karat berit — to cut a covenant. Jeremiah 34:18–20 explains the rite: the parties walk a corridor of halved animals, swearing, if I break this, do to me what was done to these. Normally the lesser party walks. Abram never walks — a deep sleep falls on him and God alone passes through as a smoking furnace and a burning torch. God takes the curse-liability of both sides. The covenant cannot fail because of Abram, because he is not one of its guarantors. Follow the corridor to its end: Galatians 3:13, made a curse for us.

Two details. A four-hundred-year prophecy of slavery and return, delayed because "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (15:16) — God is patient even with disinherited nations. And the land grant lists ten peoples, the Rephaim among them: the giant clans are written into the deed.

Also: Jeremiah 34:18–20; Galatians 3:13; Hebrews 6:13–18.

8. Hagar, and the God who sees Genesis 16:1–16

Ten years of silence, and Sarai proposes a legally ordinary solution. It works, and it costs everyone. Then the Angel of the LORD makes His first appearance in Scripture — not to Abram or Sarai, but to a pregnant slave girl running into a desert. He promises in the first person what only God can (v. 10), speaks of Yahweh in the third person (v. 11), and the narrator calls Him Yahweh outright (v. 13). A woman with no standing in the covenant is the first person in Scripture to give God a name: El Roi.

Also: The same pattern: Genesis 21:17–18; 22:11–18; 31:11–13; Exodus 3:2–6; Judges 2:1; 6:11–23; 13:16–22.

9. Circumcision, and two new names Genesis 17:1–27

God renames the man and the woman in the same scene — and gives His reason for hers: a mother of nations, kings of people shall be of her. Sarah is addressed, renamed, and promised in her own right. Circumcision is a token of the covenant, a sign and not a price (17:11; Romans 4:11). And Abraham laughs; the son is named Laughter.

Also: Exodus 6:2–3; Deuteronomy 30:6; Isaiah 51:2; Romans 4:11; Galatians 4:26–31; Colossians 2:11–12.

Interlude One — The covenant line

Genesis 15 and 17 are the third movement in a sequence. In every case God initiates, God specifies, God gives the sign, and God binds Himself. Nowhere does a human being negotiate a term.

Covenant	Text	Sign	Who ratifies
Edenic	Gen 1:28–30; 2:15–17	The two trees	God stipulates; Adam is given terms to keep.
Adamic	Gen 3:14–19 with 3:15, 3:21	Coats of skins	God alone pronounces. Nothing is asked of Adam.
Noahic	Gen 6:18; 9:1–17	The bow in the cloud	God alone — with every living creature (9:15).
Abrahamic	Gen 12; 15; 17; 22:15–18	Circumcision (17:11)	God alone walks between the pieces while Abram sleeps.

The word berit first appears in Genesis 6:18, with Noah — not in Genesis 3. And every sign involves a death or a weapon put down: an animal killed to clothe Adam and Eve, a war-bow hung in the cloud pointing away, a knife on the eighth day, a corridor of split carcasses. Genesis 15 does not introduce one-party ratification; it dramatises what God had been doing since Genesis 3. Luke 22:20 says where the line lands.

Two ways faithful readers count the covenants

This study teaches the dispensational scheme — eight covenants, three with mankind and five with Israel, six of them permanent, with the land promise awaiting a future millennial kingdom. Covenant theology, from Augustine through Calvin to Westminster, reads two: a covenant of works with Adam, broken in Eden, and a single covenant of grace from Genesis 3:15 onward, administered through Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and the New.

Both agree that God initiates every covenant and binds Himself; that righteousness is credited to faith, not earned; that circumcision seals a righteousness already there; and that Christ is the fulfillment, the Seed of Galatians 3:16 being singular. The disagreement is about how the promises are administered and where the land promise lands — not about grace.

Also: Genesis 3:21; 6:18; 9:13, 15; 15:6; 17:11; Luke 22:20; Galatians 3:16; Hebrews 9:15–17.

10. Three visitors, and the plea for Sodom Genesis 18:1–33

Yahweh appears as one of three men, is given water for His feet, and eats a meal under a tree. He renews the promise — "Is any thing too hard for the LORD?" — and Sarah laughs behind the tent door. Then the two others go on to Sodom and Yahweh stays to be argued with: fifty, forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty, ten. Abraham is not talking God down from anger; he is appealing to God's own character, and God keeps saying yes.

Also: Luke 1:37; John 1:18; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23.

11. Fire from the LORD out of heaven Genesis 19:1–29

Yahweh on earth, acting from Yahweh in heaven — two occurrences of the divine name, in two locations, in one action (19:24). This is the clearest two-powers verse in the Torah, and Second Temple Judaism knew it. Alan Segal documented in Two Powers in Heaven (1977) that a "second power" reading was an accepted strand of Jewish theology until it was ruled heretical in the second century A.D. And Lot survives not for his own righteousness but because "God remembered Abraham" (19:29).

Interlude Two — The Two Powers thread

Four scenes this week raise the same question. The thread opens here and runs through Weeks 6 and 7.

Passage	What the text does	Where it lands
Gen 15:1, 5	The Word of the LORD is seen, speaks as God, brings Abram outside.	John 1:1, 14; Revelation 19:13.
Gen 16:7–13	The Angel promises in the first person; Hagar names Him Yahweh.	Gen 22:11–18; 31:13; Ex 3:2–6; Judges 6:11–23.
Gen 18:1–33	Yahweh appears as a man, eats, and is argued with.	John 1:18 — the Son has made Him known.
Gen 19:24	Yahweh on earth rains fire from Yahweh in heaven.	Segal (1977); John 5:19–23; 1 Corinthians 8:6.
Ex 23:20–21	The Angel who carries God's Name and can pardon.	Isaiah 63:9; Deuteronomy 12:5, 11.

Passage	What the text does	Where it lands
Dan 7:9–14	Two thrones; the Son of Man receives everlasting kingship.	Matthew 26:63–65 — claimed under oath, condemned.

In John 8:56–58 Jesus tells the crowd that Abraham rejoiced to see His day, and answers the objection with "Before Abraham was, I AM." They pick up stones — they understood the claim exactly. One caution: this argues that the Angel in these particular scenes is a distinct divine figure who is also Yahweh. It does not follow that all sixty-odd Old Testament occurrences of the phrase mean that. Judge each passage on its own evidence.

12. Gerar — the same failure again Genesis 20:1–18

Same lie, different king, twenty-five years and a covenant later — immediately after Sarah is renamed and promised a son within the year. His defence is that the lie is technically true, which makes it more calculated, not less. God vindicates the pagan king (20:6), then calls Abraham a prophet and tells Abimelech to ask him to pray (20:7). The office is not revoked for the failure. Genesis 15 proved the point in a ceremony; Genesis 20 proves it in a scandal.

13. Isaac is born Genesis 21:1–7

Twenty-five years after the call. "The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken" — deliberately redundant, and the redundancy is the point. Sarah names the laugh (21:6): the joke that was doubt has become joy.

Also: Romans 4:19–21.

14. Hagar, heard a second time Genesis 21:8–21

The household fractures, and Hagar is in the wilderness again with a dying boy. The Angel of God calls to her out of heaven a second time — same figure, same woman, same wilderness, years later. The God who sees in chapter 16 is the God who hears here.

> **GENESIS 22:7–8, 12 (KJV)**
> *Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering… Lay not thine hand upon the lad… for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.*

15. The test on Mount Moriah Genesis 22:1–19

The Bible's first "love" is in verse 2, and it is a father's for an only son — the Father's vocabulary at the Jordan. Isaac carries the wood of his own sacrifice and asks the question the whole Old Testament is asking; Abraham's answer is the Bible in a line. Then the Angel stops the knife and speaks as God: thou hast not withheld thy son from ME. Romans 8:32 reverses that sentence at Calvary — what Abraham was spared, the Father was not. The ram dies in the son's place, before there is a law, a priesthood, or an altar in Israel.

Also: Matthew 3:17; John 1:29; 3:16; Romans 8:32; 2 Chronicles 3:1; Hebrews 6:13; 11:17–19.

16. Sarah dies; a grave is bought Genesis 23:1–20

The Hittites offer him the cave for nothing — a gift, from the land God had promised him. He refuses it, insists on full price, and weighs out four hundred shekels before witnesses. He was promised a country from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates; the only square foot he ever owned was a grave, bought rather than given.

Also: Hebrews 11:9–10, 13–16.

17. A bride is found for Isaac Genesis 24:1–67

The longest chapter in Genesis, and Abraham barely appears. He sends his servant with an oath and one non-negotiable condition — not from the daughters of the Canaanites — and stays home. And Rebekah answers the same call Abraham answered, in the same words: I will go (24:58).

18. Two sons at one grave Genesis 25:1–11

The son of the promise and the son of the improvisation bury their father together. Genesis does not explain it, resolve the quarrel, or moralise — it records that they both came. He owned a field. He had one son by the promise. He never saw a nation, never held the land, never met the Seed. And 25:11 turns straight to Isaac, because the covenant was never really about the man.

Threads of Fulfillment

In the life of Abraham	Fulfillment in Christ
12:3 — in thee shall all families be blessed	Galatians 3:8, 16 — the gospel preached beforehand; the Seed is Christ.
14:18 — priest-king of El Elyon	Hebrews 7:1–28 — an unending priesthood by the power of an endless life.
15:6 — counted for righteousness	Romans 4:3–25; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23.
15:17 — God alone passes between the pieces	Galatians 3:13 — made a curse for us; Hebrews 6:13–18.
16:13 — the God who sees a runaway slave	Luke 19:10 — to seek and to save that which was lost.
17:11, 15–16 — the sign, and Sarah's new name	Romans 4:11; Colossians 2:11–12; Galatians 4:26–31.
19:24 — Yahweh on earth, Yahweh in heaven	John 5:19–23; Matthew 26:63–65.
22:8 — God will provide himself a lamb	John 1:29 — Behold the Lamb of God.
22:12 — thou hast not withheld thy son	Romans 8:32 — He spared not His own Son.
22:14 — in the mount of the LORD it shall be seen	John 19:17 — another Son carrying wood up the same ridge.
23:17–20 — a grave bought, not given	Hebrews 11:16 — a better country, that is, an heavenly.

Key terms

El Elyon — God Most High (Gen 14:18–22); the title of the allotter in Deut 32:8. **El Shaddai —** the patriarchal title (Gen 17:1; Ex 6:2–3). **El Roi —** the God who sees me (Gen 16:13). **berit / karat berit —** covenant, and to cut one (Gen 6:18; 15:18). **qeshet —** a war-bow, hung in the cloud (Gen 9:13). **Memra —** the Word of the LORD in the Aramaic Targums. **Malki-tsedeq —** my king is righteousness (Heb 7:2).

Take It Home

> **THE WEEK IN ONE SENTENCE**
> God kept no nation for Himself at Babel, so He made one — and when it came time to guarantee the covenant, He put the man to sleep and walked between the pieces alone.

The practice. Read Genesis 22 slowly this week, out loud if you can, then read Romans 8:32 immediately after it. Sit with the reversal. Abraham was stopped; the Father was not.

To go further. Hebrews 7 alongside Genesis 14 and Psalm 110, in one sitting.

Next week. Genesis 25–36 — Isaac, Jacob, a ladder at Bethel, and a man who wrestles God until daybreak.

Sources

Michael S. Heiser, The Unseen Realm. Todd Hampson, The Chronological Guide to Bible Prophecy. Joel Muddamalle, The Hidden Peace. John H. Walton, comparative ancient Near Eastern work. Augustine, De Trinitate. Alan F. Segal, Two Powers in Heaven (1977). Matthew Emadi, The Royal Priest (IVP Academic, 2022). O. Palmer Robertson, The Christ of the Covenants (P&R, 1980). Frank Moore Cross, Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic (1973). Companion handout: the Biblical Covenants Reference Guide.

Scripture printed here is the King James Version. Passages read aloud in class are from the ESV. Ages follow the numbers Genesis states; where it gives none, an em dash.