

PATRIARCHS: Lesson Eleven, Looking It Over ***Genesis 12-50***

Subject: Genesis tells of four primeval events and four Patriarchs of Israel, concluding with Israel in Egypt.

Main Idea: Providence is a key theme presented in Genesis.

Principles:

1. *Sin and death will not have the final word.*
2. *What Satan intends for evil, God providentially overrules for good.*
3. *God is sovereign over the nations of the world.*

This Closing Summary will conclude our *Patriarchs* study, as well as the Book of Genesis. A full one-fourth of the *GOD of the WORD* study through the Bible is spent on the Book of Genesis alone (two of eight studies – *Beginnings* and *Patriarchs*.) This is necessary, considering our goal of understanding the story of the Bible from beginning to end, because Genesis introduces the foundational elements of the story. (Of course, I use the term “story” in the broader sense. I am *not* implying that the Bible is fictional, only that it presents God and His purposes in human history in a generally chronological, story-like fashion.) Without a good grasp of Genesis, the rest of the Bible cannot be properly understood.

Our next study, called *Exodus*, covers the remainder of the Pentateuch or Books of Moses (that is, the first five books of the Bible): the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. This is among the least read and understood portions of the Bible. But we will discover its great importance in the story and the value of its principles for us today. Before we proceed, however, a review of Genesis is in order. It will also be helpful for us to understand more about the world of the Patriarchs.

I. Summary of Primeval Genesis – Genesis 1-11

A. Four Events: The first eleven chapters of Genesis cover primeval history. They tell us who God is, who we are, what our relationship is to Him and to one another, and how the world came to be in desperate need, as we see it today. In literary terms, we could say the main characters and the central conflict of the story are presented.

i. Creation:

1. *Who is God?*

- a. The first words of Genesis introduce God as the Creator of all, as active and powerful, as Spirit, as a personal Being with intelligence and will, and as One who carefully considered and prepared His creation.

- b. God is portrayed as a Being who *transcends* His creation. The implication is that everything ultimately falls into one of two classifications: “God” and “all that is not God” (created things). He transcends His creation.
 - i. The intellectually honest person must confess that within him or her lies a longing for something beyond themselves. We often seek to fill this longing with human relationships or experiences.
 - ii. However, God’s mere existence, which is presumed by the author of Genesis, tells us that there is greater meaning and purpose in life than we can discover independently of Him.
 - iii. The fact that our Creator transcends us explains the longing for “something more” within us. We are really longing for *God Himself*.
- c. God is also portrayed as a moral Being. He called His creation “good.”
 - i. The wonders we see by looking at the heavens above us, in the oceans, as well as on land, are unquestioningly “good”. God, then, is the standard for “goodness”. He is supremely good.
 - ii. While His transcendence may make us fearful, His goodness encourages us to draw near to Him.

2. *Who are we?*

- a. The Creation account (Genesis 1-2) indicates that God created us in His image and He created us as He intended us to be. We were made entirely differently than the animals and all other created things because, like God, we are spiritual beings, with personality and morality.
- b. For this reason, we were created with great dignity. This is important to the greater “story” because it is the condition to which God will restore us one day.
- c. Genesis 2 retells the Creation account of Genesis 1, in order to help us understand that human beings were the apex of God’s creation. We are the “apple” of His eye.
- d. God created the first woman because the man He had created needed human companionship. In the Creation account, sexuality is portrayed within the context of the marital relationship between one man and one woman, as part of God’s plan.

- e. God gave the man Adam and the woman Eve healthy parameters. God forbade them from eating the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. They had an abundance of food. Only this one was forbidden. By observing this restriction, Adam and Eve had the opportunity to grow in their dependence and trust in God.
 - f. And finally, the man and woman were assigned work in the beautiful Garden of Eden, designed by God.
 - g. Their work was meaningful and profitable, their relationship with God, with one another, and with the animals was harmonious and satisfying, and their environment perfectly suited them.
3. We learn that God rested from His creative activity after the sixth “day” and that the seventh day is therefore a holy day for rest.
- ii. Fall
- 1. *Satan*: Genesis 3 introduces Satan, God’s enemy, without explaining his origins to us.
 - a. He came to the woman Eve in the form of a serpent and tempted her to eat the forbidden fruit.
 - b. This enemy, as we learn, seeks to deceive human beings into doubting God, while attempting to convince us that the consequences of rebelling against God will be minimal or nonexistent.
 - 2. *Sin and the Curse*: Adam and Eve succumbed to the temptation, rebelled against God, and sin entered the world.
 - a. As a result, God cursed the Serpent. However, within that curse was a great promise for humankind. God said the offspring of the woman would crush the head of the Serpent, while he (the Serpent) would strike at her offspring’s heel. Jewish and Christian commentators alike have understood this to be the first promise of the Deliverer (the Messiah) who would one day, by defeating Satan, overturn the Curse.
 - b. For Adam, Eve, and their offspring, sin brought death – physical death and spiritual separation from God.
 - c. Even the ground was cursed, so that it would no longer produce in the way it had previously. Work would no longer be purely pleasurable and satisfying. It would be frustrating.

3. *Adam named his wife "Eve"*
 - a. While Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden (thus from God's presence) and suffered the devastating effects of sin on the world, *faith in God's promised Deliverer* was the means by which they could re-enter a relationship with God.
 - b. Adam exhibited faith by naming his wife "Eve", *the mother of all the living*, an indication that the Deliverer God promised would come through the woman's ability to bear children.
4. *Cain and Abel*: While we must go to the New Testament for a clear explanation that all individuals inherit a sin nature and the guilt of sin from Adam (Romans 5:12-19), the evidence that it was handed down is immediately obvious in Genesis. Adam and Eve's older son, Cain, was jealous of his brother Abel and killed him.
5. *Two Categories of People*: After that event, subsequent generations of people are portrayed as belonging in one of two categories with regard to their attitude toward God: they were either faithful or rebellious. God gave Adam and Eve a third son, Seth. Seth's descendants were faithful, while Cain's were rebellious.
6. *Genealogies and Death*
 - a. The genealogy of chapter 5 ends its summary of each life with the words, "and then he died." The circumstantial evidence indicates that sin and death would prevail.
 - b. While the keeping of genealogical records indicates, in part, the human desire to be immortalized (and thus, for immortality), the Biblical genealogies also indicate the faith of some in God's promised Deliverer. Each generation must have hoped that theirs would see the birth of the "seed of the woman" who would rescue them, as God promised.

iii. Flood

1. Over time, the insidious influence of sin was so impactful that only one man of faith and his family remained on earth. All the remainder of the earth was corrupt. Because the condition was so widespread, God determined to wipe out the population and start again with Noah.
2. God sent a devastating flood to accomplish this. Every living creature dependent on dry land perished, except for a small remnant, preserved by God in an Ark. Among the remnant was Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives, and representatives of the animal population.
3. The account of the Flood introduces God's wrath over sin and the necessity of judgment.

4. In the Ark, we see a picture of deliverance from judgment. Faith in God and His promised Deliverer was the vehicle by which Noah's family was ultimately saved.

iv. Babel

1. *Ham's Sin and Curse*: After the Flood, the characters of Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth characters were revealed.
 - a. Ham dishonored his father and his descendant Canaan, who apparently was like Ham, was cursed.
 - b. Although Ham had participated in God's blessing of deliverance from the Flood, the curse on part of his family is a warning for us. Merely aligning ourselves with (and acknowledging) what is right and true is insufficient for salvation unto eternal life. The kind of faith that saves us is *transformational* in nature and evident in our behavior. Saving faith also perseveres (James 2:17, 26 and Hebrews 10:23-12:3).
2. *Nations Developed*: Noah's sons began repopulating the earth and, over time, nations developed.
 - a. God had instructed Noah's sons to multiply and spread over the earth. This was essential because where people gathered, the corrupting effects of sin would multiply.
 - b. In rebellion against God, some of the descendants of Ham established cities and kingdoms, permitting human culture and rebellion against God to grow.
 - c. The manifestation of this rebellion was the building of a ziggurat in Babylonia, an arrogant enterprise by which the builders believed they could reach the gods. Rejecting the One True God, people had created a pantheon of lesser gods, gods with which they could be equals. The building of the ziggurat proved they looked *to themselves*, rather than to God, for satisfaction.
3. *Languages Confused*: God ensured the population was scattered and the building project abandoned by confusing the language of the builders. It was the end of a common language for humankind.

v. Summary Statements

1. As the primeval history of Genesis comes to a close, we become increasingly aware that, left to ourselves, human beings are hopelessly sinful. The need for God's promised deliverance and solution to the problem of sin has become obvious. His "promise-plan" of deliverance has become central to the story.
2. Genesis 11 ends by introducing Abram to us as a descendant of Shem. He would play a part in God's solution.

B. Important Themes

- i. Among the critical themes of these chapters are humankind's creation in God's image, sin's grip on and corruption of humanity, God's promise of a Redeemer, and His judgment of the wicked and salvation of the faithful.
- ii. However, there is also a theme that, while equally important, runs through Genesis 1-11 as more of an undercurrent. That is the theme of providence. It is a theme that comes closer to the surface of the story in Genesis 12-50 in the lives of the Patriarchs.
 1. Providence can be defined as the idea "*that there is a benevolent and purposeful ordering of all events of history. Nothing happens by chance; though not always perceptible to human understanding, there is a divine or cosmic plan to the universe, a reason for everything.*"ⁱ
 2. Providence includes the idea that human beings must bear responsibility because they are able to initiate and effect evil. However, it is also based on the premise that God is powerful enough to control, preserve and govern all things in spite of man's choices. He has a personal agenda, He is involved in ensuring His agenda, and His agenda is good because He is good.
 - a. Sin spread like a wild fire and resulted in death.
 - i. It ended the perfect fellowship Adam and Eve had with their Creator.
 - ii. Adam and Eve's firstborn son Cain and his descendants moved further and further from God.
 - iii. Sin was so pervasive that Noah was the only righteous man left on the planet.
 - iv. Sinful human beings created a pantheon of weak gods replacing the only true, living God in human religion. They gathered together at Babel to replace God with their own ideas.
 - b. But God continued to overrule. While allowing sinful men and women their own will, He nevertheless ensured His plan to redeem and restore was never snuffed out.
 - i. After Cain killed Abel, he gave Seth to Adam and Eve.
 - ii. When Seth's descendant Noah was the only remaining righteous man (and possibly his family members, who were also saved), He wiped out the human population in the Flood and worked through Noah's family.
 - iii. When the nations that developed after the Flood rebelled against Him at Babel, He dispersed them to minimize the power of sin.

- c. Sin and death *seemed* to have the final word, but God providentially ensured His purposes prevailed.

Summary Statement: Genesis begins by telling us who God is, what He is like, who we are in relation to Him, and what happened that caused our present, corrupt, burdensome human condition and separation from fellowship with our Maker.

Principle: *Sin and death will not have the final word.*

Illustration: One of the many words people who don't know the God of the Bible sometimes use in place of "providence" is "serendipity". A young student presented his teacher with a cocoon, saying, "This is what I think serendipity means. This caterpillar thinks it is dying, but it is really being born."ⁱⁱ While sin and death appear to prevail, God is the author and giver of life.

Application: Is there a situation you face, dear friend, that appears so desperate that you feel hopeless? Do you foresee no possible good outcome? Does the power of sinful individuals only seem to grow while the influence of the righteous wanes? Is sin's grip on someone you love only tightening with the passage of time? Are you increasingly limited by physical decay? Like Noah on the Ark, we may see nothing around us but death and decay. But God did not allow these to have the final word.

Illustration: A man once bought the final issue of *Life* magazine. It was going out of print. Within the magazine, however, he discovered a page that had apparently appeared in every former issue, an offer to begin a regular subscription. It had inadvertently been left in the final issue. The page said, "Please start sending me *Life*." We see the irony in a "dying" magazine extending an offer of "Life". We may be discouraged when we view our circumstances and the world around us. Sin appears to have had a victory. All is dying. But this can be our prayer, "Dear God, please keep sending me life."ⁱⁱⁱ

Jesus the Messiah has finished His work! He is at God's right hand. And we are, therefore, assured that sin and death will not have the last word in human history or the last word in our lives. May this be the renewed focus of our prayers and our hope: God will not allow sin and death to have the final word.

Transition: Genesis 12-50 tell us how God intended to work through Abraham's family to introduce His solution to the problem of sin.

II. Summary of the Patriarchs – Genesis 12-50

A. Four Men: The opening chapters of Genesis recount *four events*. The remaining chapters recount the lives of *four men*, the Patriarchs of Israel. These chapters give us greater insight into God’s dealings with faithful, although very imperfect, individuals. They also give us the history of the formation of the nation of Israel.

- i. Abraham, the Man of Faith: God chose to work through one man and his family to fulfill His promise of sending a Deliverer.
 1. *Abraham’s Call*: Abraham was called by God to leave his homeland, his people, and his father’s household to go to a land that was unknown by him (Canaan). Abraham obeyed.
 2. *God’s Covenant Promises*: Critical to the lives of all four Patriarchs were the covenant promises of God. God promised to make Abraham into a great nation, to bless him and make him a blessing to all nations, and to give him the land of Canaan as his own permanent possession. These were the promises to which the Patriarchs clung, by faith, even though they saw little fulfillment of them during their lifetimes. The Patriarchs responded to God and His promises in faith.
 3. *Abraham was far from perfect*.
 - a. He lied about his wife on two occasions
 - b. He attempted to shortcut God’s plans by taking an additional wife to bear him a son, since his own wife was barren.
 4. *A Model of Faith*
 - a. In spite of these things, Abraham believed God, God credited his faith as righteousness. He models saving faith for us by his trust in God’s promises and by acting accordingly.
 - b. This is especially evident in his willingness to leave his homeland for a land where he wandered as a tent-dweller and his willingness to sacrifice Isaac, the son God promised him, after he was finally born in Abraham’s very old age.
 5. *Abraham’s Descendants*
 - a. Abraham fathered Ishmael and Isaac, the progenitors of the Arab and Jewish people groups, through a concubine, Hagar, and his wife, Sarah (respectively). Later, he fathered other sons through Keturah.
 - b. Before he died, he ensured the “son of promise” Isaac, was married to someone from his household (and *not* to a local Canaanite) and established as his sole heir.

ii. Isaac the Son and Heir

1. Isaac shared many of his father's qualities and life experiences. Like his father, he lied about his wife. Like his father, he had dealings with Abimelech. Like his father, he blessed his younger son over his older son. Like his father, he received a visitation by God and the guarantee of the same promises.
2. Isaac fathered twin sons, Jacob and Esau. He and his wife Rebekah each had a favorite son, which caused trouble in the household. Eventually, the word of God to Rebekah during her pregnancy with the twins was fulfilled: the older served the younger. Jacob inherited the Patriarchal promises.

iii. Jacob the Sanctified Sinner

1. *Jacob's Deceit*: Unlike Abraham or Isaac, Jacob was a troublemaker. His name means "he deceives" and he was, indeed, a deceiver. Jacob tricked Esau into selling him his birthright. Then he cooperated with his mother in a plan to deceive Isaac into blessing him rather than blessing Esau. Esau became so angry that he planned to murder Jacob and Jacob had to flee Canaan.
2. *Jacob's Dream*: En route to his mother's family in Paddan Aram (apparently in Northern Mesopotamia), God appeared to Jacob in a dream. God reiterated his covenant promises to Jacob and also promised to go with Jacob and to, later, bring him back to Canaan. Jacob responded by taking the Lord as his own God.
3. *Laban's Deceit*: Jacob's uncle Laban was also deceitful.
 - a. On the night of Jacob's wedding, Laban secretly exchanged his older daughter for the younger daughter Jacob intended to marry.
 - b. Jacob had worked seven years to pay the "bride price" for the younger sister Rachel. By his scheme, Laban got another seven years of work out of Jacob, as part of the agreement to give him Rachel as his bride along with her sister.
 - c. Finally, Laban sought to cheat Jacob out of an opportunity to build his own flocks and herds.
4. *Jacob's Growth and Prosperity*: Through all this, Jacob learned what it was like to be the victim of a deceiver. And God prospered Jacob. Twenty years after leaving Canaan, he returned with four wives, eleven sons, servants, and his own flocks and herds.
5. *Jacob Wrestled with God*: As Jacob grew near Canaan, on his return, he became very concerned about encountering his brother Esau, who had previously intended to kill him.

- a. The night before he crossed the Jabbok River, the angel of the Lord wrestled with Jacob throughout the night. The Lord ended the wrestling match by touching Jacob's hip so that it was wrenched.
- b. Understanding Whom he wrestled, Jacob refused to release his hold on God until He blessed him. God changed his name from Jacob (*deceiver*) to "Israel" (*he struggles with God* or *God struggles*). His mid-life name change indicates a change in Jacob's character. Jacob learned to depend on God rather than his own schemes and deceit.
- c. Esau surprised Jacob the next day by embracing and welcoming him.

6. *Jacob's Sons*

- a. Some of Jacob's sons inherited his trouble-making nature. His oldest son Reuben slept with one of his father's wives. His next two sons, Simeon and Levi, murdered an entire city of men after their sister was raped. His fourth-born son Judah married a Canaanite woman and failed to take responsibility and keep his commitment to his own daughter-in-law.
- b. A twelfth son, Benjamin, was born to Jacob in Canaan.

iv. Joseph the Suffering Servant

1. *Joseph's Brothers' Hatred*: Jacob's ten oldest sons hated their younger brother, Joseph, whom Jacob favored. Joseph foolishly shared his dreams with his brothers, which portrayed them bowing before him. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt and deceived their father into believing he had been killed by a wild animal.
2. *Joseph's Suffering*: Joseph suffered deeply in Egypt from the time he arrived at age seventeen until he was thirty years old. Despite his deep suffering, God prospered him.
 - a. He rose to a position of management within his master's household. When his master's wife attempted to seduce him, he successfully fled the temptation, only to be misjudged and imprisoned.
 - b. Then, he rose to a position of management within the prison, as well. He correctly interpreted the dreams of two fellow prisoners, leaving him with hope that the one who was released would speak to Pharaoh on his behalf. But he was forgotten.
3. *Joseph's Exaltation*: Joseph was a type of Christ: after he suffered, God exalted him.

- a. Two years after he interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's Chief Cupbearer and Chief Baker, Pharaoh had his own troubling dreams, which prompted the Cupbearer to remember Joseph.
- b. Joseph not only interpreted Pharaoh's dreams for him but also advised him about how to respond to the events the dreams foretold. Pharaoh made Joseph lord of Egypt, his second-in-command. In addition to his position, Pharaoh also gave Joseph a wife, who bore him two sons.
- c. Joseph successfully orchestrated the saving and storage of grain held in reserve during seven prosperous years in Egypt. Then he sold the grain to the Egyptians and the surrounding nations during seven years of severe famine that followed.

4. *Joseph's Tested His Brothers*

- a. Because of the famine, Joseph's brothers traveled to Egypt to purchase grain. Joseph hid his identity from them in order to test them and see if they had changed. He accused them of spying, required them to bring their youngest brother Benjamin to Egypt (something their father had forbidden), kept Simeon imprisoned, and then planted his own cup in Benjamin's sack to falsely implicate him for theft. In all of these tests, he was watching to see how his brothers would respond.
- b. Judah's change of character, hinted at after his daughter-in-law exposed him for the arrogant, selfish man he had been, becomes apparent in his sacrificial leadership, offering himself as Joseph's slave in Benjamin's place.
- c. Relieved to discover his brothers had changed, Joseph finally revealed himself to them and charged them with bringing their father and his entire household to Egypt. There, Joseph would provide for them.

5. *Jacob's Family in Egypt*

- a. Jacob's family of seventy grew and prospered in Egypt, even while the Egyptians suffered from the famine. They were given the land of Goshen to occupy, separating them from the Egyptians.
- b. Jacob blessed his twelve sons on his deathbed, giving Joseph the double portion by adopting Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh. Joseph's sons' descendants would inherit land in Canaan along with their uncles. Although his was the double portion, family leadership was granted to Judah. His blessing was a regal one, with Messianic implications.

- c. Jacob and Joseph both died in Egypt. Jacob was carried out by his sons and buried in Canaan, in accordance with his final request. His desire for this indicated his faith that God would still keep His promise to give Canaan to his descendants. Joseph also requested his bones be carried to Canaan once God “came to their aid” and brought his father’s family back out of Egypt. Thus, both men finished the course of their lives well and full of faith.

B. Important Themes

i. The Covenant Promises of God

1. At every turn, the acts of the Patriarchs seem to threaten the fulfillment of God’s promises to them. Yet, as Joshua later recorded, “*Not one of all the Lord’s good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled*” (Joshua 21:45).
2. Genesis 12-50 portray God as a Covenant-Maker and a Promise-Keeper.

ii. The Historical Development of the Nation of Israel

1. Genesis 12-50 shows us how Abraham’s family came to be the nation of Israel with its twelve tribes.
2. The first eleven chapters of Genesis convince us that humankind needs rescuing and cannot fix the problem introduced by sin on their own. In chapters 12 – 50, we discover God’s plan to use one man’s family, the family of Abraham, to introduce His solution.
3. From our historical vantage point, we recognize not only that Jesus the Messiah was Abraham’s descendant, but also that the Scriptures have been recorded and preserved for us by Abraham’s descendants. Both the written word of God and the living Word of God have come through Israel, blessing the whole world, in accordance with God’s promise.
4. In our next study, *Exodus*, we will also learn that God intended that Abraham’s family (Israel) would represent Him to the pagan nations of the world, who no longer knew who God was or what He required.

iii. Providence

1. We see God working in the lives of the Patriarchs, at every turn, to ensure the fulfillment of His promises, counter-mandating the threats imposed by their many failures.
2. Joseph summarized God’s providential overruling in his words to his brothers, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish the saving of many lives” (Genesis 50:20).

Summary Statement: God worked through four imperfect men to establish a nation through which He would bless the world.

Principle: *What Satan intends for evil, God providentially overrules for good.*

I have referred to Romans 8:28 on more than one occasion in our *Patriarchs* study. It is a New Testament verse that puts Joseph's words into a doctrinal declaration: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."

The Biblical teaching of providence negates belief in:

- *Chance*, which denies power is rational,
- *Deism*, the belief that God made the world but is now uninvolved,
- *Dualism*, the belief in multiple divine forces, since there would be competition of agendas,
- *Pantheism*, the belief that nature itself is God, by de-personalizing "deity" so that no agenda would be possible,
- *Indeterminism*, the belief that there is no control of life at all,
- *Determinism*, the belief which says man has neither control nor responsibility,
- And *fate*, which denies the controlling power to be benevolent (good).^{iv}
- Sometimes people refer to "luck", "history", "progress", human "know-how" (applied science) as the movers and shapers of life. All of these ideas are attempts to de-personalize God.^v

Application: Have any of these false ideas crept into your own thinking? To what or whom do you credit every good thing in your life? The Bible says that every good thing is from God (James 1:17).

Transition: At the conclusion of our *Beginnings* study, a brief summary of the geography and history of the area known as the Fertile Crescent mentioned that Mesopotamia and Egypt were the ancient powers in what has traditionally been considered the "cradle (birthplace) of civilization". It will benefit you to refer to the map that accompanies this lesson ("World of the Patriarchs").

III. The World of the Patriarchs

A. Mesopotamia

- i. “Mesopotamia” is a combination of two Greek words that mean “between” (Meso) and “river” (potamia.) In modern use, it refers to the region between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers (two of the four rivers named in Genesis 2:10-14 as having their sources in the river that flowed from the Garden of Eden), both of which empty into the Persian Gulf.
- ii. Genesis 24:10 referred to the central and northern part of Mesopotamia as the region as “Aram Naharaim”, which means “the Aram of the two rivers.”
 1. This same region was also called “Paddan Aram”. Paddan Aram included the Biblical city of Harran, where Abraham and his father stopped en route to Canaan and where his father died. Harran may have been the city where Nahor, Laban and Rebekah resided.
 2. This region later became the center of the Assyrian Empire.
- iii. The southerly portion of greater Mesopotamia is where the Akkadian and Sumerian empires developed. As was discussed more fully in Lesson 1, Abraham began his travels in Ur. Ur was a major center of civilization in southern Mesopotamia, a region that, in Abraham’s day, was known as Sumer. If this is the “Ur” from which Abraham originated, he migrated a great distance to Harran before descending to the southwest into Canaan.

B. Syria-Canaan

- i. *A Land-Bridge*: Obviously, the need for water played an important factor in the development of early civilizations.
 1. The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers abundantly supplied the Mesopotamian region. The Mediterranean Sea also offered this advantage. By examining the map, one can see that the delta region of the Nile in northern (“Lower”) Egypt would also have invited settlers. In fact, Egypt was the other major ancient civilization.
 2. However, one can see that to travel directly from Mesopotamia to Egypt would require traversing the Arabian Desert, a nearly impossible task.
 3. Therefore, the trade route between these two important powers has always run through the fertile valley that is near the eastern coast of the Mediterranean. This is the region of Syria-Palestine. It has always been an important land bridge between Asia, Europe, and Africa. In the days of the Patriarchs, Canaanite people groups inhabited it.
- ii. *Abraham’s travels*
 1. Abraham came from Harran into Canaan. He probably traveled through the ancient city of Damascus, located just north of Canaan in Syria (not on the map).

2. According to Genesis 12:6, his first stop in Canaan was Shechem, the city whose male citizens Jacob's sons later killed. From there he journeyed to Bethel and Ai. These two cities were about ten miles north of Jerusalem. (Bethel was known as Luz in Abraham's day.) Shechem, Ai, and Bethel were in the heartland of Canaan. All of these cities were important in Israel's later history.
3. Abraham traveled in and out of the Negev (Genesis 12:9, 13:1, 20:1). This is the dry desert area south of Judah. Beersheba, in the Negev, was a place where Abraham and Isaac found a water source (Genesis 21:25-31, 26:32-33).
4. Abraham and Isaac both spent time in Gerar, nearer the coast than Beersheba (Genesis 20:1, 26:1-6). Abimelech was the king of Gerar, whom both Abraham and Isaac deceived by saying their wives were their sisters (20:2 26:7).
5. Hebron lies between Bethel/Ai and Beersheba. It is about twenty miles south of Jerusalem. Mamre was the name of an individual (Genesis 14:13, 24). The "Oaks of Mamre" refers to a region near Hebron.

C. Egypt

- i. The Nile River is the heart of Egypt. The area surrounding the northerly, delta portion is referred to as "Lower Egypt". The southerly land is "Upper Egypt". (The Nile flows from south to north.)
- ii. Abraham traveled into Egypt (Genesis 12).
- iii. The book of Genesis ends with Israel's family living in Goshen. This was a region in the northeastern delta of the Nile. They lived there 430 years.

D. Asia Minor

- i. The third great ancient empire was in Asia Minor, modern Turkey. It was the land of the Hittites. While the people who settled in Mesopotamia and Syria-Palestine were primarily Semitic (descendants of Noah's son Shem), the Hittites were Japhethites (Indo-European).
- ii. The Hittite Empire was not established until about 1600 BC and thus, did not play an important role in Patriarchal history.
- iii. Abraham purchased the land where he buried Sarah from a Hittite (Genesis 23), but it is not known whether this refers to the same people group known by that name.

E. History

i. *The Early Bronze Age (3300-2000 B.C.).*

1. The earliest forms of writing developed in the Early Bronze Age. In Mesopotamia, the Sumerians used cuneiform. In Egypt, hieroglyphics was used. The Akkadian epic literature, discussed at the end of our *Beginnings* study, was developed during this time.
2. This was also the time in which the first great empires developed: the Old Kingdom of Egypt, the time in which most of the Pyramids were constructed, and the Sumero-Akkadian Empires in Mesopotamia. Sargon of Akkad established the first of these.
3. During this period of time, the Canaanites flourished in Palestine. Large, walled cities developed there. However, these collapsed near the end of the Early Bronze Age, probably about the time of Abraham's birth in Mesopotamia.
4. The stable Old Kingdom of Egypt also collapsed near the end of the Early Bronze Age and entered a two-hundred-year period in which the country was politically divided.

ii. *The Middle Bronze Age (2000-1550 B.C.)*

1. Many Bible scholars believe Abraham lived around 2000 B.C. (possibly 2166 – 1991 B.C.). This means he would have lived during the transition period from the Early Bronze Age to the Middle Bronze Age. Another popular theory is that he lived about two hundred years later, still in the Middle Bronze Age.
2. In southern Mesopotamia, the Sumerian culture, centered in Ur, experienced a brief renaissance around the turn of the second millennium, the time of Abraham. After that brief period, another Semitic people group, the Amorites, controlled Mesopotamia. Later (1792-1750 B.C), Hammurapi, an Amorite from Babylon, rose to power and united the northern and southern regions of Mesopotamia, establishing the Old Babylonian Empire, centered in that region.
3. After the disappearance of the urban centers of the Early Bronze Age in Syria-Palestine, people there lived in tents and huts. The Amorites also migrated into this region and began redeveloping urban centers. Bill Arnold states, “the towns and cities of the Abram narrative were likely flourishing as part of this development.”^{vi}

4. In Egypt, the political division ended and the country flourished during its “Middle Kingdom.” But near the end of the Middle Kingdom, a West Semitic group called the Hyksos (probably also Amorites) took control of northern Egypt and ruled there for 150 years (1700-1540). It was the first time Egypt had been dominated by foreigners. These may have been the people who subjugated the Israelites and treated them harshly after Joseph’s death.^{vii}

Summary: This summary is only intended to introduce a few cities and key historical events that may give us greater understanding about the world of the Patriarchs.

Providence is a function of God’s sovereignty.

Principle: *God is sovereign over the nations of the world.*

Conclusion

The book of Genesis and our *Patriarchs* study conclude with Israel in Egypt. We are, once again, reminded of Joseph’s final words, “God will surely come to your aid” (Genesis 50:24).

Today, our world is threatened by famine, nuclear attacks, terrorism, and climate change. We may be discouraged by what we see happening in the governments and nations of the world.

Yet, since the time of Christ, believers have had the assurance that God *has* come to our aid and that Jesus will *return* to set everything right. While God permits evil men to have their way for a season, He will have the final word. He has an agenda that cannot be thwarted. And His plan is exceedingly good.

ⁱ Achtemeier, Paul J.; Harper & Row, Publishers; Society of Biblical Literature: *Harper's Bible Dictionary*. 1st Ed. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985, S. 832

ⁱⁱ Jones, G. C. (1986). *1000 Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching* (p. 252). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jones, G. C. (1986). *1000 Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching* (pp. 214–215). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^{iv} Wood, D. R. W., & Marshall, I. H. (1996). *New Bible Dictionary* (3rd ed.) (979). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

^v Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). In *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

^{vi} Arnold, Bill (1998). *Encountering the Book of Genesis* (p. 85). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

^{vii} Rasmussen, Carl G. (1989). *Zondervan NIV Atlas of the Bible* (p. 85). Grand Rapids, MMI: Zondervan.