

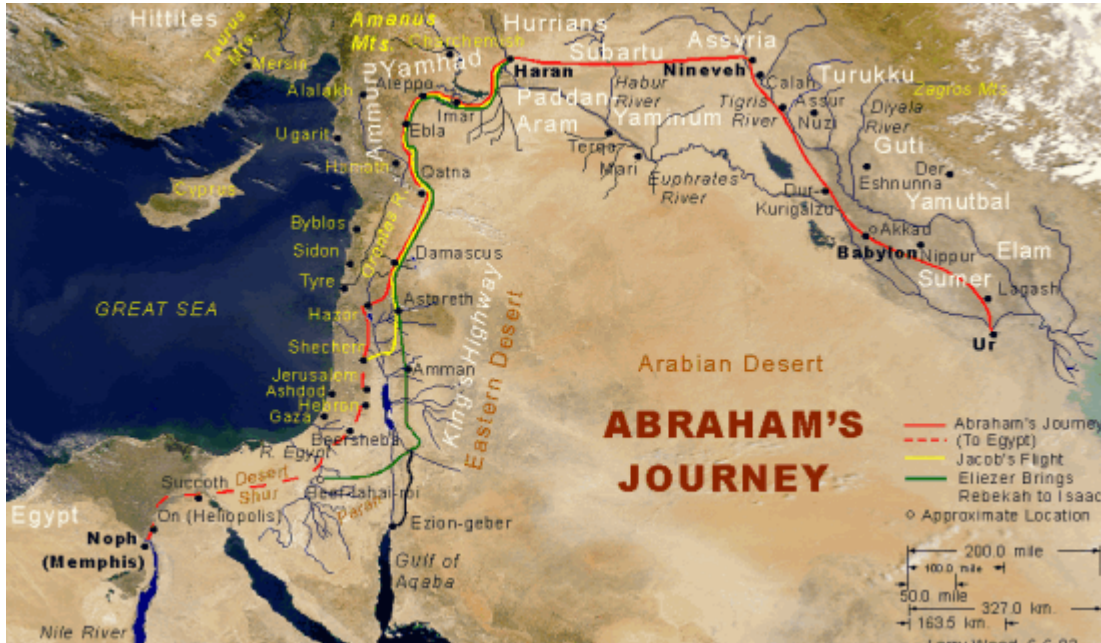
Genesis 11:10-Deuteronomy The Promise of God's Kingdom

Introduction

All of us have had our moments of confusion. You may have been on a journey to a meeting or a holiday destination and trying to follow the directions someone else has given you. They have exhorted you to relax as you cannot miss the place -by implication the directions they have given you will ensure that you cannot get lost! Most of us know from a fair number of past occasions that this is not necessarily the case. However, eventually we get our 'eureka' moments and find our way to our destination. This is all part of life's rich tapestry, but it can be intensely frustrating at the time. Likewise in the Old Testament, particularly in the earlier books we can lose our way in the midst of the details of, for example, many journeys in the wilderness in Numbers or forms of various sacrifices for particular sins in Leviticus, as well as the general challenge of stepping back into the cultures of a particular part of the world of several thousand years ago. The Bible contains a series of covenants that God makes with His people to assure us that He is still on course to carry out all that He has promised to do, despite our falling into sin and facing its consequences as a race. **The first covenant** was with **Noah** (Genesis 9) –a promise that despite human sinfulness God would never again destroy the world by a flood. The sign of that covenant was the rainbow. **The second covenant** was with **Abraham** - that God would raise up a special nation from his descendants and give them a land of their own and that He would bless the world through Abraham and his descendants. The sign of that covenant was circumcision (Genesis 17). **The third covenant** was with **Moses** (Exodus 19-20) and was given in association with the Moral Law, the Ten Commandments. Its sign was the Sabbath. One of the reasons for the exile of the Israelites to Babylon was the failure to honour God's day (II Chronicles 36:21). **The Fourth Covenant** was the **new covenant** (Jeremiah 31:33-34), prophesied in the Old Testament and fulfilled in Jesus (Luke 22:17-20). God has judged Israel for breaking the old covenants, but this new one is personal between each individual and God. Its benefits are appropriated through the once-for-all time sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. There is a progression with each of these covenants. The first is an assurance of the grace of God to undeserving sinners. The second reminds us of the sovereignty of God in salvation in His choice of Abraham. The third covenant was with a nation, but not exclusively so, and their relationship with God. The fourth is universal to people of every race and people group who come to faith in God through His beloved Son Jesus.

1. The Era of the Patriarchs (Genesis 11:10-50)

(a) **Abraham: God's Sovereign Call** (Genesis 12:1-3)¹*The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to **the land** I will show you.* ² *"I will make you into **a great nation** and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.* ³ *I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and **all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.**"*



The call to Abraham appears to have come also to his father and the extended family that lived together in Ur, a fabulous city on the coast of the Persian Gulf. It is now located many miles inland but then was a fabulous place to live that was as advanced and comfortable an environment as anywhere in the world. It appears that the extended family moved north and west to the last major urban centre of Haran in Syria. This town was the last outpost of civilisation before entering the territory occupied by nomadic peoples in what we call Lebanon, Jordan and Israel. We will never know how many of them came to a faith in God and left the worship of the moon god Sin that was dominant in Ur. Yet the downgrading of lifestyle they had experienced on the way to Haran and the much simpler lifestyle enjoyed in that trading town ensured that the majority of the family were not prepared to downgrade any further. The prospect of living the rest of their days in a tent in the desert after the luxury of a two-story comfortable home by the sea at Ur was too much for them. Genesis 12:1-3 is probably a repeat revelation to Abraham of what God intended him to do. Gen.12:1 is the huge challenge to leave behind his beloved country; then to leave the nation he loved with no prospect of a return and then the hardest part of all to leave behind the extended family that meant so much to him because they were not willing to accept God's call. It was a question of priorities for him then and us now. Where does the Lord come on the priority list? Abraham agreed to let these precious ties go. Was he the loser? No! In giving up a land God had another for him. At Shechem, north of present day Jerusalem, Genesis 12:7 reports: *The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him.* This promise was confirmed some time later in the vision recorded in Genesis 15:1-7: *After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."² But Abram said, "O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?"³ And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."⁴ Then the word of the Lord came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir."⁵ He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and*

count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."⁶ Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.⁷ He also said to him, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it." Promises of a land, a nation and a family with a bright future seemed a long way off to a couple who were unable to have children. In fact it was twenty five years after they had married before their son Isaac was born (Gen.12:4; 21:5); the hardest issue for Abraham was the timescale. What is more his descendants would need to leave the land and be absent for approximately 400 years before receiving the Promised Land as their inheritance (Genesis 15:13-15). How many of us live with disappointments concerning things we believe God has placed on our hearts? it may be even spheres of service in Christian ministry that have yet to open up? The message that comes from the life of Abraham and his family is one of patience. In God's time His purposes come to pass. God honoured the faith of Abraham twenty-five years after his call. Genesis 17:1-8: ¹ When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. ² I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." ³ Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴ "As for me, this is my covenant with you: **You will be the father of many nations.** ⁵ No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. ⁷ I will establish my covenant as an **everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants** after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. ⁸ **The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.**" What were the key blessings of this covenant? The blessing of Isaac; a change of name Abram (honoured father) to Abraham (father of many (descendants / nations); the guarantee of the land as *an everlasting possession* (Gen 17:8); (b) **Isaac: His Supernatural birth** Abraham and Sarah had wanted to help God out of a predicament. God had promised them children and as both of them had reached their 80s they decided it was time to have a 'Plan B' –a child by Hagar the servant girl (Genesis 16). God said No! I meant what I said –your child will come, but they had to wait another fourteen years to hold Isaac in their arms. The supreme test was given to Abraham when he was asked if he was willing to give up his one and only son as a sacrifice (Genesis 22). God did not demand this sacrifice, but approximately two thousand years later God gave His one and only Son for us (John 3:16). This extraordinary nature of his birth was the key point of Isaac's life, but he and Rebekah also had to wait twenty years for their promised heir – but they trusted God to provide –was that lesson learned on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22)? Twin sons Esau and Jacob were born, yet it was through the unpromising younger son that the promises of God to Abraham would be carried forward (Genesis 25:23). (c) **Jacob: God's Sacred Protection** His appalling treatment of his brother (Genesis 27) led him to leave the land, but God promised to bring him back to ensure the covenant remained secure (Genesis 28:15); He committed his life to God that day at Bethel (Genesis 28:20-21), and confirmed it many years later on his return to Bethel (Genesis 35:3), and God also reaffirmed that the covenant promises made to Abraham and Isaac were equally for Jacob and his descendants. ¹¹ And God said to him, "I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your body. ¹² The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and **I will give this land to your descendants after you.**"

Jacob, a most unpromising young man who deceived his father and stole from his family, yet who learned his lesson at the hands of his equally unpleasant uncle Laban. If God can work in the life of Jacob, He can certainly succeed in your life and mine. There are no hopeless cases in God's eyes. If you open your heart and life to Him He can transform your life and make it useful in His service for his glory and the benefit of other people. (d) **Joseph: His Special Work** In this dysfunctional family that contained two murderers (Simeon and Levi Genesis 34); and Judah, the black sheep of the family who in his earlier years rebelled against everything they stood for and led a sexually promiscuous life (Genesis 38); there was Joseph the eldest child of Jacob's favourite wife who got the best clothes and was spoiled rotten. His brothers sold him into slavery for a modest sum of money. He ended up out of sight in Egypt as the slave of Potiphar, chief executioner and head of security for the Pharaoh himself (Genesis 37). Amazingly after interpreting dreams for two fellow prisoners and Pharaoh himself (Genesis 40-41) Joseph went from rags to riches and became the Vizier (Prime Minister) of Egypt. Joseph organised the agricultural industry in Egypt to prepare for a seven year famine in that region which provided food for countless numbers of people in the region, including for his family who were invited to stay in Egypt by Pharaoh himself. God saved the lives of His covenant people, together with surrounding nations through this extraordinary work carried through by Joseph. In it all we see the providence of God in the most extraordinary of circumstances. The verse in the story is in Genesis 50:20 where Joseph tells his brothers that they had intended to harm him, but God used their evil plans to carry out His purposes. *You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*

2. Redemption from Egypt (Exodus)

(a) **The Exodus from Egypt** (Exodus chapters 1-18) Egyptian chronology BC is very complex, but approximately four centuries have passed during which Jacob's descendants had been treated well by the African dynasty that had ruled the country over those years, due to its policy of equal treatment for citizens regardless of their racial background. However, a new dynasty came to power that wanted a racially pure Egyptian state and the subjugation of all the minority ethnic groups to a state of slavery. It is doubtful if the 'Israelites' would ever have chosen to become a nation and leave their comfortable lifestyle in Egypt had this crisis not arisen. The suffering of the slaves was intense. Pharaoh passed a law demanding the killing of all Israelite boys. Many must have perished, but some survived including Moses whose mother had hidden in a reed basket alongside the Nile and who was rescued by a royal princess. He grew up in the royal palaces, received a full education and served in the Egyptian Army, apparently leading an army in a campaign against the Ethiopian Army that had been successful in previous battles over the Egyptians. Moses as general of the Egyptian army concluded a peace on favourable terms to the Pharaoh and married the daughter of the King of Ethiopia (Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book 2, chapter 9, section 2 to chapter 11 section 1). However, Moses was conscious of his Israelite ethnic origins and one day back in Egypt killed a high-ranking Egyptian official for ill-treating a slave. A warrant was put out for his arrest and he fled to the desert south of Egypt where he remained for the next forty years. While in the desert working as a shepherd God called him to bring this motley bunch of slaves out of

Egypt and lead them back to the Promised Land (Exodus 3-4). Moses (aged 80) was most reluctant and only agreed in the end if he could take his elder brother Aaron (aged 83) with him to speak to Pharaoh. The cruelty of the oppression intensified for the Israelites following Moses' request for their freedom. God sent ten plagues, which attacked the supposed power of the main Egyptian gods to persuade Pharaoh to let them go. The final plague was the death of the first-born. However, God told the Israelites to hold a special meal called a Passover, putting some of the lamb's blood on the doorposts of their homes so that the angel of death would spare their children. The death of Egyptian children, but not Israelite ones resulted in their extraordinary exodus from Egypt. This remarkable journey of possibly as many as 2.5 million people and their animals and other possessions was a defining symbol of the Israelite nation to this day. (b) The Giving of the Moral Law (Exodus chapters 19-24) The foundational principles for the new nation –the Ten Commandments- were given at Mount Horeb (Sinai), together with particular applications to that newly formed nation about how they should relate to one another and then how they should relate to God. (c) The Tabernacle (Exodus 25-40) The remaining chapters of Exodus cover the creation and erection of the Tabernacle (their place of worship), together with an account of their fall into idolatry worshipping a golden calf while Moses was meeting with God and receiving the Ten Commandments.

3. Worship the Lord in the beauty of Holiness (Leviticus)

The book of Leviticus is primarily concerned with the spiritual lives of the Israelites and how they should worship God. [picture of the Tabernacle] (a) How we should worship God (Leviticus chapters 1-16) (i) The Offerings (1-7) The first three offerings –the burnt, grain and fellowship (or peace) offering were voluntary. By contrast the last two, the sin and guilt offerings covered the commission of sin and the incurring of guilt. The whole burnt offering was a symbol of personal consecration to God. It was viewed by later Jewish followers of Jesus as a picture of Jesus' death on the cross. Paul in Ephesians told his readers in Eph. 5:2: *live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a **fragrant offering** and sacrifice to God.* In our language a person offering this sacrifice was saying God you can have all of me. Have you ever said that to God? **The grain offering** sometimes seen as a poor man's burnt offering was more likely an offering that was a means of saying thank you to God for blessings received. It was a sweet smelling aroma. Do you and I have times when we simply come to say thank you to God with no other agenda than to express appreciation? **The fellowship offering** was used to in a variety of ways in the Old Testament, including elements of thankfulness and rededication of a person's life to God. It was usually carried out in a social context and was followed by a meal. The shedding of blood denoted the seriousness of our relationship with God and fellow believers. It is not something we take for granted –but something precious and valuable. **The sin offering** is self evident with the sacrifice made so that *the priest will make atonement for them* (the worshipper) (Leviticus 4:20). This is an expensive offering for an ordinary person and symbolises the seriousness of sin and the cost of our redemption – how seriously do we take sin? **The guilt offering** is a warning to God's people not to make grace too cheap. It was a blood sacrifice like the sin offering, but sought to address any other violations of God's Law that might not have been

covered by the sin offering. Its intention was to cleanse the conscience of worshippers. Praise God for the blood of Jesus. I John 1:9: *9If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* (ii) **The Priesthood** (8-10) These chapters are a challenge to those leading acts of worship to ask for the cleansing of our sins and come with a right attitude to enter God's presence. These words were spoken specifically to the priests then but under the New Covenant these words are applicable to us all. I Peter 2:9: *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. We no longer need a priest as under the Old Covenant to pray on our behalf now by the power of the Spirit all of us can come directly to the Father in prayer (Ephesians 2:18) –praise God!* (iii) **Purification rites for the People** (11-15) holiness is not just for God's day –we are called to honour Him 24/7 –not just when with fellow believers –so the language on our lips and the attitudes in our hearts should be the same in principle wherever we are. (iv) **The Day of Atonement** (16) This is the most solemn day in the year when the high priest goes into the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the sins of the nation after first offering a sacrifice for his own sins. However, on this occasion an additional animal was taken not to be used as a sacrifice but as a living scapegoat over whom the sins of the people were confessed and then released into the desert away from the community as a visual symbol of the cost of human sinfulness. (b) **How we live holy lives** (Leviticus chapter 17-27) (i) **Rules for the people** (17-20) about a range of lifestyle issues in that cultural context (ii) **Rules for the priests** (21-22) that have similar moral boundaries (iii) **Rules for the observance of religious festivals** (23-24:9) here with reference to the major festivals of the Jewish faith (iv) **Rules for living and working in the Promised Land** (24:10-27) these would be applicable in the next generation when the Israelites crossed the River Jordan and entered the Promised Land.

4. Walking by Doubts and not by Faith (Numbers)

The book of Numbers at its heart is an account of the travels and a selective record of major incidents that occurred in the lives of the Israelite people who came out of Egypt and then of their children. The first section covers (a) **The Generation that came out of Egypt** (Numbers 1-14) the culmination of this section was the sending of the twelve spies to Canaan to gain the information required prior to a formal invasion. This work was done thoroughly and a full report was given to the nation. However, only two of the twelve, Caleb and Joshua, recommended proceeding as God had directed them. The rest of the spies, followed by the people, declined to honour God and obey His guidance. As a result every person who voted against entry would die in the wilderness. Of the national leaders only Caleb and Joshua would live to see that wonderful day thirty-eight years later. In effect the nation was hanging around waiting for the vast majority to die in the desert as a result of their unbelief. The next section (b) **Learning the Lessons of Spiritual Failure** (Numbers 15-20) contains some very sad information as the people struggled to admit they had sinned. A group of men defiantly challenged Moses and Aaron to stand down and let them take over the leadership of the nation. It was in effect a veiled attack on God. The fire of the Lord fell and consumed them and the nation got the message. The chapter of history of that first

generation was closing and a new one led by younger people was on the verge of beginning. The third section of the book describes events in the period prior to the entry to the Promised Land. (c) **The New Generation that went into the land** (Numbers 21-36) It was not straightforward. An attempt to undermine God's plan was devised by a Moabite king Balak who sought to hire a prophet Balaam, who believed in the one true God, to sabotage the entry of the Israelites into Canaan. It failed. The people were then challenged afresh to keep their eyes on God and His plans for their lives and not be sidetracked by the values of the majority culture around them. In every generation, although in different guises, the same challenge is presented. Will you and I be faithful to God or will we succumb to the secular and atheistic values so often promoted by the Government and in the media?

5. Preparing to enter the Promised Land (Deuteronomy)

The last book in this section of the Old Testament, Deuteronomy (the word means 'second law') comprises Moses' final sermon or sermons to the nation prior to his death and their entry into the Promised Land. It is a rehearsal and summary of information previously given, but serves as a reminder that God has not changed. His message must be presented clearly to each generation and a response be offered as we accept the gospel for ourselves. God has no grand-children! The first section is: (a) **Looking Backwards** (Deut. 1-11)

(i) **Review of the Way Since Sinai** (1-3) The people hearing this message did not make that journey or did so as young children. Moses concluded it by warning that because of disobedience hardly any of the adults who had left Egypt would enter the Promised Land. By implication they were warned not to make the same mistake and to follow the guidance of their new leader Joshua. (ii) **Review of the Law since Sinai** (4-11) God's work must be done God's way. The Ten Commandments were repeated and strict adherence commanded. In Deuteronomy 6:6—9 Moses spelt out clearly what this meant in practice: *These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.* God's Word had to dominate their whole worldview and those principles passed on to succeeding generations. As a parent or grandparent do you invest time in both honouring God in your own life and commending it to the younger members of your own family?

(b) **Looking Forward** (Deut. 12-34) The second part of the book turns to the future. It begins with: (i) **Final Instructions for life in Canaan** (12-30) these guidelines covered a wide range of aspects of their daily lives. It was a reminder that our faith is not just about what we do in church, but should influence every aspect of our lives. (ii) **The Closing events in Moses' life** (31-34) The greatest leader in the nation's history was soon to pass on to his eternal reward. Deut.34:10-12 are astonishing words: *Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face,¹¹ who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land.¹² For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.* The promised earthly kingdom would soon be on the verge of fulfilment. Remember God always keeps His promises. We serve a faithful God, Amen