

# ASSIGNMENT 1

## *The Patriarchs 1900-1700 B.C.*

The period of the patriarchs takes us back to northwest Mesopotamia, to Haran, where Abraham heard the voice of God and from which he left for a new land promised to him by God. Study of the background of ancient Mesopotamia might be revealing; in inscriptions of the second millennium B.C. the "Habiru" people appear as wanderers, donkey caravaneers, sometimes raiders on settled people, sometimes mercenaries — always "outsiders." Archaeology attests to movements of peoples; to disturbed times; to names of people and places which appear in the family names of Abraham's family; and to prevalent customs which appear among the patriarchal stories in the Bible.

Since this is the first period in the rise of a historical kingdom and of a moral and spiritual kingdom, the traits of the patriarchs are of interest (they were the "founding fathers"), and the glimpses of God which they found through questioning, listening, learning, are significant.

### *Readings*

Abraham .....	Genesis 11:27 to 25:10
Jacob .....	Genesis 25:19 to 35:20
Joseph .....	Genesis 37-50

### *Questions and topics for discussion*

- What traits are outstanding in each patriarch?
- How do these men compare in relationship to God and concepts of God?
- What fundamental concepts do the patriarchs establish for the moral and spiritual kingdom? (Note: God makes a *promise* of family and land (to bless all mankind) — how is this promise jeopardized and fulfilled during this early period? God makes a *covenant* with Abraham — renewed with Isaac and Jacob. Thus we have three important themes: *chosen people*; *promise from God*; *covenant relationship with God*.)
- From outside reading, what do you find about the Habiru or Khapiru people? early Mesopotamia? Hammurabi? the kingdom of Mari? the Nuzu (Nuzi) tablets? What light do these throw upon the Bible?
- What is the geography of the Middle East — do you know the Fertile Crescent? What were the great powers of the ancient Middle East?

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## NOTES

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## ASSIGNMENT 1 Continued

### NOTES

#### *The Exodus about 1300 B.C.*

The period of the Exodus is the one *most memorable, most central* in the historical traditions of the Bible people. Between the time of Joseph, when the family was hospitably received and allowed to settle in northeast Egypt (as others before and after them did in times of drought) and the time when Moses led the Children of Israel out of Egypt, the dynasty ruling that country had presumably changed, the capital, at any rate, was in the delta area, and Moses' people were slaves, working on cities for the pharaoh. The fact that an enslaved group were delivered out of oppression, beyond the pursuit of the oppressor, led through the wilderness, fed and sustained and protected, and finally welded into a "nation" through a covenant relationship with the mighty delivering Power, God, impressed these people and their descendants "forever." For this deliverance, they owed Him gratitude. For this covenant, they owed Him obedience.

The name for this God was Yahweh (Jehovah). He appeared to Moses at the burning bush, and in Exodus 6 we see the narrator linking Yahweh with the God of the Fathers (El Shaddai, God Almighty, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). The exodus period contributed much to the historical kingdom (shared experiences, institutions, such as the Decalogue, the judgeships, and the Passover Observance, and concepts of God) and to the moral and spiritual kingdom.

#### *Readings*

The situation in Egypt.....	Exodus 1, 2
Moses' Call .....	Exodus 3:1 to 6:13
The plagues.....	Exodus 7-11
The deliverance .....	Exodus 12:1 to 19:2
At Sinai	
a. Covenant .....	Exodus 19:3 to 24:18
b. Breach and renewal of covenant.....	Exodus 32-34
c. Desire for meat.....	Numbers 11:4-35
In Paran.....	Numbers 12; 13:1-3, 17-33; 14; 16; 17:1-10; 20:1-13; 21:4-9, 21-35
In Moab.....	Numbers 22-24; Deuteronomy 29-34

#### *Questions and topics for discussion*

- Who ruled Egypt when Joseph was prime minister? (What group of people?) Who ruled when the Children of Israel were enslaved and left in the Exodus?
- As the exodus period gave a nation its birth, what shared experiences, institutions, traditions were significant, and how?
- What traits are outstanding in Moses (from early actions, throughout)?
- Note two stories of the ratification of the Sinai Covenant (these represent two different traditions).
- May we call the Exodus a kind of kindergarten or elementary school for the people in their concept of God? Considering the events of Numbers 13 and 14, when they *could* have entered the Promised Land, would you "pass" or "fail" them? Why? It was because of their lack of trust in God that they now "wandered" in the wilderness (staying mainly at Kadesh-Barnea) until the older generation (who had "known Egypt") had died and a new generation was ready to go on to the Promised Land.