***Judaism- Origins***

***Timeline of Jewish History***

*Available online: NSW Jewish Board of Deputies*

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***Judaism- Origins***

***Covenant***

A covenant is a solemn and binding agreement between at least two parties. In this case, the covenant is the agreement that Abraham and his descendents will be the people of God, for all generations.

God promised Abraham as many descendents as there are stars in the sky and lots of land (modern day Iraq to the Mediterranean Sea).

Covenants, or binding agreements, often involve a sign to show the agreement has taken place. In this case it is circumcision, the removal of the foreskin of all males.

The beginning of a covenant often signals that a new life is being entered into (eg. The purchase of a house, a marriage etc). God also changes Abram and Sarai’s names to Abraham and Sarah, signifiying this new life. Naming is also significant in that the one who names holds dominion. Just as God gave Adam the power to name the animals in the second Creation story, so also does God name Abraham and Sarah, signifying that they are now people who belong to God.

***Abraham***

1. God calls Abram (Gn 12: 1-9)

*Significant points:*

* + - *God initiates contact*
		- *Offers Abram the two most precious things in the OT times: descendents and land*
		- *“leave your country, your kindred and your father’s house”. Father’s house is last because it is the most difficult to do (stresses importance of family)*
1. Abram receives the divine promises (Gn 15: 1-21)

*Significant points:*

* + - *Abram, despite receiving lavish gifts from God, considers them to be no use unless he has descendents to pass them on to*
		- *God promises Abram as many descendents as there are stars in the sky*
		- *God promises Abram the land from the “River of Egypt to the Great River… etc”. Although today the Promised Land = Israel, traditionally this meant from Iraq to the Mediterranean*
1. Ishmael (Gn 16: 1-15)

*Significant points:*

* + - *Abram and Sarai become concerned when Sarai still cannot conceive children*
		- *Sarai suggests her slavegirl Hagar as a potential barer of a child for Abram*
		- *Hagar conceives a child, Sarai gets jealous, treats hr badly, Hagar runs away*
		- *Hagar, too, is promised that many descendents will come from this offspring (Arabs and Islam)*
		- *Ishmael is born*
1. Covenant and Circumcision (Gn 17: 1-23)

*Significant points:*

* + - *God’s part of the agreement: make Abram father of many nations, give land*
		- *God then renames Abram (which means ‘exalted ancestor’), “Abraham” (which means ‘ancestor of a multitude’). God also names Sarai (meaning ‘my princess’), “Sarah” (meaning ‘princess’).*
		- *Naming is significant as it shows ‘dominion’. The one who names something has dominion over it. God is making Abraham ‘his person’. Abraham now belongs to God.*
		- *Abraham’s part of the agreement: that God will be his God and the God of his ancestors and that all males must be circumcised at eight days old*

*Therefore there are 4 parts to the covenant*

1. *Promise of a multitude of descendents*
2. *Promise of land*
3. *Name change- Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah*
4. *Physical sign: circumcision*
5. Promise of a legitimate son (Gn 18: 1-15)

*Significant points:*

* + - *Abraham and Sarah will bare a legitimate son despite their old age*
		- *Sarah finds this laughable*
		- *God chastises Sarah for laughing for “nothing is impossible for Yahweh”*
1. Birth of Isaac (Gn 21: 1-7)

*Significant points:*

* + - *Fulfillment of God’s promise in Gn 18*
		- *Named Isaac (meaning, “he laughs”, a reminder of Sarah’s laughing when God said she would conceive a son in her old age (cf. Gn 21:7)*
		- *Isaac circumcised as per covenant requires*
1. Hagar and Ishmael sent away (Gn 21: 8-20)

*Significant points:*

* + - *Now that Abraham has a legitimate son he wants him to inherit*
		- *Abraham sends Hagar and Ishmael away*
		- *God promises that nations will come from Ishmael as well (Arabs and Islam)*
1. Sacrifice of Isaac (Gn 22: 1-19)

*Significant points:*

* + - *It was common in Abraham’s time for people to sacrifice their children to gods*
		- *There are then two schools of thought regarding this passage:*
1. *That God was testing Abraham to see how seriously he regarded the covenant: did Abraham think so much of his relationship with God that he would be willing to sacrifice his long-awaited, precious, legitimate son? When God sees that Abraham is serious and does value the covenant he stops Abraham*
2. *That Abraham, influenced by the people of his time, thought that God would want this sacrifice of his only legitimate son. God, who of course values human life, stops the sacrifice and teaches Abraham about the value of human life.*
	* + *Either way, Jews believe that this story illustrates God’s abhorrence of human sacrifice and/or taking of human life (depending on the variant)*

***Isaac- son of Abraham***

1. Marries Rebekah (Gn 24: 62-67)
2. Esau and Jacob (Gn 25: 19-27)

*Significant points:*

* + - *Twins, Esau and Jacob (meaning “he takes by the heel”) fought from the time they were in the womb right through their childhood*
		- *Esau is a hunter, favoured by his father, Isaac. Jacob is more spiritually minded, favoured by his mother, Rebekah.*
		- *Esau is born first, therefore has the right to his father’s blessing and therefore inheritance*
1. Esau sells his birthright (Gn 25: 29-34)

*Significant points:*

* + - *Esau, having been out hunting is famished and thinks he is about to die of hunger.*
		- *Jacob has food but will only give it to Esau if he gives over his birthright (the right to inherit)*
		- *Esau agrees*
1. Isaac Blesses Jacob (Gn 27: 30-40)

*Significant points:*

* + - *Isaac’s sight is bad in his final years*
		- *Isaac sends Esau out to hunt, upon return Esau will prepare food for his father and then Isaac will give him his final blessing before he dies*
		- *Rebekah overhears and sends Jacob in, disguised as Esau, to receive the blessing from Isaac*
		- *Issac, although suspicious, offers the blessing to Jacob, hence making Esau subject to Jacob*

***Jacob- son of Isaac, grandson of Abraham***

1. Esau is furious with Jacob, Jacob escapes (Gn 27: 41-28: 4)
2. Jacob marries Leah and Rachel (Gn 29: 15-35)

*Significant points:*

* + - *Polygamy was customary in this time*
1. Jacob’s 12 Sons (Gn 30)

*Significant points:*

*Sons of Jacob (and meaning of names) are:*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *1. Reuben (“look, a son”)**2. Simeon (“one who hears”)**3. Levi (“being attached”)**4. Judah (“praise be to God)* | *5. Dan (“to vindicate”**6. Naphtali (“my struggle”)**7. Gad (“my good fortune”)**8. Asher (“happy”)* | *9. Issachar (“reward”)**10. Zebulun (“honour”)**11. Joseph (“May he add [to my family]”)**12. Benjamin (“son of my right hand”)* |

1. Jacob is named “Israel” (Gn 32: 22-32)

*Significant points:*

* + - *Jacob (perhaps in a dream, wrestles with an angel/God)*
		- *Angel/God renames (again, significance of naming) Jacob “Israel” (meaning, “one who strives/struggles with God)*
1. Joseph (Gn 37-46)

*Significant points:*

* + - *Most people know the story, perhaps as “Joseph and his Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat”*
		- *Joseph, favourite of father, Jacob. Therefore, Joseph despised by brothers*
		- *Joseph sold into slavery in Egypt by jealous brothers*
		- *Joseph earns his way out of slavery and into the service of Pharaoh as a dream interpreter*
		- *Joseph rises to power in Egypt*
		- *Meanwhile, Joseph’s family are experiencing a famine and come to Egypt for help*
		- *Joseph is the one to meet with them, he recognizes his brothers but the brothers do not recognize him*
		- *Joseph detains his youngest brother Benjamin, Jacob is bereaved at having now lost his two youngest sons*
		- *Judah comes to plead for Benjamin’s release as Jacob is suffering too much*
		- *Joseph gives in and reveals himself to his brothers*
		- *Jacob’s family comes to live in Egypt under the protection of Joseph*

This is the story of how the Israelites came to live in Egypt.

***Moses***

A new pharaoh rises up in Egypt who did not know Joseph and is concerned about the proliferation of the Israelites.

Pharaoh decides that the Israelites are becoming more powerful than the Egyptians so condemns them all to slavery. Also, to stop the Israelites from increasing in number, Pharaoh decrees that all male children of the Israelites should be killed.

Into this time and way of life, Moses is born.

1. Birth and Youth of Moses (Ex 2:1-5)

*Significant points:*

* + - *Moses born of Levite parents, mother hid him for 3 months until she could no longer guarantee his safety*
		- *Sent him down a river in a basket, Moses found my Pharaoh’s daughter*
		- *Moses’ sister Miriam, working for Pharaoh’s daughter, offers to find a Hebrew woman willing to nurse the child, takes Moses back to his mother*
		- *Moses taken back to Pharaoh’s daughter when he grew, taken as her son*
		- *Named Moses (meaning “to draw out”)*
1. Moses flees Egypt (Ex 2: 11-25)

*Significant points:*

* + - *Moses begins to understand the plight of his people*
		- *Kills an Egyptian beating one of the Hebrews*
		- *Moses, scared that Pharaoh will find out about the murder, flees to Midian, marries Zipporah and has a son, Gershom.*
1. Moses meets God (Ex 3-4)

*Significant points:*

* + - *Moses keeping sheep for his father-in-law on the mountain Horeb (otherwise known as Sinai)*
		- *God appears to Moses as a burning bush*
		- *Again, it is significant that God initiates contact*
		- *God tells Moses to remove his sandals for he stands on holy ground (mountains are very significant to Christians and Jews, they are where we ‘meet God’)*
		- *God shows concern for his people*
		- *God entrusts Moses with the task of addressing the plight of the Hebrew people with Pharaoh*
		- *The divine name is revealed (Ex 3: 13-14) as “I am who I am”. See* [*http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/rs/2/Judaism/name/*](http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/rs/2/Judaism/name/)
		- *God promises to bring the Israelites out of misery in Egypt*
		- *Moses, concerned about being taken seriously, asks for a sign, God turns Moses’ staff into a snake and gives it power*
		- *Moses enlists the help of his brother, Aaron, a more eloquent speaker*
1. The Plagues (Ex 7: 14- 10: 29)

*Significant points:*

* + - *Despite Moses and Aarons’ pleas, Pharaoh hardens his heart to the plight of the Israelites*
		- *The plagues begin:*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1. Water turned to blood
2. Frogs
3. Gnats
 | 1. Flies
2. Livestock Diseased
3. Boils
 | 1. Thunder and Hail
2. Locusts
3. Darkness
 |

1. The First Passover and Directions for Passover(Ex 12-13)

*Significant points:*

* + - *God says that this time (month) shall mark the beginning of all months (ie. Passover is Jewish New Year)*
		- *On the 10th of the month, take an unblemished lamb of appropriate size for family*
		- *Keep it until the 14th of the month then slaughter it at twilight*
		- *Take some blood and put it on the two doorposts*
		- *Eat the lamb, roasted over the fire, with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, letting none of the lamb remain*
		- *Israelites told to eat hurriedly and dressed, ready to go*
		- *God says he will pass through the land of Egypt, striking down the first born humans and animals but the blood on the doorpost will be a sign to keep the Israelites safe*
		- *“this shall be a day of rememberance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance” (Command to celebrate Passover- Ex 12: 14. Continues to 12: 20)*
		- *Pharaoh, devastated by the final plague, commands Moses and Aaron to take their people and be gone*
		- *They escape by way of the Red Sea (or Sea of Reeds), sea is parted by Moses’ staff, pursuing Egyptians killed, Israelites now in the wilderness but on way to ‘The Promised Land’ (link to Abraham)*
1. The Wilderness Wanderings (Ex 16-18)

*Significant points:*

* + - *This section of Exodus is characterized by the Israelites waning trust in God as times are tough in the desert*
		- *The pattern for stories in this section is: Israelites grumble at their hardship (usually to Moses), Moses doubts that he has done the right thing by leading them into the wilderness, calls upon God to help, God provides for his people*
		- *Stories include: Bread from Heaven (manna in the desert), Bitter Water Made Sweet, Water from a Rock*
		- *The key theme: God provides for his people*
1. Arrival at Mt Sinai (Ex 19)
2. The 10 Commandments (Ex 20)
3. Other Laws (Ex 21-30)