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123 The Patriarchal Dispensation

1. Introduction

The earliest chapters of the Bible reveal a time in which God provided mankind with guidance, instruction and the first laws. In this video we'll examine **The Patriarchal Dispensation**.

2. The Patriarchal period

The book of Genesis tells the story of how everything began including the earliest interactions between God and humans. A characteristic of this time is that God communicated to mankind verbally, through dreams and in other ways. As we read through the text we find that God acted in spiritual as well as physical ways to deliver His messages, blessings, warnings and judgments. In the beginning all of mankind knew God but as time went on humans began to pursue their own way and eventually forgot the Lord. This early period is significant due to the fact that certain principles were established that are still in effect today. The origins of morality and other important conventions for the good of society were set in place by God. Although many reject the Biblical explanations of the development of mankind during this period and propose other reasons for the development of moral laws the Bible provides valuable insights into the nature of man, God and the origin of the idea of right and wrong. An understanding of events that occurred during this time establishes a foundation that helps us understand the narrative and will later enable us to better understand God's plan to reconcile man.

We'll examine five characteristics of the Patriarchal period in depth including -

- a. Order & modeling
- b. The justice of God
- c. God's judgment
- d. The scope or extent of the knowledge of God in the family of man, and ...
- e. The duration of the Patriarchal period

3. Order & Modeling

Ancient creation myths view the universe as starting in a state of chaos. Some describe the beginning as a great chasm, a void, an egg and others tell of gods that fought each other creating the world and sky from the remains of those they conquered. Modern evolutionary thought isn't far from this except that scientists have sanitized the idea of creation by removing various deities, including God, replacing them with the forces of the natural world. We can also view ancient myths as a corrupted view of the Biblical account as it underwent changes made by the cultures that originated them. The common element in all of these accounts is that order somehow developed from disorder bringing about the universe as we know it. Some today haven't wanted to completely dismiss the idea of an all powerful being who created the universe and have devised the idea of theistic evolution. This view seeks to reconcile the biblical account with science. Theistic evolutionists interpret the Biblical account as accurate but change the six

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days recorded in Genesis to a corresponding number of ages spanning immense amounts of time. While this appears to be a good idea, theistic evolution denies the accuracy of the scriptures which creates problems with the credibility of the Bible. If we believe in God and His power then nothing is beyond His ability including creating a physical universe.

Taking a look at the account of creation we find that there's a progression from a nebulous void to order. We'll see that order was established during creation, and some things exist as laws based on the way God made them. These stand as models for life today. We'll cover these in the next few sections but let's start by taking a look at how order and modeling appear during creation. Summarizing the events of each day of creation will demonstrate these points:

a. **Genesis 1.1:** In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. In this simple statement the scriptures mark the beginning identifying God as the force behind creation. The phrase "*the heaven and the earth*" denotes defined space and earth as a tangible reality. In less than a dozen words we have a summary of time, space, matter and force represented by the presence of God as the one who brings them into being. Light is created on the first day and separated from darkness. God names the light day and the darkness night. (**Gen 1.3-5.**)

b. **Gen 1.6-8:** On the second day God creates a firmament, or expanse, separating waters above and below the Earth. God named the firmament "heaven" which we see as the sky and the expanse containing the stars.

c. **Gen 1.9-13:** On the third day God gathers the waters into one place and dry land appears. God calls the waters seas and creates grass, plants and trees.

d. **Gen 1.14-19:** On the fourth day God creates the sun and moon. These are to divide day from night and mark the change of seasons. An interesting note is that light was created on the first day but the sun, which gives light upon the Earth was not created until the fourth day. On this day God also created the stars placing them in the expanse of the heavens.

e. **Gen 1.20-23:** On the fifth day God created living creatures in the seas including whales and "*every winged fowl*".

f. **Gen 1.24-31:** On the sixth day, the final day of creation, God created land animals such as cattle, creeping things and "*every beast of the earth*". Finally God made man in his image as a living soul, an eternal being with the ability to reason.

Stepping back for a moment and reviewing the sequence of creation we find that God worked in a specific order. From the first to the sixth day there's a progression from general to specific. The world began with a lack of definition but over the course of six days we see refinement and a narrowing focus. Elements are created, then environments that will support the forms of life in each of them. As God works we can note the institution of natural laws such as

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the division of light and darkness, the separation of the atmosphere surrounding the earth from what we know as outer space, boundaries between land and seas and the implementation of the sun and moon marking time and the change of seasons. As these environments are completed and populated, mechanisms are set in place that will sustain and maintain them. God demonstrates design, purpose and engineering that works seamlessly. In this account there's no trial and error, everything is mature and God looks on what has been brought into being and let's us know that it was good.

In addition to the natural laws governing the elements God also creates the mechanisms for reproduction that will insure that what has been created will be renewed. Plants, animals and humans are blessed by God with the “*seed*” within them that will perpetuate what has been started by the Lord. Today we've identified laws of reproduction in the animal and plant kingdoms that work automatically that guarantee survival and continuation of the order put in place. These natural laws are evident in the world around us as we see the cycles of nature that sustain the world.

While animals have instincts, and plant life follows set cycles of growth, reproduction and maturation, they're unlike mankind in one respect. God created man in his image as a living soul. Humans have the ability to think, reason and act autonomously. It's at this point that we find the first instructions given to Adam and Eve as God places them in the Garden of Eden. Their instructions are simple. They're to dress and keep the garden, be fruitful and multiply replenishing the Earth and they could eat of any of the trees of the garden with one exception. God issues a single prohibition to not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We'll save a deeper discussion of this for a later time but for now we'll focus on the instructions and their importance.

From the beginning God follows a pattern in dealing with humanity. The Lord provides blessings, states conditions for maintaining these and identifies things that are not to be done. Negative consequences are identified for violations of what God has prohibited. These instructions constitute the first laws given to man and were conveyed in a verbal manner to Adam and Eve. As the narrative progresses we can also identify universal laws given to the family of man. These universal laws can be seen throughout the scriptures. A review of these provides a basis for understanding the judgment of God at various points in the scriptures.

The first of these universal laws is that of marriage. God created man and determined that it wasn't good for him to be alone (**Gen 2.18**). God then created a “*help meet*” for him in the creation of Eve. The pair were joined by God Himself. Christ confirms that this universal law, marriage, was in place in the first century as he answered questions about divorce. Christ states, “*Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*” (**Matt 19.4-6**). God's

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design was that one man should be joined to one woman in a lifelong relationship. The prophet Malachi rebuked the men of his day for abusing the marriage relationship by divorcing their wives and remarrying. The prophet stated they had dealt treacherously with the “*wife of thy youth*”. He then notes God’s attitude toward them stating, “*For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away*” (Mal 2.14-16). Abuses of marriage and wrong attitudes are the product of human thinking and aren’t in accordance with God’s design for life on Earth. The law of marriage stands as a universal law for all of mankind and hasn’t been changed since the beginning.

After the flood during the life of Noah God pronounces other laws that are to be observed by all people. A second universal law given to Noah and his family was that blood was not to be eaten since it was sanctified by the Lord and represents life (Gen 9.4). This will have more significance when we discuss the plan for redeeming man. A Third universal law given to Noah and his family was that of punishment for taking life (Gen 9.5-6). The consequence for taking life was severe and the penalty was to be carried out against animals who killed as well as humans.

Along with these laws is a universal condition in a promise from God that He would never again destroy the world through a flood (Gen 9.11-17). As a symbol of this promise God created the rainbow in the clouds as a reminder. Although these statements and directives weren’t recorded in writing at the time they were given they’ve been preserved by divine inspiration for all time.

In addition to the laws instituted by God there are other conventions the Lord set in place during this period as well. Like the universal laws that I’ve reviewed these also remain in place and will stand as long as the Earth remains. The first of these is that the world will continue following the natural order set in place in the beginning. As Noah and his family came out of the ark, the patriarch sacrificed to God. The Bible tells us that God recognized that “*the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth*” (Gen 8.21). In light of this God made another promise. “*While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.*” (Gen 8.22). This is a significant passage in the scriptures in which God declares that there will be four seasons as noted by “*seedtime and harvest*”, “*heat and cold*” and “*summer and winter*”. If we trust the word of God we can rest assured that such fears as global warming which will eradicate seasonal changes will not occur. Other passages in the scriptures tell us that we’re stewards of the Earth (Psalm 8) and therefore should act responsibly in caring for it. While the Earth will continue through the annual changes put in place its possible for man to act irresponsibly in caring for what the Lord has provided.

Another convention set in place by God following the flood is that animals could be eaten for food (Gen 9.3). Until this time the diet of man was from the plant world but now the Lord changes this. There are many in the world who consider eating animals to be immoral or

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unethical but the subject is addressed in the New Testament by the apostle Paul who speaks of an apostasy that would occur. One of the characteristics of this denial of scriptural truth is stated clearly in his writing to Timothy. Paul states that some would command others to “*abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.*” (1 Tim 4.3). We may choose to avoid eating animal products for health reasons but this isn’t a command of God. Thinking of this logically we may also include that adding animals to the diet of mankind would help maintain balance in the overall ecosystem.

A significant characteristic of the Patriarchal period is that of the practice of animal sacrifices. The scriptures don’t record a direct command from God to do this but we can conclude that it came from the Lord. Abel was accepted by God for sacrificing of his flocks. His brother Cain offered of the “*fruit of the ground*” (Gen 4.3). When Cain realized that God respected Abel’s sacrifice and not his he became angry. God informed Cain that he could do well also if he made different choices (Gen 4.6-7). In spite of God’s counsel, Cain’s solution was to kill his brother rather than do what was required. The reason for the sacrifices will become clearer in our discussion of the scheme of redemption but for now we’ll note that those who were faithful to God offered animal sacrifices. Some may regard this practice as inhumane and barbaric but there’s a greater purpose that will impact all of humanity.

Studying the accounts given in the book of Genesis we can establish methods for determining scriptural authority. There are three ways in which we can determine what God’s will is. The first and most obvious of these is a direct command. We see this in the Garden of Eden as God told Adam and Eve what to do and what to avoid. A second way of determining God’s commands is through examples of the actions of the faithful. Abel, Noah and Abraham offered animal sacrifices which provides such an example. We can also conclude that God ordered these sacrifices based on the information presented. This is referred to as a necessary inference, a conclusion that must be drawn based on the scriptural information. These methods can be used throughout the Bible to help us understand the will of the Lord.

4. Justice

As I noted earlier, there isn’t a formal written law during the Patriarchal dispensation. But that’s not to say that a law didn’t exist, or that humans were able to make laws for themselves. God’s instructions to Adam and Eve in essence constitute the first laws. God’s instructions have the characteristics of law as we examine them closely. First, laws are made by a governing authority that has the ability to create, implement and enforce them. Secondly, laws specify what should be done, how they’re to be done, limits or statements of what should not be done and consequences for breaking them. Laws would be meaningless if the governing authority that issued them either failed to enforce them or lacked the ability to impose sanctions. We also realize that laws must be fair and applied without prejudice. The justice of God meets all

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of these as we take a look at the events that transpire in Genesis 1 through 3. First let's summarize the characteristics of law.

a. **Authority:** There must be a governing authority who has the ability and right to make laws, enforce them and impose sanctions.

b. **Definitions:** Statements of what should be done and how they should be done should be stated clearly. A statement of limits or what is not to be done will also be Identified.

c. **Sanctions:** A defining characteristic of law is that the governing authority has the ability to impose sanctions thus enforcing the law. Without sanctions a law would be meaningless.

Now let's look at the Genesis account:

a. **Authority:**

God is established as the governing authority as shown in statements recorded as God speaks to Adam and Eve. The two passages listed here clearly show that God was the authority and as such has the ability and right to issue commands.

1. **Gen 1.26** - God said unto them...
2. **Gen 2.16** - And the Lord God commanded

b. **Definitions:**

God's instructions were clearly stated and contained benefits for keeping them. The Lord also defines what should not be done. The following passages confirm this point.

1. **Gen 1.28** - Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it
2. **Gen 2.15** - the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it
3. **Gen 1.30** - Given every green herb for meat
4. **Gen 2.16** - Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:
5. **Gen 2.17** - But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it
6. **Gen 3.3** - But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it.

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c. Sanctions:

Finally, God defines a negative sanction for violating his commands.

1. **Gen 2.17** - in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

God's instructions were clear and simply stated. The directives on what to do and not do were clear. Adam and Eve made the decision to violate God's instructions. As a result of their choices God imposed the negative consequences He warned them about. Right and wrong were defined by the Lord's statements to the couple and there wasn't any excuse for violating them. The sanctions imposed by God were fair as the Lord did exactly what he stated He would do. Today we understand justice to mean that law is upheld and fairly enforced. This is precisely what took place in this instance.

I mentioned the story of Cain and Abel earlier and we can return to it now to see God's justice in this case. Let's use the methods for determining scriptural authority and apply the principles from our discussion of law above.

- a. By example and inference we conclude that God commanded an animal sacrifice
- b. Offering something other than what was commanded would be rejected

Now let's review the story of Cain and Abel

- a. Both brothers brought offerings (**actions**)
- b. God had commanded animal sacrifices (**necessary inference**)
- c. Abel brought an animal sacrifice (**example**)
- d. Cain offered the fruits of his harvest (**violation**)
- e. Abel's sacrifice was accepted (**blessing**)
- f. Cain's sacrifice wasn't respected - (**sanction**)
- g. God spoke to Cain and told him he also could be accepted and warned him of sin if he didn't master what he was feeling (**instruction / command**)

When Cain chose to violate God's command, the Lord rejected his sacrifice. God demonstrates an effort to encourage Cain to do what was right in order to be acceptable. The story of Cain and Abel demonstrates that we have a choice that will determine whether we're acceptable in the sight of God. As with Cain, God continues to speak through his word calling us to remember his commands, do what is right, live well and have the hope of a home with Him.

5. Judgment

As I mentioned earlier, laws are meaningless without the governing authority's enforcement of them. A study of various stories in the Bible demonstrates that the judgment of

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God is righteous and consistent with His commands. God's judgment contains both blessings and negative consequences. The patriarchal period that we're discussing provides insights that can help us begin to understand the judgment of the Lord. Following are examples from some of the more familiar stories from this period.

Adam and Eve were the first humans created and God's commands were few and simple. The couple was presented with a home, meaningful activities and enjoyment within the context of a personal relationship with the Lord. God issued blessings, stated conditions under which these would continue, and detailed consequences for violating the single prohibition they were given. God didn't force them to do as he commanded giving them freedom to choose. There was nothing lost in observing God's instructions and nothing to be gained in violating them that would make their life better. A summary of God's commands and the events that took place will demonstrate this point.

God's instructions to Adam and Eve were to

- a. Dress and keep the garden
- b. Be fruitful, multiply, replenish the Earth and subdue it
- c. They could eat of every tree of the garden and every green herb or plant
- d. They were prohibited from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and
- e. God stated they would die if they violated this one limitation

God's right to issue these commands lies in the fact that He created them. The commands given were for their benefit and the consequences were clear as well. God's blessings would continue if the commands given were observed. Let's look at the process that led the couple to violate these instructions.

Satan appeared to Eve in the form of a serpent and asked a simple question, "***...hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?***" (Gen 3.1). Satan apparently knew God's command and was testing Eve's knowledge. She correctly replied that they weren't to eat or even touch the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The Devil then presents a half truth and a lie. He stated, "***Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.***" (Gen 3.4-5). Let's take a closer look at these statements.

Two things are suggested in the Devil's statement to Eve. First, he implies they wouldn't suffer a negative consequence by violating the command which is a half truth. God had told them they would die but didn't provide detail about how this would occur. Satan's declaration misrepresented what God's had said. Secondly, Satan implies that God is holding them back from becoming gods themselves and feared what they would become. This suggestion proposed that they had been restricted unfairly. Eve then looked at the fruit and

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concluded it was good for food, looked appealing and could make one wise. Ignoring God's command she ate the fruit and gave it to Adam as well.

When confronted about what they had done Adam and Eve both made excuses for why they acted as they did. Adam blames Eve who in turn blames the serpent. God then imposes sanctions for their actions as he told them he would. Since the relationship was damaged, and the couple could no longer be in God's presence, there are other changes made as well. Let's summarize these.

- a. **Gen 3.16** - Speaking to Eve God stated
 - 1. Her conception and sorrow would be increased as she brought forth children
 - 2. Her desire was to be directed toward her husband
 - 3. Adam was to have the rule over her

- b. **Gen 3.17-19** - Speaking to Adam God stated
 - 1. A curse was placed on the ground which would produce thorns and thistles
 - 2. Adam would eat of the herb of the field in the sweat of his brow
 - 3. He would die and return to the dust from he had been made

- c. **Gen 3.14-15** - Speaking to the serpent God stated
 - 1. It was cursed above all cattle and beasts of the field
 - 2. He would now move on his belly
 - 3. Enmity was placed between the seed of the woman and the serpent

Now that we've summarized these let's talk about them briefly. At this point I'll note that some of the things stated by God have to do with His overall plan to save all of mankind. We'll cover some of these things in more detail when we discuss the scheme of redemption. The sanctions imposed by God also accompany changes in the living situation of Adam and Eve which would affect all of mankind.

Consequences given to Eve reflect changes made by the Lord that affect all women. God stated He would multiply her conception and she would bring forth children in sorrow. This includes the pain of childbirth but it may entail more than that. It could also be that as children came into the world Eve would remember what had been lost and why it happened. God also defines her relationship with Adam more specifically as well. Eve was to direct her desires toward Adam and he would rule over her. I'll have more to say about that in a moment but these conditions further specify that marriage is a monogamous relationship between a man and a woman. These conditions exclude homosexuality, divorce or multiple partners.

I have to add a note about these changes as there are some listening to this who really don't like what they're hearing. In our world those who teach and practice these things are regarded as ignorant, repressive and archaic. Following God's instructions for marriage, or

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anything else isn't a reflection of ignorance. As the scriptures tell us, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. This is also not repressive. God hasn't set the husband in a position of just being a boss who can treat his wife any way he pleases. We see this all too many times. The marriage relationship that conforms to God's pattern is a partnership with the wife respecting her husband and working with him to build a home. Husbands are told to love their wives as their own selves and to do this as Christ also loved the church and gave his life for it. Some men have turned the idea of being the head of the household into a dictatorship that's restrictive and abusive. There's no place for these attitudes in a godly home.

Conditions imposed on Adam were just as severe. Eve had been fooled by the Devil while Adam apparently knew exactly what he was doing. As God voices his judgment he lets Adam know that providing for his family will not be easy. He will have to labor for what he gets and will one day return to the ground. No doubt Adam would be aware of the nature of what he has done as life moves from day to day and he begins to age.

God's judgment against the serpent is significant and we'll cover it in more depth later. Many regard the account of Satan taking the form of a serpent and speaking to Eve as a myth. There are elements at work that will become prominent figures in the future demonstrating that this event took place as recorded. We have to note that the serpent wasn't Satan. The Devil simply took the form of a serpent. God used this to provide a glimpse into the future and to leave a reminder. First is that the serpent was cursed above all cattle and beasts of the field. In the world today there remains a fear and dislike for snakes in the majority of the population. Second the serpent was told that he would move on his belly eating dust. While this appears to be a myth its supported by the discovery of protrusions in some snakes that appear to be the remnant of legs. God supplied us with a tangible reminder of the reality of this account.

The last statement made to the serpent by God was not to the animal but to the spiritual entity hiding behind the disguise. There was to be enmity, or hatred between the seed of the serpent and the woman. At some point in the future the serpent would be able to inflict a wound on the seed of the woman by bruising his heel. The seed of the woman however would bruise the head of the serpent which is a crushing blow ending in death. These statements are spiritual in nature and have to do with Christ and redemption..

Another change made by God was that of Adam and Eve's physical state. Until this time they had been naked and weren't ashamed. Once guilt became a reality they felt the need to cover themselves making aprons from fig leaves. The mercy and love of God for mankind in spite of their transgression can be seen in what the Lord does for them. God takes animal skins and makes coats for them. They were no longer to remain naked which has spiritual as well physical and moral lessons that can be learned. The end result is that life was completely transformed by their sin. The judgment of God was fair, impartial and consistent with what he stated he would do.

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The same principles can be seen in God's judgment against Cain. While negative sanctions were imposed the Lord demonstrated mercy in that He didn't take Cain's life. As the narrative progresses we see a growing trend toward violence that escalated until the Lord determined to destroy all flesh through the flood.

The antediluvian world was filled with violence and mankind had become corrupt (**Gen 6.5-6, 11**). In the Lord's judgment we once more find that God is merciful and communicated His plan to destroy the world by a flood to Noah who is described as a "**just man**" who walked with God (**Gen 6.8-9**). Noah was given the means to save himself and his family by building an ark that would preserve them from the destruction. Once more we see that while God acted against evil He preserved the faithful who walked with Him.

After the flood mankind again began to reject the guidance of God. The Lord promised that He would never again destroy the world with a flood but during this period we have examples of God's judgment against evil. One of these is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah who had become evil to the extent that the Lord determined to destroy them. Abraham was faithful to God and when the Lord revealed his intent to destroy the evil of these cities the patriarch intervened. God agreed that if ten righteous could be found within them he would spare them (**Gen 18.23-32**). This instance once more shows that God is willing to spare even the wicked and avert his judgment if there's the possibility that they might repent. The scriptures reveal that these couldn't be found and God destroyed the cities and their evil.

Notable in this event is mercy that is shown to Abraham's nephew Lot who had made his home in Sodom. The scriptures reveal that God remembered Abraham (**Gen 19.29**) and sent Lot and his family out of the city. As Lot, his wife and his daughters fled they were given instructions not to look back as the cities were destroyed. Lot's wife however failed to obey this and was turned to a pillar of salt (**Gen 19.26**). God had extended mercy to Lot and his family by saving them. Simple instructions were given that they weren't to attempt to view the destruction. Lot's wife chose to violate this and suffered the consequences for her actions. Throughout the scriptures we see a pattern repeating. God provides blessings, states instructions to continue these and consequences for disobedience. When these aren't followed God implements his judgment in accordance with His word. Patriarchs who follow God's instructions are described as faithful while those who ignore these directives suffer the negative consequences for their choices. The faithful today are characterized by obedience to God's commands the same as those in the beginning.

Some today reject the validity of the scriptures when God's people are told to destroy other nations? A closer examination of the circumstances will shed some light on this when we discuss the Mosaic period. During the Patriarchal dispensation God at times acted directly against evil when cultures or people became corrupt and digressed into practices that are destructive and ungodly. Later we'll discuss God's judgment and how this is brought about.

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6. Scope

The image of God in the Old Testament is viewed by some as a reflection of a brutal and warlike deity whose followers slaughter in the name of their selfish interests. A spiritual study of the scriptures reveals that God has been patient with all people, has established principles of order and good that must not be violated and doesn't order destruction without cause. A popular view of the scriptures is that they're the product of the Hebrew culture and reflects their ideas of morality and nationalism. This idea doesn't take into account the sovereignty of God as creator and misses the underlying spiritual realities of the narrative. The patriarchal period as recorded shows us that the knowledge of God is not restricted to the Hebrews. A review of the scope or extent of the knowledge of God by others will help us see this more clearly.

Some view the Bible as a product of the Hebrew culture fabricated during the Babylonian exile to explain the catastrophe that overtook them. On the surface that seems to be a good explanation but as we examine the scriptures in depth we find this isn't the case. The patriarchal period displays a window on a time in which there were no Hebrews. The nation of Israel didn't exist, and God had dealings with all of mankind. A transition takes place later that we'll talk about but in the beginning things were quite different. How do we know that a knowledge of God was present throughout the world? If we survey Genesis and Numbers in particular we'll find that knowledge of God was present in other cultures. Let's take a look at what the scriptures reveal.

a. **Abraham:** Abram, later renamed Abraham by God, was the father of the Hebrews but his origin is interesting. Abram was Chaldean as can be seen in the account of God calling him to leave his home and family (**Gen 11.31 - 12.1**). Separated by the Lord, his family developed a culture that eventually became the nation of Israel but the roots of the nation are Chaldean as I mentioned. Interesting to note is that Abraham knew who God was and was faithful to the Lord while his family worshiped idols.

b. **Melchizedek:** One of the most interesting figures that appears in the book of Genesis is a priest of the most high God who blessed Abraham after rescuing Lot following the battle of the kings (**Gen 14.18-20**). Melchizedek received tithes from the patriarch and blessed Abraham. These blessings were consistent with the promises God had made to Abraham. Melchizedek is described as the king of Salem as well as being a priest. We'll return to Melchizedek in a later lesson as his appearance in the scriptures is significant. For now we'll note that Salem, or Jebus was a Jebusite city and later described as idolatrous. Salem, or Jebus will later be known as Jerusalem.

c. **Balaam:** Balaam of Mesopotamia is one of the notorious characters of the Bible. He apparently had a knowledge of God (**Num 22.2-8**) as we see in his summons by Balak the king of Moab. Balaam apparently gives lip service to faithfulness to God while hiding his desire to curse the children of Israel for the money Balak offered him. God spoke to the prophet (**Num 22.9-12**)

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and later sent an angel to block his path (**Num 22.22-34**). Eventually the faithless prophet was only permitted to speak what God allowed him to say (**Num 22.35**). Instead of cursing the children of Israel, he blessed them which angered Balak. Balaam displays his character as he comes up with a plan to seduce the children of Israel to worship idols and commit fornication in an attempt to corrupt the people of God. Balaam was destroyed as well as 23,000 who gave in to these temptations. He's mentioned in the New Testament as one who was greedy of reward and willing to compromise his integrity (**Num 31.8,16, 2 Pet 2.15, Jude 11, 1 Cor 10.8**). The significant point is that he lived in Mesopotamia, a region outside of Palestine, and yet he knew who God was. Another interesting point is that this was over 400 years after the family of Abraham was separated as God's people proving that an awareness of the Lord wasn't restricted to the Hebrews and had survived in other areas.

So far these examples provide valuable insights but there's another source that gives us a closer view of life during the Patriarchal period. If you notice the chart that I presented in the video on Biblical history you'll find that there's one book missing from the diagram. That wasn't an oversight. One book was reserved and we'll add it now as it has information that will enlighten us about the Patriarchs.

The book of Job is unique in the Bible when compared to the other volumes. The author of the book isn't certain although some ascribe this to Moses while others suggest it may have been written by Samuel. Regardless of who the author is Job presents valuable information about life in the Patriarchal period.

The time period of the book is very early. I place this sometime after the flood and possibly up to the time of Abraham. These conclusions are based on the fact that the Law of Moses isn't mentioned nor are the Hebrews, Israel or any of the tribes. Absent from the book is any reference to the Patriarchs descended from Abraham, including Esau or Edom. This isn't an in-depth study of the book of Job and the following points are offered only to support the conclusion that events recorded in the book occur during the Patriarchal period.

- a. Job lives in the land of Uz. Without going into a lot of discussion for the sake of time, this may be an area inhabited by Uz who was a descendant of Shem.
- b. Job's friends also come from areas that have very old names that appear to predate the family of Abraham, particularly his great grandson Esau or Edom.
- c. Job is concerned about the welfare of his family in a spiritual sense and fears they may have done something to anger God. He offers sacrifices for his sons and daughters for this reason reflecting the attitude of a patriarch responsible for his family's spiritual health.
- d. Throughout the book Job and his friends indicate they've received instruction from

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God through dreams, visions and audible voices. This is consistent with the Patriarchal dispensation as God dealt directly with the respective heads of households.

e. Concerns are raised in the book about being punished by God. There are references that seem to point back to the flood and fears of judgment. Older generations are called upon as evidence of God's actions serving as warnings. This is consistent as well with the way of life in the patriarchal period.

f. The end of the book presents God's appearance to Job and his friends in a whirlwind as He speaks with the patriarch. This is consistent with other Patriarchs who were addressed by God. Only during the patriarchal period did this type of communication take place with the exception of God's appearance at mount Sinai when the Law was given to Moses which we'll discuss later.

There are other indications in the book of Job that these events occurred during the patriarchal period but those noted here demonstrate a knowledge of God outside the realm of the Hebrews. Based on this information we can conclude that the Bible is inspired and records more than just a history of the children of Israel.

7. Duration of the Patriarchal period

As we read the Bible it appears that when Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt the Patriarchal dispensation comes to an end. This seems to be a logical conclusion based on the fact that nothing else is stated about heads of households from other nations. The entire narrative changes as Abraham is replaced by the story of Isaac and later Jacob. Jacob's exploits take up a good bit of the Genesis account and leads us to the story of Joseph who saves his family and Egypt by the providence of God. That fades into the account of Moses who leads the people out of bondage under God's guidance and brings them to Sinai where they're given a law, and made a nation. So what about other people in the world? Does God just forget them? Is the Bible a product of the Hebrew culture and therefore doesn't concern itself with those outside of Israel?

The answer to these questions is no. But when discussing the duration of the Patriarchal dispensation and other nations' relationship with God the answer lies in a careful study of the entire narrative. In this study I'll review part of the answer and the rest will be presented when we review God's plan to redeem mankind. There are a few considerations to keep in mind.

The Law of Moses didn't remove the laws or principles put in place by God during the Patriarchal period. Hebrew patriarchs are still responsible for the spiritual leadership of their families but they now have a law to follow that is far more specific.

Sacrifices are offered under the law of Moses but there's more detail about them that we'll cover later. The ultimate purpose of the sacrifices as we'll discover later doesn't change.

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The sacrifices are critical elements that link mankind with God over all time as we'll see.

The universal laws mentioned earlier not only don't change but are clearly stated as part of the Law of Moses. Laws such as marriage, the sanctity of blood and prohibitions against murder are clearly defined as well as many more.

Other similarities exist as well that we'll cover when we review the Mosaic dispensation. These are only a few of the considerations that show us that God really didn't change. The Lord essentially remains the same and extends identical requirements to the nation of Israel that existed before. The additions as we'll talk about later, have more to do with what follows which will become clearer as the study progresses.

The separation of the Hebrews as "*God's chosen people*" had a specific purpose that would benefit all people. This was part of the promise to Abraham, that through him all nations would be blessed. When God called Abraham to leave his home it was obvious that the majority of the world was turning away from God. For that reason God selected Abraham because of his faithfulness and would later fulfill his promise to bless all nations. Those outside this family, or gentiles as we know them, may not appear in the narrative as a focal point but that didn't exclude them from being held accountable by God to the moral or universal laws and other directives that were given. We don't have extensive detail on what the patriarchs knew but books such as Job tell us that God revealed himself, was rejected by most people but continued to hold all of mankind accountable. So, while it seems that the Patriarchal dispensation ends with the Law of Moses a more accurate way of looking at it is to consider it as existing parallel to the Law. This may seem confusing right now but when we review the Christian dispensation and later God's plan to redeem mankind we'll examine passages that provide us with the final part of our answer.

8. Next

In the next video we'll take a look at **The Mosaic Dispensation**. We'll examine transitions that take place during this period, how the Biblical narrative refines its focus and how the character of God really doesn't change.