

Mission (Im)possible? FINDING NEW LIFE IN OLD SONGS 1

## The Mission of the People of God

### The story of Abraham

Sagas: Legendary narrative about an ancestor or community figure. Explores human experience.

These stories are not told to give historical background so much as to answer questions of IDENTITY.

We 'we' are captured in these stories about our ancestors.

Draws on ancient stories, but the final (canonical) form was shaped during the Exile. This means that it has long and rich theological reflection and experience of the life of faith woven into its telling.

### Background: The Stories of Origins

Symbolic narratives that speak of how the world as we know it came to be. Do not read them as primitive science, but as profound reflections on life and experience. Answer questions like: What is God like? What does it mean to be human? What is our place in the world? Explains 'brokenness' of our experience.

Creation and Original Blessing: Genesis 1

"God saw that it was good." (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31).

"God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth ...."

Re-creation after the Flood: "God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth." (Gen 9:1)

Tower of Babel: Genesis 11:1-9

*Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. <sup>2</sup>And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. <sup>3</sup>And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. <sup>4</sup>Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." <sup>5</sup>The LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. <sup>6</sup>And the LORD said, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. <sup>7</sup>Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech." <sup>8</sup>So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. <sup>9</sup>Therefore it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.*

- Beginning: United, but a uniformity of rebellion.
- Hubris: make a name for ourselves
- Fear and rebellion: "lest we be scattered"
- Ending: Scattered and fragmented.

### The call of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-4a)

- response to crisis of Babel
- continuation of original mission

*Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup>I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." <sup>4</sup>So Abram went, as the LORD had told him ...*

- Opposite of city builders: Go ... to the land I will show you; God will give a great name.
- Continuation of creation story: great nation; blessing
- Blessed in order to be a blessing

- Beginning of response to crisis of humanity: All the families of the earth are the ultimate focus.

### The covenant with Abraham:

(Genesis 17:1-8) *When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. <sup>2</sup>And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." <sup>3</sup>Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, <sup>4</sup>"As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. <sup>5</sup>No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. <sup>6</sup>I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. <sup>7</sup>I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. <sup>8</sup>And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God."*

(Genesis 18:17-19) <sup>17</sup>*The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, <sup>18</sup>seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? <sup>19</sup>No, for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; so that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."*

- Land
- Descendants
- Blessing
- "I will be your God and you will be my people"
- Obligation:
  - Circumcision as sign of covenant
  - Teaching children after them

What does this say of God's mission through the Church today?

- Blessed in order to be a blessing
- Moving outwards
- Passing on faith to the children
- Result: unity in diversity
- .....

### **God's Mission Through the Church**

*"You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* (Acts 1:8)

Pentecost (Acts 2): Gathered in one place; different languages but everyone understands.

*"Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him."* (Acts 2:38-40)

### The temptation to 'stay put'.

(Acts 8:1-4) *That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria. <sup>2</sup>Devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him. <sup>3</sup>But Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison. <sup>4</sup>Now those who were scattered went from place to place, proclaiming the word.*