



Genesis 17 v 1-13

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.

A Reflection by Revd Canon David Durston Some people never read the Book of Genesis. That's a shame. It is a wonderful book full of great stories, stories that people have told again and again over the centuries, gathered around the fire in the winter, or over a refreshing drink in the evening of a hot summer day. And now the stories have been written down and printed for us to read in the comfort of our own homes.

These stories are told in a way that helps us to learn about God. From the stories we learn what God is like and how God works in this world that He has given to us.

How can we get the best out of these stories? People who belong to Book Clubs meet each month, and they read each book in a month. They usually read several chapters at a time. Do the same with the Book of Genesis, say four to six chapters each time you sit down to read. There are fairly natural breaks after chapters 5, 11, 15, 20, 24, 27, 32, 36, 40 & 45. Read it in a language that is natural to you, a translation that has been made in your lifetime.

In the same weekly mailing from Harnham churches as you received this you will find a little leaflet called "Introducing the Book of Genesis". You may find it helpful to read that leaflet first. It may explain things that are otherwise puzzling. It will help you to see where there are natural breaks between the stories.

Lent starts on 17 February, a month today. Let Genesis be your Book of this Month...

*It is interesting to note that in Genesis there are a diverse range of prayers recorded- five blessings, five petitions, two intercessions, two vows and one thanksgiving, a lament and a curse! It's also interesting to note who prays and for whom- from female slaves and bereft mothers to God, fathers for their children, a lost brother for protection, prayers for kings and blessings by angels. (Examples in Genesis 4 v 26, 9 v 25-27, 14 v 19-20, 21 v 16, 28 v 20-22, 32 v 9-12)*

*So I chose short arrow prayers to share today as well as some of the names of God linked to the prayers in Genesis. Revd Becky*

**Save Me! Bless Me! I cry to You! Guide Me! Bless my family!  
God my Shepherd. God of my ancestors. God Remembers me. My God hears.**

### **HYMN REFLECTION FOR JANUARY 17<sup>th</sup> MS**

Today's service is one of a series based on the Old Testament. There are some Christian hymns based on Old Testament texts, like Wesley's beautiful *Come, O thou traveller unknown*, based on Genesis XXXII, vv. 22ff. But our hymn today actually is an ancient Jewish hymn, which has been Christianised by at least two later authors. Most hymn books will tell you *The God of Abraham praise* was written by Thomas Olivers, who was working with Wesley at the time he wrote it, "based on the Hebrew Yigdal". It is invariably sung to the tune *Leoni*, "a Hebrew melody notated" by the same Thomas Olivers (1725 - 1799), who heard Cantor Myer Lyon sing it in the Great Synagogue in London in 1772. (There is another completely different hymn based on the Yigdal, beginning "Praise to the living God").

This hymn merits a huge amount of study. For a start, should it be the God of Abraham or the God of Abram? Both appear in print. The Yigdal is a Jewish hymn often sung at the beginning of morning prayer or the end of evening prayer on Shabbat. It consists of 13 principles of faith compiled by Maimonides, or Moshe ben Maimon (1135-1204), who of course lived in the Christian era. When it is sung antiphonally the last bit is repeated. Olivers wrote thirteen verses, and we cannot possibly reproduce them all, so I will quote from four.

For example, the sixth principle is headed "Revelation through God's prophets". A non-metric translation of the Yigdal says, "The flow of his prophetic spirit he has imparted to men selected for his glory." The next bit is specifically about Moses. One of Olivers' verses reads:

**Though nature's strength decay,  
And earth and hell withstand,  
To Canaan's bounds we urge our way  
At his command:  
The watery deep we pass,  
With Jesus in our view;  
And through the howling wilderness  
Our way pursue.**

It is possible to trace links and connections all the way through. One of Olivers' friends attached a Biblical reference to every line of the thirteen verses.

The hymnologist Eric Routley once wrote a paper discussing which hymn(s) gave us the best match between words and tune. In any such discussion, today's hymn must surely be on the short list. It fits like a glove. The kids at school used to love singing a huge crescendo on "and Holy, Holy, Holy, cry, almighty King"; yet in other verses that same phrase can be sung gently: "Arrays in garment white and pure his spotless Bride". Eventually we reach the last verse, which seems to be common to all hymnals however many of the others they have or have not included:

**The whole triumphant host  
Give thanks to God on high;  
"Hail, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost",  
They ever cry;  
Hail, Abraham's God, and mine  
(I join the heavenly lays)  
All might and majesty are thine,  
And endless praise.**

Full organ; put in exaggerated commas; you can even hear the brackets in the tune - it's marvellous. Then finish with a Tierce de Picardy - a major chord to end a minor tune. Perfection.