

The Patriarchs of Israel

Week 4

Abraham (Part 3)

The Promised Descendant Arrives

Chapter 21. When Abraham was 100 years old, Isaac was born to Sarah. The emphasis is on the faithfulness and power of God in keeping His promise and providing an heir miraculously through Sarah. Note three repetitions: “as He had said,” “as He had promised,” and “of which God had spoken” (vv. 1-2).

God “visited” Sarah. The Hebrew word here highlights the major significance of Isaac's birth. Abraham's obedience in naming his own son “Isaac” (v. 3; cf. 17:19) and circumcising him on the eighth day (v. 4; cf. 17:12) expressed his worship. Isaac's name (“laughter”) was appropriate for two reasons:

1. Both Abraham and Sarah had laughed in amazement and unbelief when told that God had chosen to bless them by giving them a son so late in life (17:17; 18:12).
2. Isaac would be a continual source of joy to his parents as the fulfillment of God's promised seed.

Renewed tensions in the household led them to banish Hagar and Ishmael her son, this time permanently. It was at the feast of Isaac's weaning (up to three years after a child's birth) that Sarah noticed Ishmael mocking (literally, laughing at) her son Isaac. She realized that Ishmael was a potential rival and she did not want Ishmael to share Isaac's inheritance. Hence her request of Abraham to “send away” the rival concubine and her son. Abraham understandably felt distressed by this situation since he loved Ishmael as well as Isaac. God appeared to him again to assure Abraham that Sarah's desire was in harmony with His will. He encouraged Abraham to divorce Hagar. This act was contrary to local custom and required further divine revelation, to Hagar as well as Abraham, to justify the action. God assured each of them that He would provide for the heritage of their sons since they were both sons of Abraham.

Abimelech recognized Abraham's growing wealth and power as God's blessing of Abraham, and requested a covenant of mutual respect to be made between them. Abraham agreed and added his own request for a well which he had dug but Abimelech's servants had seized. He purchased his right to the well (thereafter called Beersheba, “well of the oath”) with seven ewe lambs, and they parted as allies.

Chapter 22. Abraham's faith in the divine promise met its most severe test when God commanded him to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. With this chapter, we reach the climax of the faith life of Abraham—the supreme test and the supreme victory. Obeying God's command, Abraham took his promised heir to Mt. Moriah to sacrifice him to the Lord. Because Abraham was willing to slay his uniquely begotten son, God restrained him from killing Isaac and promised to bless him further for his obedience. Abraham memorialized the place as “the Lord will provide.”

This incident demonstrates the strong confidence Abraham had in God at this time. The sacrifice was already accomplished in Abraham's heart; he fully satisfied the requirements of God. The test, instead of breaking him, brought him to the summit of his lifelong walk with God. Abraham gained greater appreciation of God as the One who will provide or look out for him (Yahweh-yireh) as a result of this incident (v. 14). Also, the Lord confirmed His knowledge of Abraham (v. 12). He believed God was even able to raise Isaac from the dead (Heb. 11:19). This appears to be why he was even willing to slay him. At the last possible moment, he was saved from doing so by God's gracious intervention and substitution of a ram (vv. 1-14). God then reaffirmed His covenant promises, “because you have obeyed my voice” (v. 18).

The main point of Genesis 22:9-14 is portraying an obedient servant, worshiping God in faith at great personal cost, and in the end receiving God's provision. For the first and last time in Genesis, the Lord swore an oath in His own name guaranteeing His promise (v. 16).

God thus reinforced, reemphasized, and extended the promise that He had given formerly (12:1-3) because Abraham trusted and obeyed Him (vv. 17-18).

Here again God promised Abraham that he would become the recipient of the covenant blessings. The covenant was not based on obedience, nor was the perpetuity of the covenant based on obedience—but rather *the personal reception of covenant blessings was conditioned on obedience*. An unconditional covenant may have conditional blessings.

Every time Abraham made a sacrifice for God, the Lord responded by giving Abraham more:

1. Abraham left his home; God gave him a new one.
2. Abraham offered the best of the land to Lot; God gave him more land.
3. Abraham gave up the King of Sodom's reward; God gave him more wealth.

In each case God gave Abraham a deeper relationship with Himself, as well as more material prosperity. Is there a universal application here?

This test of Abraham's faith is the climax of his personal history. It is the last major incident in the record of his life. The record of Nahor's twelve sons (vv. 20-24) prepares the way for the story of Isaac's marriage. It shows that Rebekah was the daughter of Milcah, Bethuel's wife (v. 23). This section signals a change in the direction of the narrative. The author brought the history of Abraham's life to a close and began to set the scene for related events in Isaac's life.

Chapter 23. Sarah died some time later and was buried in the cave of Machpelah, which Abraham first had to purchase from Ephron the Hittite. Abraham's purchase of a burial site in the Promised Land demonstrated his intention to remain in Canaan, rather than going back to his native homeland. The two major events in this chapter continue Moses' emphasis on God's faithfulness. They do so by recording the death of Abraham's wife, the mother of his heir, and by showing the beginning of the fulfillment of the land promise that God had given to Abraham.

Sarah is the only woman whose age at death the Bible records (v. 1). This illustrates her importance. Isaac was 37 years old when his mother died. Abraham died at the age of 175 (25:8), 38 years after Sarah. Abraham and Sarah had moved back near Hebron after living at Beersheba for some time (v. 2).

Chapter 24. In old age, Abraham made certain that his son Isaac would marry within the family, the result being that Isaac took Abraham's great-niece Rebekah as his wife. Abraham's servant was sent to Paddan-Aram charged with the duty of finding a suitable bride for Isaac. He faithfully and resolutely fulfilled his task, relying on God's faithfulness to prosper his journey and God's providence to guide him. God directed him to Rebekah. The length of this story and the details show how God provided a wife and seed-bearer for Isaac and thus remained faithful to His promises to Abraham. God working providentially through the natural course of events to accomplish His purposes clarifies His ways with humankind.

Chapter 25. Abraham married Keturah, one of his concubines (1 Chron. 1:32) who gave birth to the ancestors of the Dedanites and Midianites. At an advanced age he gave gifts to the sons of his concubines and sent them “to the land of the east,” Arabia, leaving Isaac as his sole heir in possession of the family property. Finally Abraham died at the age of 175 and was buried with Sarah in the cave of Machpelah.

The Four Seeds of Abraham in Scripture

1. Natural Seed: All physical descendants of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3, 7; et al.)
2. Natural-Spiritual Seed: Believing physical descendants of Abraham (Rom. 9:6, 8; Gal. 6:16)
3. Spiritual Seed: Believing non-physical descendants of Abraham (Gal. 3:6-9, 29)
4. Ultimate Seed: Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16)