

SESSION 3

*ABRAHAM
AND ISSAC*

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I. PRAYER

II. PANORAMA TIMELINE (Movements #1 and #2)

"Prologue"



"Patriarchs"



III. OVERVIEW OF GENESIS

A. Chart: Focus on Key Events/Key People

Genesis	
Primeval History	Patriarchal History
Major Events	Major People
"Creation" "Fall" "Flood" "Tower" 1 – 11	"Abram/Abraham" "Issac" "Jacob/Israel" "Joseph" 12 – 50

B. Outline: "Toledot" Sections

Creation (1:1-2:3)

1. Toledot of the Heavens and the Earth (2:4-4:26)

2. Toledot of Adam (5:1-6:8)

3. Toledot of Noah (6:9-9:29)

4. Toledot of Shem, Ham, and Japheth (10:1-11:9)

5. Toledot of Shem (11:10-26)

6. Toledot of Terah (11:27-25:11)

7. Toledot of Ishmael (25:12-18)

8. Toledot of Isaac (25:19-35:29)

9. Toledot of Esau, the father of Edom (twice) (36:1-8; 36:9-37:1)

10. Toledot of Jacob (37:2-50:26)

IV. LIFE OF ABRAHAM

A. Horizontal Chart

Life of Abraham		
The Call 12-14	The Covenant 15-21	The Confirmation 22-25
Covenant Faith Begun	Covenant Faith Tested	Covenant Faith Perfected

B. Abraham: The Call (Gen. 12-14)

*Covered in Session 1

C. Abraham: The Covenant (Gen. 15-21)

*Covered in Session 2

D. Abraham: The Confirmation (Gen. 22-25)

1. Testing of Abraham (22)
2. Death of Sarah (23)
(Cave of Machpelah)
3. Isaac and Rebekah (24)
4. Death of Abraham (25)

V. ABRAHAM: THE CONFIRMATION (Genesis 22-25)

A. Testing of Abraham (Gen. 22)

1. Background

Abraham is the man of “faith.” This is attested in the Book of Genesis (cf. Gen. 15:6) as well as the New Testament.

HEBREWS 11:11 (NIV 84)

“And by faith Abraham, even though he was past age-and Sarah herself was barren-was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.”

ROMANS 4:3, 20

“What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” ²⁰“Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God.”

Abraham's faith was tested at several points in his life, not the least of which was God's call to Abraham to make personal sacrifices (that would have tested his faith):

- Leave his home and family (Gen. 12:11)
- Separation from his nephew, Lot (Gen. 13:8-9)
- Sending away of his son, Ishmael (Gen. 21:8-13)
- Offer his son of promise (Isaac) on the altar (Gen. 22:1-2)

2. Exposition: Genesis 22:1-19

The outline of this testing event is suggested by Ross (*Creation and Blessing*, 392).

a. Presentation of the test (1-2)

GENESIS 22:1-2

"Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham!' 'Here I am,' he replied. ² Then God said, 'Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.'"

- (1) This event is the 8th revelation of God to Abraham.
- (2) The event occurs several years ("sometime later") after the treaty at Beersheba (Gen. 21:22-34). The Jewish historian, Josephus, suggested that Isaac was twenty-five, but this seems high. At least a decade has passed as Isaac is old enough to both accompany his father and carry the burden of the sacrificial wood (22:6).
- (3) The event is a "test" of Abraham's faith (better than "tempt" in KJV). A test is to prove the worthiness or the strength; a temptation is to entice to evil or to destroy.

Testing to strengthen (approve):

JAMES 1:2-4

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

I KINGS 10:1

"When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relationship to the LORD, she came to test Solomon with hard questions."

DANIEL 1:12

"Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink."

Tempting to destroy:

JAMES 1:13-15

"When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

1 PETER 5:8-9

"Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings."

- (4) "Here I am" is the only recorded word of Abraham in this story, a common response used by those related by intimacy or respect (father-son, king-subject). The word (just one word in Hb.) may hint at Abraham and God's closeness and Abraham's willingness to do the unspeakable.
- (5) The command by God is highlighted by three imperatives:
 - (a) Take
 - (b) Go
 - (c) Sacrifice
- (6) "Only son" refers to Isaac's privileged status as the only son of promise. Ishmael is Abraham's son, but not the covenant-promise son.
- (7) "Moriah" occurs here and in 2 Chronicles 3:1. The location is best seen as the future temple site on the temple mount in Jerusalem, namely Mt. Moriah (a journey of about 50 miles from Beersheba).

b. Compliance with the instructions (3-10)

Abraham sets out from Beersheba with his son, Isaac, and two servants. Wood for the offering is also taken (uncertainty of wood at unfamiliar destination?).

◆ *INSIGHT*

"Life is a succession of tests, for character is only possible through discipline."

(W.H.G. Thomas quoted by Constable, 165).

GENESIS 22:4-5

“On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵ He said to his servants, ‘Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.’”

- (1) The journey takes “three days.” The text does not record Abraham’s thoughts, but the length of the journey solidifies his obedient resolve.
- (2) Wood for sacrifice speaks of preparation for worship. “We will worship” includes Abraham and his son only. The servants are to remain with the donkey.
- (3) “We will come back” interjects a surprising note in the tense storyline. For Abraham to suggest that “we” would return from the mountaintop worship experience could only mean one of two logical conclusions: (1) God would intervene before Abraham completed the sacrifice (2) God will raise this covenant-promise (“only son”) from the grave. Which did Abraham believe?

HEBREWS 11:17-19

“By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, ¹⁸ even though God had said to him, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.’¹⁹ Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.”

Isaac (perhaps a teenager, perhaps a young man) is notably compliant to his father’s wishes (a man well past 100 years). Isaac’s restraint and faith in his father is commendable. His only question is chilling, “where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” (22:7).

GENESIS 22:8

“Abraham answered, ‘God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.’ And the two of them went on together.”

- (1) “God himself” could be translated “God will provide for Himself” or even, “God will provide Himself” for the offering. Either way, the emphasis is upon divine provision for the sacrifice.
- (2) Abraham will later name the place “The LORD Will Provide” (22:14) or “Jehovah Jireh” or better, “YHWH Yireh.”

Obedient in his faith, Abraham made preparations for offering his son on the newly constructed altar. The Canaanites regularly practiced human sacrifices which were later specifically condemned and denied to the Israelites (cf. Lev. 18:21; 20:1-5; Deut. 18:10). This is certainly one of the greatest, most difficult texts to theologically understand. How could God ask of Abraham what would be seen as repugnant in later Israelite history?

c. Compliance with the instructions (10-19)

GENESIS 22:12-14

“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.” ¹³ Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.”

- (1) God intervenes and states that “Now I know . . .
“Did Abraham’s choice surprise God? Was the outcome weighing in the balance?”

PSALM 147:5

“Great is our LORD and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.”

- (2) The whole of Scripture affirms that God is omniscient, that is, He knows all things knowable. Such knowledge can be theoretical (known but yet not actualized) or experiential (known and actualized).

MATTHEW 11:20-21

“Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. ²¹ “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.”

Note that Jesus appealed to theoretical knowledge that was known but not experienced (actualized). The statement was true nonetheless. Thus, God’s knowledge of Abraham’s choice became actualized (“Now I know...” experientially) at the point of his obedience.

GENESIS 22:15-18

“The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time ¹⁶ and said, “I swear by myself, declares

◆ SACRIFICING HIS SON?

1. God’s plan was not for actual sacrifice; this was a test of obedient willingness.
2. Later Mosaic legislation would clearly prohibit child sacrifice (to Molech; cf. Lev. 18:21; 20:2).
3. Abraham’s trust must be full and complete in God’s Person and Promises; either intervention to prevent or resurrection from death are the only two options.
4. It is within God’s sovereign control over all creation is to give or take life. This is not an immoral command of God (though it would be to a false god); after all, God did sacrifice His own Son at Calvary (Jn 3:16).

(Adapted from Geisler and Howe, *When Critics Ask*, 51-52)

the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, ¹⁸ and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”

- (1) This is the 9th revelation to Abraham; it is also the 5th affirmation of the great Abrahamic Covenant.
- (2) Note the Covenant aspects:
 - a) “Bless” (17, 18)
 - b) “Descendants” (17) or “Offspring” (18)
 - c) “Cities of their enemies” (or land) (17)
- (3) The promise of blessing to all nations is restated again (18). Note Paul’s New Testament application.

GALATIANS 3:6-9

“So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” ⁷ Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. ⁸ Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” ⁹ So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

3. Transition: Genesis 22:20-24

This passage bridges from the high point, the mature and full expression of Abraham’s faith (22:1-19), to the death of Sarah and the search for a wife for Isaac (Gen. 23). Thus, the emerging storyline will begin to focus on Isaac.

Perhaps structurally, this can be seen as follows (in Chiastic form):

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- A Genealogy of Terah (11:27-31)
 - B Abraham’s Initial Faith Call (12:1-8)
 - B’ Abraham’s Climatic Faith Demonstration (22:1-19)
 - A’ Genealogy of Nahor-Terah’s son (22:20-24)
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B. Death of Sarah (Genesis 23)

1. The death at Kiriath Arba (or Hebron) (23:1-2)

GENESIS 23:1-2

“Sarah lived to be a hundred and twenty-seven years old. ² She died at Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her.”

- a. Sarah lived to be 127 years; Abraham at her death was 137 years while Isaac was 37 years and still unmarried. In all of the Scriptures, Sarah is the only woman whose age at death is recorded. This speaks of her importance.
- b. Sarah was rightfully seen in later Israelite history as the nation’s mother.

ISAIAH 51:1-2

“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness
and who seek the LORD:
Look to the rock from which you were cut
and to the quarry from which you were hewn;
² look to Abraham, your father,
and to Sarah, who gave you birth.
When I called him he was only one man,
and I blessed him and made him many.”

- c. “Kiriath Arba” means “City of Four”. Perhaps the city was characterized by four separate regions, the Hittites occupying one. Modern day Jerusalem has four quarters in the Old City (Arab, Jewish, Armenian, Christian).
- d. “In the land of Canaan”
Hearkens the reader to recall that “the land” was promised to Abraham as a part (aspect) of the Covenant (Gen. 15:18-21). Recall the three aspects of the Abraham Covenant:



2. The cave of Machpelah (23:3-20)

While Abraham undeniably mourned the loss of his wife (23:2), the bulk of the text centers upon the negotiations for the land (and the burial cave). This is the first acquisition of property in the Promised Land and gives Abraham the status of landowner, not simply an “alien and a stranger (foreigner)” (23:4). The tension of owning land coupled with covenantal promises guide the theological theme of Genesis 23. Though the mother of the future nation had died, Canaan (“the land”) is the new home. Sarah will not be taken out of this promised land.

a. Round one of negotiations (3-6)

GENESIS 23:5-6

"The Hittites replied to Abraham, ⁶ 'Sir, listen to us. You are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will refuse you his tomb for burying your dead.'"

- (1) Abraham refers to himself as an "alien and stranger," thus one of lowly status. The Hittites refer to him as a "mighty prince" (lit. "prince of God"), a bestowal of respect and honor as well as an acknowledgement of God's favor upon Abraham.
- (2) Abraham asks to purchase a "burial site" (4), but the Hittites offer a choice "tomb." There seems to be reluctance to sell land as a permanent possession.

b. Round two of negotiations (7-11)

GENESIS 23:7-9

"Then Abraham rose and bowed down before the people of the land, the Hittites. ⁸ He said to them, "If you are willing to let me bury my dead, then listen to me and intercede with Ephron son of Zohar on my behalf ⁹ so he will sell me the cave of Machpelah, which belongs to him and is at the end of his field. Ask him to sell it to me for the full price as a burial site among you."

- (1) Abraham's bowing before the Hittites (who have called him a prince of God) speaks of his humble, dependent bargaining status. This is the only recorded instance of Abraham bowing to the inhabitants of Canaan.
- (2) Abraham specifically asks that Ephron might sell the cave of Machpelah and at "full price," that is, a generous amount for an irrevocable sale.

Ephron initially refuses to sell but is willing for Abraham to bury his dead in the cave. This may be an evidence of the bargaining process, a cultural custom known to Abraham and the Hittites. Note, as well, that Ephron speaks for himself and does not wait for the other Hittites to act as mediators (23:10-11).

c. Round three of negotiations (12-16)

GENESIS 23:12-14

"Again Abraham bowed down before the people of the land ¹³ and he said to Ephron in their hearing, 'Listen to me, if you will. I will pay the price of the field. Accept it from me so I can bury my dead there.'"

- (1) Abraham counters that he wishes to purchase (irrevocably) the field (not just the cave) and he is willing to pay “the price of the field.”
- (2) Ephron consents to four hundred shekels of silver to which Abraham agrees (23:16). The agreement is fixed, witnesses are present, and payment is rendered.

d. Conclusion to the negotiations (17-20)

GENESIS 23:19-20

“Afterward Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre (which is at Hebron) in the land of Canaan. ²⁰ So the field and the cave in it were deeded to Abraham by the Hittites as a burial site.”

C. Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 24)

1. Introduction to the Story (24:1)

GENESIS 24:1

“Abraham was now very old, and the LORD had blessed him in every way.”

- a. Abraham is described as very old and very blessed.
- b. This verse introduces the longest, single story in the Book of Genesis. The story points to the rising importance of Isaac (our next patriarchal figure) and his wife who will bear sons.

2. Abraham’s instructions to his servant (24:2-9)

GENESIS 24:3-4

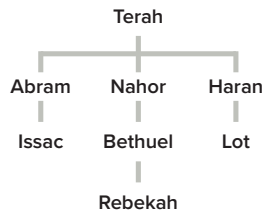
“I want you to swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, ⁴ but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac.”

- a. According to the custom of the day, the parents (in this case, Abraham alone) arranged the marriages of their children (though Isaac is a grown man).
- b. The promised son and heir to the covenant promises must not marry a Canaanite. Abraham sends his “chief servant” (Eliezer?) to find a suitable bride from among Abraham’s relatives. (Refer again to the transitional genealogical information previously given in 22:20-24).
- c. The servant will have a successful journey. Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel (brother of Laban) will soon enter the picture. Note her relation by lineage to Isaac (next page).

◆ **PREVIEW**

“On the theological level, the scene wrestles with the interplay of human responsibility (faith in action) and divine initiative (perfectly coordinated circumstances).”

(Waltke, *Genesis*, 323)



Compare Genesis 11:27-32 with 22:20-24

GENESIS 24:6-7

“Make sure that you do not take my son back there,” Abraham said. ⁷ ‘The LORD, the God of heaven, who brought me out of my father’s household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised me on oath, saying, ‘To your offspring I will give this land’—he will send his angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from there.”

- a. Should Abraham die, Isaac must remain in the land. Abraham left relatives and in obedience to God’s call went to the unknown place (“to the land I will show you” – 12:1). His son of the covenantal promise must not return there.
- b. Abraham reminded his servant that God’s Covenant promised “land” and “offspring.” Isaac needs to stay in the land and with the right wife (“will send his angel before you”) produce offspring.

3. The servant (providentially) meets Rebekah (24:10-27)

The servant obediently departed with ten camels plus “all kinds of good things” (bridal price). His destination is the homeland of Abraham’s relatives in Aram Naharaim (Northwest Mesopotamia) and he arrives at the city of Nahor (10-11).

a. The prayer (12-14)

GENESIS 24:12

“Then he prayed, “LORD, God of my master Abraham, make me successful today, and show kindness to my master Abraham.”

- (1) This is the first recorded prayer for specific guidance in the Scriptures.
- (2) The servant identifies with the Lord, the God of Abraham. His faith will be remarkable.
- (3) In his prayer he asks for a confirming sign that the right choice of a bride would draw water for the servant and for his camels (14).

b. The answer to prayer (15-21)

- (1) Before the prayer is finished, Rebekah appears (15).
- (2) Rebekah fulfills the confirming sign (17-20).

GENESIS 24:21

“Without saying a word, the man watched her closely to learn whether or not the LORD had made his journey successful.”

c. The aftermath of the prayer (22-27)

- (1) After receiving a goodwill gift, Rebekah identifies herself with her family pedigree, assaying the concern of Abraham.
- (2) Rebekah invites (law of eastern hospitality and gratitude for extravagant gifts) the servant to stay at her home.

GENESIS 24:26-27

“Then the man bowed down and worshiped the LORD, ²⁷ saying, ‘Praise be to the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master. As for me, the LORD has led me on the journey to the house of my master’s relatives.’”

The servant’s response is noteworthy. He worships the God who has guided him to a successful search and discovery. He acknowledges God’s hidden hand (the clear work of God’s providential care).

4. The servant in the household of Bethuel (24:28-61)

GENESIS 24:28-31

“The young woman ran and told her mother’s household about these things. ²⁹ Now Rebekah had a brother named Laban, and he hurried out to the man at the spring. ³⁰ As soon as he had seen the nose ring, and the bracelets on his sister’s arms, and had heard Rebekah tell what the man said to her, he went out to the man and found him standing by the camels near the spring. ³¹ “Come, you who are blessed by the LORD,” he said. “Why are you standing out here? I have prepared the house and a place for the camels.”

- a. Rebekah’s brother, Laban, hurries to meet the stranger (bearing gifts). Laban will figure prominently in the later drama between Jacob (Rebekah’s son) and his uncle Laban (Gen. 29ff).
- b. “As soon as he had seen the nose ring” indicates that Laban’s motives are based in greed. This will become more pronounced in later chapters. Rebekah, on the other hand, displayed courtesy, respect and hospitality before the display or gifting of gold rings and bracelets.

The New Testament issues this warning:

I TIMOTHY 6:17-19

“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸ Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹ In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

GENESIS 24:34-36

“So he said, ‘I am Abraham’s servant. ³⁵ The LORD has blessed my master abundantly, and he has become wealthy. He has given him sheep and cattle, silver and gold, male and female servants, and camels and donkeys. ³⁶ My master’s wife Sarah has borne him a son in her old age, and he has given him everything he owns.’”

- a. The servant tells an abbreviated story of Abraham, Sarah and Isaac and how they have been blessed by God. He highlights his mission to find a wife for Isaac from among Abraham’s relatives (24:37-38).
- b. Again, in slow and deliberate detail, the servant of Abraham relates the prayer fulfillment of meeting Rebekah.

GENESIS 24:47b-49

“Then I put the ring in her nose and the bracelets on her arms, ⁴⁸ and I bowed down and worshiped the LORD. I praised the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me on the right road to get the granddaughter of my master’s brother for his son. ⁴⁹ Now if you will show kindness and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, so I may know which way to turn.”

- a. Laban and Bethuel acknowledge the leadership of God and offer Rebekah as the bride for Isaac (24:50-51).
- b. The servant “bowed down to the ground before the Lord” and distributed gifts (bridal price).

GENESIS 24:55-58

“But her brother and her mother replied, “Let the young woman remain with us ten days or so; then you may go.” ⁵⁶ But he said to them, ‘Do not detain me, now that the LORD has granted success to my journey. Send me on my way so I may go to my master.’ ⁵⁷ Then they said, ‘Let’s call the young woman and ask her about it.’” ⁵⁸ So they called Rebekah and asked her, ‘Will you go with this man?’ “I will go,” she said.”

- a. The servant is anxious to successfully return to his master. But Rebekah's mother and brother (Laban) ask for "ten days or so." The Hebrew expression could indicate a much longer time (months... over a year).
- b. Yet, the servant is determined and appeals to the Lord's guidance in this venture. The question is put to Rebekah who decisively replies, "I will go" (Mathews, p. 344, translates, "I want to go"). Thus, Rebekah demonstrates her faith in the God of Abraham and like him, she is willing by faith to go to a new land (cf. 12:1, 4).

GENESIS 24:66-67

"Then the servant told Isaac all he had done. ⁶⁷ Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death."

D. Death of Abram (Genesis 25)

- 1. His wife

GENESIS 25:1-2

"Abraham had taken another wife, whose name was Keturah.

² She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah"

- a. Here, Keturah is called Abraham's "wife." But Genesis 25:6 refers to his sons of his "concubines." The fact that Abraham bequeathed his wealth to Isaac (25:5) argues that Keturah was a privileged concubine (who bore six sons).
- b. "Took" (NIV 84) should be translated "had taken." There is no sure chronological marker to date this event. Probably it is given here to contrast the favored/promised son with other sons.

GENESIS 25:7-8

"Abraham lived a hundred and seventy-five years. ⁸ Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people."

- a. Abraham dies at 175 years, 100 of which he lived in "the land."
- b. Abraham died at a good old age, even as it had been promised to him (cf. 15:15).
- c. Abraham is buried by his sons Isaac and Ishmael in the cave of Machpelah in the place where Sarah was buried (sons listed in order of importance, not birth order).
- d. "Gathered to his people" (25:8) cannot simply mean, buried in proximity to his ancestors. The tenor of the passage is to be

brought to some kind of fellowship or association. This likely indicates some kind of belief in life after death.

GENESIS 25:11

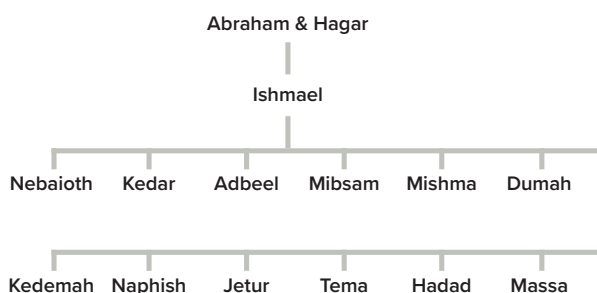
“After Abraham’s death, God blessed his son Isaac, who then lived near Beer Lahai Roi.”

- a. From the passing of Abraham, now the story continues with Isaac and his offspring to come.
- b. “God blessed Isaac” reminds the reader of Abrahamic Covenant blessing.

VI. “TOLEDOT” OF ISHMAEL (Genesis 25)

This section is the 7th of 10 “toledots” (or, what became of...) in Genesis (see chart, Session 3, p. 50). Ishmael, the son of Abraham and Sarah’s maidservant, Hagar, has 12 sons (“tribal rulers”). Ishmael lived for 137 years and the Scriptures note of his offspring, “And they lived in hostility toward all their brothers” (25:18); this fulfills the prophecy of 16:12.

The twelve sons of Ishmael:



VI. “TOLEDOT” OF ISAAC (Genesis 25-35)

A. Overall Structure (Gen. 25:19-35:29)

Note the chiasmic structure (adapted from Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 169).

INSIGHT

“Isaac and Ishmael, though spiritually distinct from inception, politically begin together in the burial of their father. The Primary History, however, traces a growing political hostility between Israel and these ‘brothers’ that spring from Abraham (i.e. the various Arabian tribes through Keturah and Ishmael; cf. Judg. 8:24), from Abraham’s brother Nahor (i.e., Arameans; cf. 1 Kgs. 20; 2 Kgs. 5; 6:24-70), and from Haran (i.e., the Ammonites and Moabites from Lot; cf. Num. 20:14-21; 21:4; 22:1; Judg. 3:12-13; 11:1-18; 1 Sam. 14:47; 2 Sam. 8:2, 12-14; 1 Kgs. 11:14-22; 2 Kgs. 13:20).

Toledot of Isaac (The Story of Jacob)

A Journeys Begin: Jacob and Esau (25:19-34)

B Isaac and the Philistines (26:1-33)

C Jacob Steals Esau's Blessing (26:34-28:9)

D Jacob Meets God at Bethel (28:10-22)

E Jacob at Laban's House (29:1-14)

F Jacob Deceived: Marries Leah and Rachel (29:15-30)

HINGE!

G Birth of Jacob's Sons (29:31-30:24)

F' Jacob Deceives: Outwits Laban (30:25-31:1)

E' Jacob leaves Laban's House (31:2-32:1)

D' Jacob Meets Angels at Mahanaim (32:2-3)

C' Jacob Returns Esau's Blessing (32:4-33:20)

B' Dinah and the Hivites (34:1-31)

A' Journeys End: Jacob and Isaac (35:1-29)

B. Life of Isaac (Genesis 25-26)

1. The birth of sons (Gen. 25:19-26)

Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah (25:20-21). The text relates that she was barren (unable to conceive hearkens to Sarah, the mother of Isaac).

Isaac prays and the Lord answered; Rebekah becomes pregnant. But how much time lapsed between the initial praying and the final answer? Verse 26 notes, "Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them" (i.e. the twins).

I JOHN 5:14-15

"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him."

MATTHEW 7:7-8

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”

2. The strife between brothers (Gen. 25:27-34)

a. Prophesied by the Lord

GENESIS 25:23

“The LORD said to her,
‘Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you will be separated;
one people will be stronger than the other,
and the older will serve the younger.’”

b. Demonstrated in birth

GENESIS 25:24-26a

“When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. ²⁵ The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. ²⁶ After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau’s heel; so he was named Jacob.”

(1) Esau (“red” as in ruddy complexion) is born first; he is characterized as “hairy,” perhaps a clue to his animalish nature (so Waltke, 358). Esau is also a wordplay on Edom (Edomites); “hairy” sounds like “Seir,” the future homeland of Esau (32:3, 36:8).

(2) Jacob (“he grasps the heel” or “supplanter”) plays upon Jacob’s hand at birth grasping the heel of his first-born brother. The action supports the earlier prophecy about the two (25:23) and of later actions.

c. Enacted in early life (27-34)

GENESIS 25:27-28

“The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was content to stay at home among the tents. ²⁸ Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.”

(1) Esau became a skillful hunter. The profession links back to Nimrod, the founder of rebellious cities (10:8-10). Later, Esau will be described as one who lives by the sword (27:40).

(2) Jacob is a “quiet” (perhaps better, “complete,” “civilized” or “cultured”) man, comfortable with life among the tents. His brother will be a man of the “open country” while

Jacob will seek a more stable and quiet life. The two could not be more opposite.

- (3) Isaac loved (showed strong preference for) Esau (physical/food reasons); Rebekah loved Jacob (perhaps influenced by the prophetic oracle that “the older will serve the younger” – 25:23).

GENESIS 25:29-31

“Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. ³⁰ He said to Jacob, “Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I’m famished!” (That is why he was also called Edom.) ³¹ Jacob replied, “First sell me your birthright.”

- (1) “Famished” speaks of dire hunger. His brother should not have taken advantage of his condition.
- (2) Jacob exploits his brother and “sells” stew in exchange for his “birthright” (i.e., the rights of the firstborn – cf. Gen. 43:33; 49:3 and the privileged status and benefits).

Jacob valued the birthright but acted wrongly to steal it. Esau despised his birthright and foolishly exchanged it.

HEBREWS 12:16-17

“See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. ¹⁷ Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done.”

◆ *INSIGHT*

“The cunning hunter fell into a better hunter’s trap, becoming prey to his own appetite.”

Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 449)

3. The strife between Isaac and Abimelech (26:1-35)

a. Abrahamic Covenant renewal (1-6)

During a time of “famine”, Isaac may have been tempted to leave the Promised Land. The Lord appeared to him and reaffirmed the Abrahamic Covenant aspects to Isaac.

GENESIS 26:2-6

“The LORD appeared to Isaac and said, ‘Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. ³ Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. ⁴ I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, ⁵ because Abraham obeyed me and did everything I required of him, keeping my commands, my decrees and my instructions.’ ⁶ So Isaac stayed in Gerar.”

- (1) God promised “blessing” (3, 4).
- (2) God promised “land” (2, 3, 4).
- (3) God promised “descendants” (3, 4).

The Abrahamic Covenant has been confirmed to Isaac.

b. “Wife-as-sister” deception (7-11)

Like his father, Abraham, had done on two separate occasions, Isaac follows the example concerning Rebekah. This story-line is obviously out of chronological sequence, otherwise a woman with twins could not be passed off as a sister. The story shows that Isaac has inherited more than covenantal blessings, but also weaknesses as well. As in the case of his father, Isaac is found out. Abimelech is horrified that he or his men might have slept with Rebekah and incurred God’s wrath (10-11).

Striking Parallels

Abraham	Issac
1. Covenantal Promise (12:1-3)	1. Covenantal Promise (26:2-6)
2. Wife-sister Deception (12:10-20)	2. Wife-sister Deception (26:7-11)
3. Quarrel with Lot’s Men (13:1-12)	3. Quarrel with Abimelech’s Men (26:14-22)
4. Divine Reassurance and Sacrifice (15:1-21)	4. Divine Reassurance and Sacrifice (26:23-25)
5. Treaty with Abimelech: at Beersheba (21:22-24)	5. Treaty with Abimelech: at Beersheba (26:26-33)

*Garrett quoted by Waltke, *Genesis*, 366

c. Strife with the Philistines (12-35)

- (1) Isaac becomes rich due to God’s hand of blessing (12-13); his wealth incurred the bitter envy of the Philistines (14-15).
- (2) Abimelech urges Isaac to leave. “You have become too powerful for us” (16).
- (3) Isaac moves to the Valley of Gerar. Time after time he digs a well producing fresh water, only to encounter strife with the herdsmen of Gerar (17-22).

GENESIS 26:23-25

“From there he went up to Betersheba. ²⁴ That night the LORD appeared to him and said, ‘I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham.’ ²⁵ Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD. There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well.”

- (a) Note the Covenant aspects: “bless” and “descendants.”
- (b) Note Isaac’s response: altar and worship.
- (c) “In Genesis, monuments are often made in the presence of God. Abraham and Isaac mark their encounters with the Lord by building altars (Gen. 12:8; 26:25)... altars are ‘the most visible sign of one’s devotion to the true God...’”(Ryken, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 20).
- (4) Abimelech arrives in order to secure a formal “sworn agreement” or treaty. Once accomplished, Isaac sends them away in “peace.”
- (5) The story concludes with a note about Isaac’s son, Esau.

GENESIS 26:34-35

“When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and also Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite. ³⁵ They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah.”

- (a) Esau breaks custom and seeks his own wives from amongst the Canaanites.
- (b) Esau was 40 years old, even as his father, Isaac, was when Abraham sought a wife for him (25:20).
- (c) Esau’s actions betrayed his disregard for the Abrahamic Covenant vision of a special people, special descendants. The action was a “source of grief” (lit. “bitterness of spirit”) to his parents. It validates that God’s best choice of patriarchal blessing is not the eldest but the youngest.

Spiritual Message (Esau):

Esau serves as a good illustration of the natural man of the earth (Heb.12:16-17). In many respects a more honest man than Jacob, he was nevertheless destitute of faith. This was manifest in his despising the birthright because it was a spiritual thing, of value only as faith could see that value. The birthright involved the exercise of the priestly rights vested in the family head until the establishment of the Aaronic priesthood. The Edenic promise of one who would “bruise” Satan was fixed in the family of Abraham (Gen. 3:15); the order of promise was Abel, Seth, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Esau. As the firstborn Esau was in the distinct line of the promise to Abraham: “and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (12:3). For all that was revealed, these great messianic promises might have been realized in Esau. For a fleeting,

◆ ESAU’S WIVES

1. Judith
2. Basemath (also called Adah)
3. Oholibamah
4. Basemath (daughter of Ishmael)

Compare Genesis 26:34 and 36:2-3; Judith not mentioned in 36:2-3 probably because she was barren without children.

fleshly gratification Esau sold this birthright. Although Jacob's understanding of the birthright at the time was undoubtedly carnal and faulty, his desire for it, nevertheless, evidenced true faith. "For he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Heb. 11:6).

(Taken from *New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 373)