

Abraham’s Death

I. REVIEW OF ISAAC’S LIFE

Abraham continued to show faith that God would take an active role in establishing His family when he sent his servant to obtain a wife for Isaac from among his people.

A. Rebekah

God chose Rebekah, a woman who was ready to leave her home for a strange land and unknown husband God had chosen for her, to mother the father of the future nation of Israel.

Then Isaac brought her into the tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death [Gen 24:67].

Rebekah and Isaac leave their parents behind to move forward into the new promise that God holds out for them. They become a new family according to God’s plan.

B. The Blessing Passed On

God's blessing fell on Isaac after Abraham's death. Isaac inherits everything from his father, Abraham, despite the fact that Abraham has other sons by Hagar and Keturah.

- Isaac is the free-born son of the promise.
- Isaac is the fulfillment of the Covenant between God and his father, Abraham.

C. Waiting on God

God did not immediately keep His promise to give Isaac children. He answered Isaac only after 20 years of waiting on God, thus showing that the promise would come by grace, not by man's effort.

D. Principle of Election

- Just as He chose Isaac over his older brother Ishmael, God chose Isaac's younger son Jacob to succeed him as patriarch.
- He revealed to Rebekah that she was bearing twins who would always be at odds and that the younger [Jacob] would be stronger than - and be served by - the elder [Esau].
- **This illustrates the principle of election, whereby God chooses not based on natural birthright or man's effort or deeds but based on His sovereign will and mercy.**

The covenant promises God made to Abraham because of his obedient faith, are passed down to Isaac for Abraham's sake. The promises are to continue through Isaac as he continues in obedience to God's direction to stay in the land of promise even though circumstances tempt him to leave.

God remained with Isaac and blessed him just as He remained with Abraham and blessed him.

God is continuing to forge a personal relationship with a family He is building for Himself.

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF ISAAC'S LIFE

The life of Isaac seems insignificant next to the careers of his father Abraham and his son Jacob. There are few chapters of Scripture devoted to Isaac, and most of his story is entwined with the story of the other Patriarchs.

Yet he is a Patriarch, his name forever included when Israelites call on the name of God, the father of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Isaac's main role seems to be one of a bridge between Abraham, father of those who believe, and Jacob, father of Israel.

- Isaac safeguards and transmits the promise through his own faithful obedience.
- He embodies the continuity of God's promise, the link through whom it passes from generation to generation.

But there is more significance to him than that:

1. Isaac waits for God's promise, as indeed do all of the Patriarchs. Those 20 years spent praying for a son not only helped form Isaac in faith, they became an example for Israel as it waited for God's promised Messiah.
2. Isaac is also the fruit, the evidence of God's promise.
 - He is the impossible child, born of two people well past the age of childbearing.
 - His name means "laughter," and his name is a perpetual reminder that God promises the impossible and keeps His promises.
3. And as the obedient son of the promise, Isaac prefigures Jesus Christ, the promised Son of God.
 - He walked willingly and obediently up the hill to be sacrificed, even as Christ would so many years later.
 - His life is a living testimony to "the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were (Rom. 4:17)."
 - He is the loving son and father and husband, the obedient son through whom God pours His blessing on a nation and on the world.
5. The lists of descendants of Abraham through Keturah and Ishmael show that God is fulfilling His promise to Abraham to give him a multitude of descendants and to make Ishmael the father of nations as well.

III. ABRAHAM MARRIES KETURAH

After Sarah died, Abraham married Keturah, a concubine, who bore additional sons for him – six in all. He eventually sends these sons away, because they, like Ishmael, whose mother was Hagar, are Isaac's half-brothers, but not heirs of the covenant.

Read: Genesis 25:1-6

[1] Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah.

[2] She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah.

[3] Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan. The sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Le-um'mim.

[4] The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abi'da, and Elda'ah. All these were the children of Ketu'rah.

[5] Abraham gave all he had to Isaac.

[6] But to the sons of his concubines Abraham gave gifts, and while he was still living he sent them away from his son Isaac, eastward to the east country.

IV. THE DEATH OF ABRAHAM

Abraham lived 175 years and then breathed his last and was gathered to his people.

Read: Genesis 25:7-11

[7] These are the days of the years of Abraham's life, a hundred and seventy-five years.

[8] Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people.

[9] Isaac and Ishmael his sons buried him in the cave of Mach-pe'lah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, east of Mamre,

[10] the field which Abraham purchased from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried, with Sarah his wife.

[11] After the death of Abraham God blessed Isaac his son. And Isaac dwelt at Beer-la'hai-roi.

V. THE DESCENDANTS OF ISHMAEL

[12] These are the descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's maid, bore to Abraham.

[13] These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, named in the order of their birth: Neba'ioth, the first-born of Ishmael; and Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam,

[14] Mishma, Dumah, Massa,

[15] Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Ked'emah.

[16] These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names, by their villages and by their encampments, twelve princes according to their tribes.

[17] (These are the years of the life of Ishmael, a hundred and thirty-seven years; he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his kindred.)

[18] They dwelt from Hav'ilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria; he settled over against all his people.

VI. ISAAC – THE TRUE HEIR

Genesis records three ways in which Isaac was preferred over his half-brothers as the true heir of not just Abraham's property but of the promise as well:

- He received the bulk of Abraham's inheritance;
- He made his home in Canaan, while the other sons were sent away to live **outside** the Promised Land; and
- He was the recipient of God's blessing after Abraham's death.

Why do you suppose God chose just one of Abraham's sons, Isaac, and excluded the others? Does that suggest an unfair partiality on His part?

At first it may seem unfair to us that God blessed Isaac above all of Abraham's other sons.

But consider for a moment the ultimate result had God blessed all of Abraham's sons equally (don't forget that far from abandoning them, God did bless and prosper the other sons for Abraham's sake).

If all of Abraham's sons had been blessed equally, then anyone in Abraham's bloodline, whoever the mother, would have been heir to God's covenant promise.

- Far from extending the reach of the covenant, however great and numerous the other sons' families became, this would firmly establish one family, the natural children of Abraham, as the people of God - to the exclusion of everyone else on earth.

God's goal, however, is worldwide blessing. He means to restore all of mankind to His family. By choosing Isaac over Ishmael, God confirms that all people born of faith (as Isaac was born of his parents' faith in God's promise to do the impossible) are truly children of Abraham and thus heirs of the promise.

This, too, may seem limiting - but in fact it is God saying, "Forget the circumstances of your birth. Anyone who comes to me in faith is mine!"

St. Paul expands on this in Romans 9:6-8: *"...For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his descendants; but 'through Isaac shall your descendants be named.'* This means

that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are reckoned as descendants."

We who are not Jews by birth should be thanking God from the bottom of our hearts that God chose Isaac, for that choice opened the door for us to become true Israelites through His Son; and members of His family in the Church.

VII. THE BIRTH OF JACOB AND ESAU

Read: Genesis 25:19-26

[19] These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham was the father of Isaac,

[20] and Isaac was forty years old when he took to wife Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean.

[21] And Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

[22] The children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is thus, why do I live?" So she went to inquire of the LORD.

[23] And the LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples, born of you, shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger."

[24] When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb.

[25] The first came forth red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they called his name Esau.

[26] Afterward his brother came forth, and his hand had taken hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

VIII. ISAAC’S PRAYER

And Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

Gen. 25:21 says that "Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer..." Read vs. 20 and 26.

- How many years did Isaac pray for Rebekah?
- What might have given him that kind of persistence in prayer?
- Why might God have taken so long in answering?

If Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah, and 60 years old when she bore the twins, then he prayed for 20 years that Rebekah would conceive. Isaac was tested by God during this waiting period, even as Abraham was tested while waiting for the birth of Isaac.

- In both cases, the delayed answer demonstrated that the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham would come by grace, not by man's effort.

Isaac's prayer would have been based on what he knew was God's word and promise, and strengthened by what he knew of his own birth and his parents' prayers.

It seems fitting that Isaac, the long-awaited child of the promise, would himself be strong in hope and faith that God would continue to do what He had started.

IX. REBEKAH HAS TWIN SONS

The children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is thus, why do I live?" So she went to inquire of the LORD.

How does Rebekah respond to the fact that her sons are struggling, even before birth, in her womb? What does she learn?

Rebekah went to the Lord to find the source and meaning of the discord in her womb. God told her that the twins she is carrying would father two nations. They would be unequal in strength, and the older would serve the younger.

This revelation accurately predicts the future relationship between Israel and Edom, the nations that will spring from her sons.

Jacob would be the father of the nation Israel, and Esau the father of the nation Edom.

X. GOD’S ELECTION

What does the way Jacob was born (and consequently the meaning of his name) suggest about the type of man he would be?

During the birth of the twins, Jacob, ["he takes by the heel" or "he supplants,"] grabbed his twin [Esau] by the heel as though trying to pull his way out before his brother.

- Jacob will find it difficult to leave things to God, instead striving to work circumstances to his own advantage and pull ahead by wiliness and his own effort.

Read Romans 9:6b-16, especially vv. 10-13. According to the Apostle Paul, what was God's choice of Jacob based on?

- Was God's choice of Jacob over Esau to father His people a result of any merit on Jacob's part? How do we know?
- What does God's choice depend on, and what does His selection of the younger brother show?

Paul explains:

Read: Romans 9:10-16

[10] . . . when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac,

[11] though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call,

[12] she was told, "The elder will serve the younger."

[13] As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

[14] What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!

[15] For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

[16] So it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy.

God chose Jacob because He wanted to choose Jacob - not because of anything Jacob had done, good or bad.

Jacob (and by extension Israel) was chosen by God before he was born, out of God's "sheer, gratuitous love (CCC 218)."

- This is the principle of election, which says that God's choice depends on His sovereign will and mercy toward us.

God chose the younger of Isaac's twin boys just as He chose the second son of Abraham and would later bypass Jacob's oldest sons: to showcase His power, His sovereignty, His work in fulfilling His promises.

As the Apostle Paul shows in Romans, the same thing is true today: God chooses us not because we're born a Jew (or Catholic!) or because of anything we do, but out of His love and will and mercy.

I. ESAU SELLS HIS BIRTHRIGHT

A. *What is a Birthright?*

Ancient laws directed that the birthright - which included the right to at least a double portion of the father's inheritance, as well as the position of superiority and leadership over any siblings after the father's death - belonged to the first-born son.

Read: Genesis 25:27-34

[27] When the boys grew up, Esau was a skilful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents.

[28] Isaac loved Esau, because he ate of his game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.

[29] Once when Jacob was boiling pottage, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished.

[30] And Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red pottage, for I am famished!" (Therefore his name was called Edom.)

[31] Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright."

[32] Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?"

[33] Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob.

[34] Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright

B. Esau’s Attitude toward his Birthright

Does Esau seem to appreciate the value of his birthright? Contrast his priorities with Jacob's.

Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?"

Esau is interested in satisfying his own needs, and thus sold his future for a meal. According to v. 34 he not only did not appreciate the value of his birthright, he despised it.

His number-one priority is himself, and the needs and pleasures of the moment, whereas Jacob will do anything to get the future, lasting benefit that the birthright will provide.

It is inconceivable to us that Esau would sell his birthright - the rights to his inheritance and position within the family - for a single meal. But Paul warned the Hebrews [Heb. 12] not to be godless like Esau and trade away their birthright (they apparently were tempted to compromise their faith to avoid persecution), but to persevere in holiness.

C. Reflection

Have you ever been tempted to throw away your status as God's child for some physical need or desire, or to deny your faith out of fear of what others will think? What is important to you: the temporal "now" or the eternal?

Jacob's name means "supplanter" or "deceiver," and certainly he schemes to take advantage of his brother to get the birthright. God can't have approved Jacob's methods, yet He fulfills His plan in him anyway.

Are you troubled by God using sinners to advance His purposes? That is the glory of the gospel: we all sin, yet God uses us as His agents in the world. Pay attention as the story of Jacob unfolds, and watch God mold him by events as the years pass.

II. ISAAC FOLLOWS IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF HIS FATHER

Isaac’s life parallels that of his father in many ways, and he became a wealthy man. Wealth signifies God’s favour as well as man’s diligence in Old Testament

times. These passages emphasize the corresponding themes of human work and divine blessing

Read: Genesis 26

D. Isaac Stays in the Promised Land Despite Famine

God's plan was to give Isaac and his descendants the land of Canaan, and He meant them to set down roots there. This sounds like it might be a test of Isaac's faith; this is, after all, the second time Isaac has a compelling reason to leave, but has been told to stay (the first was when it was time for him to find a wife from among his people).

Will Isaac stay in the place where God wants him, even though it is as a stranger and there is a famine in the land? Now it is Isaac's turn to trust God's word when he can't see the reasoning behind it. We aren't given the details that we were with Abraham; we don't know if he struggled.

We do know that God promised to be with Isaac and bless him if he stayed, and that God confirmed his intention to carry out all he had promised Abraham, through Isaac. And we know that Isaac trusted those promises, for he stayed in Gerar (vs. 6).

E. God Appears to Isaac

A theophany is a revelation or visible appearance of God. Isaac experiences such a theophany at night when the Lord appears to him and reiterates the promise given to his father.

[24] And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of Abraham your father; fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your descendants for my servant Abraham's sake."

F. Isaac's Response

So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there.

Isaac has a personal encounter with God and makes a personal response to God. God desires each of His children to have a personal encounter with Him, to invoke His name, pray to Him, and worship him.

Have you had a personal encounter with God? If not, pray for it. God wants to have a personal relationship with all His children.

Summary

1. Abraham continued to show faith that God would take an active role in establishing His family when he sent his servant to obtain a wife for Isaac from among his people.
2. God chose Rebekah, a woman who was ready to leave her home for a strange land and unknown husband God chose for her, to mother the father of the future nation of Israel.
3. God's blessing fell on Isaac after Abraham's death.
4. God did not immediately keep His promise to give Isaac children, but answered only after 20 years of waiting on God showed that the promise would come by grace, not by man's effort.
5. Just as He chose Isaac over his older brother Ishmael, God chose Isaac's younger son Jacob to succeed him as patriarch. He revealed to Rebekah that she was bearing twins who would always be at odds and that the younger would be stronger than - and be served by - the younger. This illustrates the principle of election, whereby God chooses not based on natural birthright or man's effort or deeds but based on His sovereign will and mercy.
6. The covenant promises God made to Abraham because of his obedient faith, God confirmed to Isaac for Abraham's sake. The promises are to continue through Isaac as he continues obedient to God's direction to stay in the land of promise even though circumstances tempt him to leave.
7. God remained with Isaac and blessed him as He was with Abraham and blessed him; a fact that was clear even to the Philistine king Abimelech. God is continuing to forge a personal relationship with a family He is building for Himself.