

## ***PATRIARCHS: Lesson Five, Isaac, Abraham's Heir*** ***Genesis 23-26***

**Subject:** Isaac lost his parents but gained a wife, two sons, and the covenant promises.

**Main Idea:** God's sons and daughters are His royal heirs.

**Principles:**

1. *God the Father has made all the necessary provisions that we might be called His sons and daughters.*
2. *God's children inherit His Kingdom.*

### **Introduction**

Recently, the British royal family announced the birth of Prince George, the newest heir to the royal throne, after his father William and grandfather Charles. This baby did nothing to earn his position or inheritance. He was born into it. Our present lesson is about a man who was born into a royal position from a spiritual point of view. Isaac was Abraham's son and heir to God's covenant promises.

We have been following the lives of the four Patriarchs of Israel through the book of Genesis. Abraham, the first patriarch, received God's promises of land, of many descendants, and of being blessed and becoming a blessing to all other nations. God entered a unilateral covenant assuring these promises would be fulfilled. We have learned this is often known as the Abrahamic, or Patriarchal, Covenant. By tracing the history of this family and the fulfillment of God's promises, we are really tracing the history of God's plan of salvation.

The Bible gives us much more detail about some of its characters than others. Our previous lesson covered the final chapters in Genesis that include the history of Abraham's life. This lesson covers the life of his son Isaac. Comparatively, little is said about Isaac, after the many chapters that described Abraham's life. Isaac lived 180 years – five years longer than Abraham lived (Genesis 25:7, 35:28). He, no doubt, had many experiences. But, in Isaac's case, we learn little of these. We may draw certain conclusions about Isaac's character and walk with God. But pointing these out does not seem to be writer's primary goal. Rather, the focus of the story is the transfer of the Patriarchal Covenant from father to son. We see God's faithfulness in this. Although Abraham died, God's promises did not.

It seems, then, as though the Bible has just one primary point to make about Isaac: he was Abraham's son, and for that reason, heir to the Patriarchal Covenant. The promises God gave Abraham were passed on to Isaac. He gained these simply because he was born into the position as Abraham's son and heir, just as Prince George of Cambridge was born into his position as a royal heir.

As we work our way through these chapters in Genesis, we first see Isaac's position as Abraham's heir being secured beyond the steps Abraham had already taken. Then we see God personally transferring the promised inheritance from Abraham to Isaac.

## I. **Isaac Loses His Parents But Gains A Wife** – Genesis 23:1-25:10

### A. **Sarah's Death** – 23:1-20

#### i. Hebron and Beersheba – 23:1-2

1. Near the end of chapter 22, we were told that Abraham remained in Beersheba. Apparently he was still there when Sarah died at Kiriath Arba, near Hebron, for “Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her.”
2. Both Hebron and Beersheba have already been named as locations where Abraham dwelt. (Mamre was also in the vicinity of Hebron 13:18; 18:1.)

#### ii. A Business Transaction with the Hittites – 23:3-16

1. Abraham sought to purchase land from local Hittites where he could bury Sarah. (Either this was a small group from the Great Hittite Empire to the north that had migrated much further south than the Empire ever extended or they are not related to the people of that empire at all.)
2. We notice that while Abraham refers to himself as a “foreigner and stranger,” this local group thinks of him as a “mighty prince among us.”
3. The Hittites offered to gift some land to Abraham to bury Sarah. However, a gift could later be questioned. Purchasing the land would ensure Abraham's ownership remained undisputed.
4. Once Abraham insisted on buying the land, it seems as though the man who owned the cave Abraham wanted to purchase, Ephron, expected Abraham to bargain with him. However, Abraham paid the full price (again, leaving no room for any future questioning of Abraham's character or ownership).

#### iii. Abraham's Property in Canaan – 23:17-20

1. It was, then, on the occasion of Sarah's death that Abraham acquired the only piece of land he ever owned in Canaan. (He seemed to also own a well in Beersheba, 21:31-33.)
2. Later, Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah were buried with Sarah at this site (25:10, 49:29-31, 50:12-13). Their desire to be buried there indicates their faith in God's promise to give the land to their descendants – a promise none of them lived to see fulfilled. Hebrews 11:13 offers this commentary: “All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.”

## B. Isaac's Marriage – 24:1-67

### i. Abraham's Blessing – 24:1

1. 24:1, indicating that the focus of the story is transitioning from Abraham to Isaac, states that Abraham was an old man and blessed by the Lord “in every way.” From Abraham's perspective and the divine perspective, the delay of Abraham's full possession of Canaan did not hinder him from being fully blessed. The Lord had blessed Abraham with wealth (12:16, 13:6, 20:14-16), sons (21:2, 16:4, 25:1-4), and honor (23:6, 14:17-20, 20:15; 21:22-23), in addition to the one piece of land he owned. The land *would be* his in full, even if not in his lifetime.
2. All that remained for Abraham to do was to further secure Isaac's position as his heir. Ensuring he had a proper wife was critical, since the Patriarchal Covenant was being passed to Isaac and his offspring, and the influence of the wife and mother in a family is significant. Therefore, Abraham committed this task to his most senior servant, one whom he obviously trusted and had trained in the ways of the Lord. (Whether or not this was Eliezer, the servant Abraham thought might inherit his estate (15:2) is unknown.)

### ii. The Servant's Oath – 24:2-9

1. Abraham had two primary concerns:
  - a. First, that Isaac would not leave the land of promise – fearing he might never return.
  - b. Second, that Isaac not marry a local Canaanite woman.
    - i. Although Abraham was called to leave his family behind in order to go to the land to which God was sending him (Canaan; 12:1), choosing a wife for Isaac from among his own family was far preferable to allowing Isaac to marry a woman of Canaanite origin. Abraham knew the land was to be taken from the Canaanites in order that his descendants would inherit it (15:15-16, 18-21).
    - ii. The writer has previously informed us that Abraham possessed information about his brother Nahor's family. While Nahor was an idolater (Joshua 24:2), the portrayal of his son Bethuel's family in Genesis 24 (verse 50) leads us to believe that, at the very least, this branch of the family worshipped the Lord along with their idols (31:19). Rebekah's willingness to leave her family far behind, apparently only because doing so was God's will for her (24:50, 57-58), gives us a positive insight into her spiritual life.

- iii. Although it was not acceptable for a parent to marry their own child (recall the shame of Lot and his daughters, 19:30-38), marriage between siblings and cousins was widely practiced in ancient times, when genetic mutations had not yet resulted in physical or developmental difficulties in the offspring of close relatives.
  - 2. The act of the servant placing his hand under Abraham's thigh has been explained in a variety of ways. The "thigh" almost certainly was a euphemism for the male procreative organs.
    - a. Some suggest a connection with the rite of circumcision, giving "a covenant solemnity to the oath."<sup>i</sup>
    - b. Another idea is that it "had reference to the long-range effects that the servant's mission would have upon Abraham's descendants."<sup>ii</sup>
    - c. Others suggest, "it symbolized that even his yet unborn children would avenge any violation of the act."<sup>iii</sup>
    - d. The custom is only referred to in one other place in the Bible (Genesis 47:29), where no further insight can be gained about its real meaning. Regardless, it was clearly intended to be a solemn oath.
  - 3. Abraham assured his servant, "the Lord, the God of Heaven" would guarantee his success (24:6-7).
- iii. The Servant's Journey – 24:10-11
  - 1. The servant traveled from Canaan (presumably Mamre [Hebron]) to the town of Nahor in Aram Naharaim in northwest Mesopotamia. This was a journey of roughly 500 miles and could have taken many weeks.<sup>iv</sup>
  - 2. Therefore, he went with ample supplies, including bridal gifts (24:10, 22, 53).
- iv. The Servant's Prayer – 24:12-14
  - 1. Customarily, women went to the town well for water in the morning and evening, avoiding this laborious chore in the heat of the day. Not knowing where to begin to find Abraham's family or the proper wife for Isaac, the servant used common sense by going to a place where he could, at the very least, gather information, and in the best case, identify a worthy woman.

2. Here, he prayed to the God of his master, Abraham, for success. His prayer was specific, bold, and smart! He asked God to cause the woman He had prepared to be Isaac's wife to voluntarily water his ten thirsty camels. (That would be a significant task!) However, if God answered in the way he prayed, there wouldn't be much room for doubt that her family was the one whom he should meet, and he would have confidence that the woman had good health in addition to being kind, hospitable, and industrious.

v. Rebekah's Appearance – 24:15-25

1. Before he finished praying, Rebekah appeared at the well, an indication that God foreknew the prayer of Abraham's servant and was already working to fulfill the request.
2. Just as he prayed, Rebekah (who we are told was beautiful, a virgin, and Nahor's granddaughter) responded to his request for a drink by offering to also water his camels. But to make the offer was one thing, to fulfill it, another. This she did completely, proving herself a woman of honor.
3. After offering Rebekah gifts in appreciation and as an act of good will, he asked about her family and received the answer he hoped to hear, the confirmation that she was Bethuel's daughter and Nahor's granddaughter. Furthermore, she responded to his inquiry for lodging by affirming her family's ability and willingness to host the traveler and his beasts.

vi. The Servant's Response – 24:26-27

1. Having received such clear direction from the Lord, the servant bowed and worshipped Him, thanking Him for His loving-kindness and provision. (How often do we petition in prayer, only to forget prayers of thanksgiving once we have received God's gracious answer?)
2. This servant had been influenced by Abraham's faith.

vii. The Servant's Meeting with Laban – 24:28-53

1. Rebekah's brother Laban is introduced for the first time.
  - a. Laban appears to be the primary negotiator, along with his father. This role of the brother was according to custom<sup>v</sup> and, as scholars Keil and Delitzsch explain, possibly, one of the many complications of polygamy: the daughters of the least favorite wife (or wives) might be neglected (not given as a wife) apart from the intervention of a brother. (This suggestion is only regarding the *origin* of the custom and *not* intended to imply that Rebekah was such an unfortunate woman.)

- b. Laban becomes an even more significant character later in Genesis. His daughters, Leah and Rachel, become the wives of Isaac and Rebecca's son Jacob.
  2. The servant eagerly recounted the story to Laban and Bethuel, of his journey, his prayer, and his encounter with Rebekah in great detail. In amazement, they could only reply, "This is from the Lord; we can say nothing to you one way or the other. Here is Rebekah; take her and go, and let her become the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has directed" (24:50-51).
  3. The gifts offered to Rebecca's family were in line with the custom of a groom's family paying a bride price.
- viii. Rebekah's Decision – 24:45-61
  1. With his mission accomplished, the servant wanted to return to Abraham as quickly as possible to assure him of his success. (After all, Abraham was quite elderly, and the servant would have wanted the pleasure of giving him this good news prior to his death.)
  2. Although her family wished more time to spend with Rebekah, when asked, she indicated willingness to comply immediately. Her response echoes that of Abraham's willingness to leave his family at God's call (12:1-4).
- ix. Isaac's Reception – 24:62-67
  1. Isaac had been in Beer Lahai Roi, the place where Hagar first met the "angel of the Lord" and named it "*the God who sees me*" (the meaning of Beer Lahai Roi).
  2. Isaac was in a field meditating. The word "meditate" is understood by many to indicate prayer.<sup>vi</sup> Perhaps he was praying about the outcome of the servant's journey and his marriage.
  3. He and Rebekah saw one another from a distance, although neither knew whom they were seeing.
  4. We are told that Rebekah was a source of great comfort to Isaac, following the death of his mother. He loved her (24:66-67).

### **C. Abraham's Death** – 25:1-10

#### i. Keturah's Sons – 25:1-4

1. A brief statement is made about sons born to Abraham by a wife (later called a concubine, 1 Chronicles 1:32) named Keturah. She bore him six sons, and these fathered people groups. All this was in fulfillment of God's promise to make him the father of many nations (17:6).

2. Bible scholars have mixed opinions about whether Keturah became Abraham's wife after Sarah's death, as the chronology suggests, or whether she was one of the concubines (25:6, the other being Hagar) whom he may have had while married to Sarah. In either case, the placement of the information at the end of Abraham's life's story further affirms the fulfillment of prophecy about his many descendants, while also helping to clarify Isaac's unique status among his many half-brothers.
- ii. Abraham's Sons Sent Away – 25:5-6
    1. Having been blessed "in every way" (24:1), and assured that Isaac was properly married, Abraham took steps to *ensure Isaac's position* as his sole heir was protected.
    2. Isaac inherited everything Abraham owned, while Abraham's other sons received gifts and were sent away from Isaac, by Abraham, to the east. (Ishmael was one of these who was sent away, 21:14.)
  - iii. Abraham's Burial – 25:7-10
    1. Abraham died at age 175 and "was gathered to his people."
      - a. This expression, and the similar one, to "go to his people" (or "ancestors"), recurs frequently in the Old Testament (Genesis 15:15, 25:8, 17; 49:29, 33; Deuteronomy 32:50, 2 Kings 22:20).
      - b. Some have suggested that it simply means to be buried alongside one's relatives. However, in Genesis 25, this cannot be the case, for Abraham was not buried with his ancestors, or even with his extended family. Sarah was the only other person buried at this site.
      - c. Being "gathered to one's people" or to "go to one's people" are expressions that affirm that, upon a person's death, they have entered an afterlife where they have "joined a community of believers who had gone on before."<sup>vii</sup>
        - i. Hebrews 11:16 tells us that the Patriarchs longed for a heavenly country.
        - ii. Although the Biblical doctrine of resurrection isn't fully developed until the New Testament, we know that the concept of afterlife can be traced back at least a thousand years before Abraham's time. The pyramids of Egypt stand as a testimony to ancient belief in real life beyond death.<sup>viii</sup>
        - iii. When the question of afterlife was raised to Jesus, He quoted from the "Bible" of His day, the Old Testament (Exodus 3:6), to prove that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were still living (Matthew 22:29-32).

2. Ishmael and Isaac buried Abraham alongside Sarah. Here, we see Ishmael elevated above Keturah's sons. He had received a distinct blessing by God by Abraham's request (17:20).

**Summary Statement:** Abraham did all that was necessary to ensure and establish Isaac's position before his death.

**Principle:** *God the Father has made all the necessary provisions that we might be called His sons and daughters.*

Isaac's position as Abraham's heir is a picture of the position of "sonship" that believers, have today.

- The New Testament is full of verses that speak of us as God's children.
- While there is some sense in which all people are universally God's children, in that He gives all people life and breath (Acts 17:25-29, Hebrews 12:9, James 1:18), the Bible does not refer to human beings at large as "God's children," but only to those who have entered a saving relationship with Him through Christ. *We are called His sons and daughters!*

How does this happen?

- The general term Bible students use to describe our salvation is *redemption*. We understand that our redemption is accomplished by Jesus' atoning death.
- But our question concerns how that is applied to us. Specifically, we want to understand *our position as God's children*.
- In order to do so, it is helpful to consider four different doctrinal terms. These terms are *regeneration, conversion, justification, and adoption*. (The *Systematic Theology* text written by Wayne Grudem is one of many helpful resources that explain the meaning of these terms. I have used his definitions and many of his explanations below.)

**Regeneration:** "*Regeneration is a secret act of God in which he imparts new spiritual life to us. This is sometimes called 'being born again' (using language from John 3:3-8)."*<sup>ix</sup>

- Unlike some of the other terms, this is not one in which we play an active role. It is the work of God alone in which He reaches into our hearts and awakens us spiritually.
- Romans 3:11, 1 Corinthians 2:14, Ephesians 2:4-5, Colossians 2:13 are among the passages that speak of us as being awakened into a state of spiritual life following a state in which we were spiritually dead and undiscerning.
- We may or may not be able to pinpoint the moment in which this has happened to us, but we will see evidence of it over time in changed desires and behavior.
- Dr. Grudem says, when this happens, we sometimes explain it this way: "I don't know exactly what happened, but before that moment I did not trust in Christ for salvation. I

was still wondering and questioning in my mind. But after that moment, I realized that I did trust in Christ and He was my Savior. Something happened in my heart.”

Conversion: “*Conversion is our willing response to the gospel call, in which we sincerely repent of sins and place our trust in Christ for salvation.*”<sup>x</sup>

- We are active in this process. We actively *repent* (turn from) our sins and place our *faith* in Christ for salvation.
- Conversion doesn’t occur because we merely know and approve of the truth. It occurs as a decision of our will to depend on Christ to save us personally. It is our very personal choice.
- And this choice is always accompanied by a heartfelt renunciation of the sin in our life and a genuine desire to live in obedience to Christ.
- Although not necessary for conversion, because it involves a decision of the will, it is often helpful to express this decision in a prayer.

Justification: “*Justification is an instantaneous legal act of God in which he (1) thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ’s righteousness as belonging to us, and (2) declares us to be righteous in his sight.*”<sup>xi</sup>

- While regeneration is an act of God in us, justification is a judgment of God with respect to us.<sup>xii</sup>
- Justification explains how we can no longer be guilty and deserving punishment for our sins. When we are justified, God legally declares us forgiven and no longer liable.
- He does this by transferring (or imputing) Christ’s substitutionary death for our own *and* by reckoning Christ’s perfect life as a substitute for the life we could never live.
- We are no longer condemned (Romans 8:33-34) *and* we are considered just (or righteous) (Philippians 3:9).

Adoption: “*Adoption is an act of God whereby he makes us members of his family.*”<sup>xiii</sup>

- You may wonder, how can we be both born into a family and adopted. In human families, it does not happen that way. But in God’s family, it does. Both are true. We are re-born and we are adopted. The reason the Bible uses both of these terms is, as I have been describing, to highlight two different truths about our salvation. Our adoption highlights that we are not naturally part of His family. Naturally, we are born into Adam’s human family and inherit his sin nature. We are naturally children of darkness (Ephesians 5:8).
- We could have been made spiritually alive (regenerated), repented of our sins and received Christ by faith (converted), and been declared forgiven and righteous by God (justified), and that alone would have been marvelous. Yet, by adopting us, God has elevated us to the position of being His own sons and daughters.
- We are adopted into a position of “sonship” through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:5).
- The aspect of our salvation called adoption focuses on the personal relationship salvation gives us with God and with other saved people.

- Not only do we know God as our own Heavenly Father, we also have sisters and brothers in Christ. By being adopted into God's family, both Jews and Gentiles, males and females, all become equally part of one family (Galatians 3:28-29).

Just as Abraham did what was necessary to secure Isaac's position as his son and heir, in Christ, God has done what is necessary that we might be secured in our position as His children.

**Application:** Understanding our identity as sons and daughter of God is critical to our transformation and our ability to live in obedience to God. Beloved pastor, Ray Stedman (now with the Lord), explained this beautifully:

*... We have power to overcome the sin that is within. Now, that is a very important matter, and one that we ought to understand clearly. Because we do not always feel that we have power to overcome sin, we need to recognize that certain facts are true, whether we feel it or not... What we really are saying is that behavior depends on seeing and recognizing who you are and the basic facts about your identity. Psychologists tell us this. They say that only when you have a clear idea of who you really are can you then act that way. But you can't turn the two around. You can't act like something you would like to be, and thus gradually become that kind of person. That is what confuses so many people today. Millions of people today are operating on the basis that they will become the kind of person they would like to be if they act that way. But that is wrong. The Word of God tells us the truth -- the way to become different is to become changed at the very basis of your being by faith in Christ, so that you are something different. And if you believe what you are, you will begin to act that way. What a difference that makes... it is something that God intends for us to return to when we are in trouble. If you are having difficulty handling your behavior -- whether you are not doing what you want to do, or doing what you don't want to do -- the way to handle it is to remind yourself of what God has made you to be... you are not a slave, helplessly struggling against a cruel and powerful master; you are a son, a son of the living God, with power to overcome the evil -- even though it is a struggle to do so. And though you may be temporarily overcome, you are never ultimately defeated. It cannot be, because you are already constituted children of God. No matter what happens to us, that is what we are. Nothing can change that.<sup>xiv</sup>*

Dear believing friend, do you live below the dignity of your position as God's sons and daughters or in light of it?

**Transition:** Isaac was Abraham's promised, chosen son. As such, he became heir to the Patriarchal Covenant and the promises of God that were part of that covenant. The remainder of Genesis 25 and chapter 26 further portray this. To begin, we see Ishmael dismissed, since this benefit did not belong to him.

## II. Isaac Inherits the Covenant Promises – Genesis 25:11-26:35

### A. Isaac, Not Ishmael – 25:11-18

#### i. Isaac's Divine Blessing – 25:11

1. Immediately after Abraham's death is recorded, Genesis 25:11 says, "After Abraham's death, God blessed his son Isaac, who then lived near Beer Lahai Roi."
2. The statement affirms that Isaac was beginning to inherit God's covenant promise of blessing, first given to his father Abraham (15:4, 17:19, 21:12).

#### ii. Ishmael's Family – 25:12-18

1. The pattern in Genesis with regard to tracing descendants is to, first, list those of least importance to the main story, and then, setting them aside, continue the story with the man who is more significant in it. Also, more space is given to the genealogy of the man with godly influence. Therefore, just as Cain's lineage precedes Seth's (4:17-5:32) and the lineage of Japheth and Ham precedes that of Shem (Genesis 10-11), Ishmael's descendants are briefly accounted for before the text moves on to give a fuller account of Isaac's life.
2. A second type of pattern in Genesis is that of a younger brother being recognized over the older one. This is contrary to the custom of the day. Early in Genesis, Seth was the godly younger brother of Cain, who was sent away from the family. Here, Isaac is the son of promise, not Ishmael. We will see that this pattern continues with Isaac's sons and Jacob's sons. 1 Corinthians 1:27-29 explains God's way of often choosing the less likely person to carry out His purpose: "But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him."
3. Ishmael fathered twelve sons, as God foretold (17:20; 21:18). God told Hagar (16:12) that Ishmael "would live in hostility toward all his brothers." Genesis 25:18 confirms that Ishmael's sons did indeed live "in hostility toward all the tribes related to them."
  - a. While some of Keturah's descendants have names that indicate a link to the Arab peoples, Arabs trace their roots directly to Ishmael and Hagar.

- b. James Brenneman writes, “The *Qur’an* describes Mohammed as an Arab prophet, a descendant of the Ishmaelites through a figure known as *‘Adan*. It was Mohammed’s intention to return Arabs to the undefiled religion of their forefather Abraham, understanding Ishmael as the historical conjunction between Muslims and ancient Semitic monotheism. Muslims since have known their spiritual heritage to be Ishmaelite.”<sup>xv</sup>
- c. Isaac’s descendants, through Jacob, are the Jewish people. The long-standing tension between Jews and Arabs combined with ongoing strife among Arab nations proves fulfillment of the prophecy that Ishmael would “live in hostility toward all his brothers” (16:12).

## **B. Isaac’s Twin Sons – 25:19-34**

- i. Isaac’s “Toledoth” – 25:19-20
  - 1. The record of Ishmael’s sons and the introduction of Isaac’s family begin with a phrase, “this is the account of”, repeated ten times in Genesis. As indicated in the Beginnings study, one can outline the book of Genesis based on these “toledoths”.
  - 2. “Toledoth” is a word that translates “generations”. Each time it is used, it is followed by a genealogy or history.
- ii. Rebekah’s Barrenness – 25:21
  - 1. Less space (by far) is given in Genesis to the life of Isaac than any of the other Patriarchs. The statement that Rebekah was barren is our first clue about why less is said. Isaac’s life was a reflection of his father’s life in so many ways that highlighting some of these similarities says as much as needs to be told about him.
  - 2. Sarah and Rebecca were not the only matriarchs with fertility issues. The battle for fertility between Jacob’s wives is also crucial in the Patriarchal narratives. God promised Abraham many descendants and that, through them, He would bless the world. The Bible is careful to prove that the outworking of His plan of salvation can never be explained by natural occurrences. The barrenness of the matriarchs’ substantiates this: their position as the mothers of many descendants was divinely foretold and supernaturally fulfilled.
- iii. Rebekah’s Pregnancy – 25:22-23
  - 1. Isaac prayed and, as a result, Rebekah conceived. Abraham waited 25 years for Isaac’s birth. Similarly, Isaac waited 20 before his sons were born (25:20, 26).

2. During Rebekah’s pregnancy, unusual movement within her caused her to inquire of the Lord, “Why is this happening to me?” Some translations fail to suggest the force of their movement. Referring to this, Don Carson says, “The babies smashed each other... inside their mother’s womb. Their antenatal battle foreshadowed the life-long struggle between them.”<sup>xvi</sup>
    - a. The Lord answered Rebekah. She learned she was carrying twins who would father two nations. The Lord tells her they “will be separated.” (The Israelites and the Edomites were regularly at war with one another.)
    - b. Additionally, the Lord told her the older twin would serve the younger. This was information Rebekah surely would never have forgotten.
  3. “Why is this happening to me?” is a question people often ask God. Doing so is wise when we are humbly motivated to evaluate ourselves and desire to conform our lives to His purposes. However, more often, people ask this out of resentment for their circumstances, with a desire to blame, suggesting God is treating them unjustly.
- iv. The Twins’ Births and Personalities – 25:24-28
1. The twins’ birth reflected the struggle between them.
  2. The names given them have much significance, especially for their later lives. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* offers these insights about their names:
    - a. The name “Jacob (ya‘āqōb, meaning ‘may He [God] protect’) was selected because of its connection in sound and sense to the noun ‘heel’ (‘āqēb),”<sup>xvii</sup> since Jacob was born grasping the heel of his older brother. However, later in life this idea took on a fuller meaning as “one who trips up others by grasping the heel”, or one who deceives (“deceiver”).
    - b. “The name Esau (‘ēśāw) has a loose connection with the word ‘Seir’ (śē’îr), the early name for Edom to the southeast of the Dead Sea, where Esau later lived (32:3; 36:8). The Hebrew word ‘red’ (‘admonî) is related to the word ‘Edom’ (‘ēdôm; [compare with] 25:30); and ‘hairy’ (śē’ār) is similar to ‘Seir.’ Those words were carefully chosen to portray in the lad the nature of Edom, a later arch rival of Israel.”<sup>xviii</sup>
  3. From birth, the boys were different. As they grew, their preferences reflected their differences: Esau, the elder, preferred the outdoor life. The younger Jacob was content at home.

4. Isaac favored his older son, who brought home the wild game he so loved. Rebekah favored Jacob. Whether or not this was because of the prophecy that “the older would serve the younger”, we cannot say. Jacob and Rebekah’s favoritism is noted in the text, but not condoned. In fact, as we will see, it greatly aggravated the tensions that already existed between the brothers.
- v. Esau’s Birthright – 25:29-34
1. Jacob and Esau must have known about the God of their father Isaac and grandfather Abraham from the time they were young.
    - a. They surely also knew of His covenant promises to their family.
    - b. Jesus said, “Abraham saw my day and rejoiced” (John 8:56). It seems likely, then, that the Patriarchs anticipated the promised Deliverer (first announced to Eve in Genesis 3:15) would come from their own family.
    - c. Abraham lived to 175 years (25:7). He was 100 when Isaac was born (21:5). Since Isaac was 60 when his twin boys were born (25:26), Abraham lived another 15 years after their birth. They would have had opportunity to hear these things directly from him, as well as their own father.
  2. One would think Jacob and Esau would have been eager to embrace the God of their fathers and His promises. He had chosen them for a special assignment, even though they could not have understood all the details we have from our perspective of history.
  3. However, Genesis 25:29-34 records that Esau despised his birthright! He valued it so little that he traded it away for a single meal.
    - a. The birthright gave the oldest son the right to inherit the estate of one or both parents. It also included a number of other privileges and responsibilities.
      - i. He ranked second only to his father in the family and was considered the one who would guarantee the preservation of the family.
      - ii. He received a double share of the inheritance. (He inherited as much as two other sons combined would inherit.)
      - iii. He bore leadership responsibility for the tribe, clan, or family.
    - b. The father had the right to ignore birth order in granting the position. Additionally, it could be sold or traded by the eldest son himself.<sup>xix</sup> This was what Esau did.

- i. We may applaud Jacob's eagerness to be aligned with God's promises, but the passage implies that he took advantage of his brother in order to do so. It hints at the deceptive, scheming nature we see further developed in Jacob as the story continues.
- ii. Esau's willingness to trade such privileges and responsibilities so quickly is also a statement about his nature. Hebrews 12:16 condemns Esau, saying his willingness to trade his birthright so quickly was because he was "godless". His carelessness about inheriting God's promises could only reflect carelessness toward God in general. He was spiritually apathetic.

### **C. Isaac and Abimelech – 26:1-33**

#### **i. A Divine Appearance to Isaac – 26:1-6**

1. Genesis 26 is the only chapter in Genesis devoted entirely to the life of Isaac. The chapter highlights the similarities between the lives of Isaac and Abraham. This is not to say that Isaac demonstrated the depth of character that was shown by his father. But the similarities were recorded to establish that the promises and plan of God were passed from father to son. Isaac was heir to Abraham's position and possessions.
2. A famine drove Isaac to Gerar, where Abimelech was king.
  - a. While Abraham went to Egypt in a famine, the Lord specifically warned Isaac against going there. Isaac was to stay in the land of the Philistines – part of the territory later given by God to his descendants.
  - b. Except for that one difference, the remainder of what the Lord said to Isaac is quite familiar to us. He repeated His patriarchal promises, affirming to Isaac directly that God would work through him as He had his father.
    - i. God would give him and his descendants all of Canaan.
    - ii. He would make his descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky.
    - iii. And through Isaac's offspring, all nations on earth would be blessed.
  - c. Abraham established his son's position prior to his death. But God Himself established Isaac as the possessor of His covenant promises.

- ii. Isaac's Lie About Rebekah – 26:7-11
  1. Obediently, Isaac remained in Gerar.
  2. However, he followed his father's poor example in lying about his relationship to his beautiful wife, claiming she was merely his sister. Isaac inherited Abraham's weaknesses as well as his strengths! His excuse was the same as his father's: "I thought I might lose my life on account of her."
  3. Whether or not this Abimelech is the same man Abraham encountered or his successor is unknown. On this occasion, Abimelech learned of Isaac's deceit before he ever took Rebekah into his harem, and he warned any of his subjects against harming her or Isaac.
  4. This event may have occurred before the birth of the twins.
- iii. Isaac's Prosperity – 26:12-16
  1. Both Abraham and Isaac's material possessions were substantially increased in Gerar.
  2. According to Genesis 26:12-14, God blessed Isaac's crops so much that he became extremely wealthy there.
  3. Eventually, the envious Philistines wanted him to move away. They began stopping up his wells.
- iv. Isaac's Battle over Wells – 26:17-22
  1. Both Abraham (21:25-30) and Isaac had conflict with the Philistines over wells.
  2. For those who lived a nomadic lifestyle, access to water supply was essential.
  3. Isaac had repeated conflict with the Philistines over rights to wells. But eventually he found room to flourish near a well no one argued over.
- v. A Second Divine Encounter – 26:23-25
  1. Isaac returned to Beersheba, the place he lived with his father when his father was instructed by God to sacrifice him. His father had planted a tree there (21:33). It was also the place to which Abimelech came to make a peace treaty with Abraham (21:30-32).
  2. At this location, a theophany occurred: the Lord appeared to Isaac. He identified Himself as "the God of your father Abraham" and told Isaac not to be afraid, "for I am with you." He, once again, affirmed His promises to bless Isaac and to increase his descendants.
  3. God said He was doing this for Abraham's sake. Isaac inherited God's promises on the basis of sonship: He was Abraham's heir.
  4. Like Abraham, Isaac was not always deserving of God's blessing. They both received God's promises by grace through faith.

5. Like his father had done on more than one occasion, Isaac built an altar and “called on the name of the Lord.”
- vi. Abimelech and the Peace Treaty – 26:26-33
  1. Just as had happened with Abraham, Abimelech understood the advantage of maintaining a peaceful co-existence with Isaac. He recognized the Lord’s blessing on Isaac’s life. And on this basis, he sought a peace treaty with him. Isaac agreed to the treaty, as his father had.
  2. The story affirms that Isaac’s power and influence in the region was no less than what his father had.
  3. His servants uncovered yet another well, continuing the evidence of divine blessing on him.

#### **D. Esau’s Wives – 26:34-35**

- i. Genesis 26 ends with a brief statement that Isaac’s elder son Esau took wives from among the local women.
- ii. Isaac and Rebekah would not have arranged such marriages. The text states, “They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah.”
- iii. This information further portrays Esau as unfit as the heir of God’s promises.

**Summary Statement:** In this history of our salvation, we see that the covenant promises of God passed from Abraham to his son and heir Isaac. We who are in Christ are also God’s sons and daughters and His heirs.

**Principle:** *God’s children inherit His Kingdom.* (Matthew 25:34, Colossians 1:12, James 2:5)

I have already described our adoption as God’s sons and daughters.

- Adoption was not fully realized by Old Testament believers (Galatians 3:23-26). Although they related to God as their Father, the benefits of adoption could not be fully realized until after Christ completed His work and sent His Spirit to indwell us. Even then, there is yet a future time, the time of Christ’s return and the resurrection of our bodies (Romans 8:23), at which we will completely experience these benefits.
- By our adoption, God grants us the rights of being His children (John 1:12). He gives us special benefits and privileges.
- We become His heirs. Romans 8:15-17 says, “The Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship... The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ...”

As heirs of God’s kingdom, what exactly do we inherit? One day we will inherit eternal life in Heaven in our new bodies. But what are the benefits and privileges we have now?

- First, we know God as our good and loving Heavenly Father and relate to Him on this basis (Romans 8:15-16). He loves us and takes care of our needs. He listens to our petitions and answers us. And He gives us many good gifts.
- One of the greatest gifts we receive is the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 1:13 says “when you believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance...” When the Holy Spirit is resident within us:
  1. *We recognize the Bible as truth when we read it, and the Spirit teaches us by it.* When we read it, it is alive to us. We feel God is speaking to our hearts. At times our hearts may even burn within us.
  2. *We have a desire, at times even an urgency, to pray.* We may see a beautiful mountain view and our heart cries out in praise. Or we may observe a hurting person and immediately breathe a prayer for them.
  3. *We are empowered to live the Christian life.* Although our sin nature and our Enemy will try to condemn us and convince us we cannot succeed, the Holy Spirit within us continually encourages us that He will work through us what we cannot accomplish on our own and renews our desire to live in obedience. Rather than feeling condemned, we feel empowered by Him to succeed.
  4. *We feel a special love and bond with other Christians.* You meet someone and the minute you discover that person is a Christian, you feel your kinship with them.
  5. *We sense God is our Father and Jesus is our brother.* Romans 8:15-16 says, “The Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by Him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” Sometimes the Spirit of God comes over you at an unexpected time or place and you suddenly sense His special love, protection, and provision for you as His child. You may feel overwhelmed by the sense of His nearness and dearness. But even when you do not sense this, even if you have stumbled into sin, there is still a witness in your heart that you belong to God – He is your Father.
- All these are marks that we are God’s children and that the Holy Spirit indwells us as a deposit on an even greater future inheritance.

### **Conclusion**

Nothing could be more life changing than for us to remind ourselves morning after morning of our identity in Christ: we are God’s own sons and daughters. Knowing who we are dictates what we become. Many of us know professing Christians who have never understood their identity in Christ. And because of this, they have only experienced the transformational power of being a son or daughter of God in very small measure. Is that true of you? If so, will you began living up to who you are? Our position is a noble one and our inheritance is beyond measure.

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