

Old Testament History

Lesson #3

Genesis 15:1-Genesis 36:43

Outline

I. ***The Account Of Terah (Genesis 11:27-25:11)***

- A. God's covenant promise (15:1-21).
- B. Hagar and Ishmael (16:1-16).
- C. God's covenant sign: circumcision (17:1-27).
- D. Sarah to bear a son (18:1-15).
- E. Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed (18:16-19:38).
- F. Abraham and Abimelech (20:1-18).
- G. The birth of Isaac (21:1-7).
- H. Hagar and Ishmael banished (21:8-21).
- I. Prosperity in the land (21:22-34).
- J. Abraham's faith tested (22:1-19).
- K. Transition to Isaac (22:20-25:11).
 - 1. Rebekah's family background (22:20-24).
 - 2. The death of Sarah (23:1-20).
 - 3. Isaac marries Rebekah (24:1-67).
 - 4. Isaac the sole heir (25:1-6).
 - 5. The death of Abraham (25:7-11).

II. ***The Account Of Ishmael (Genesis 25:12-18)***

III. ***The Account Of Isaac (Genesis 25:19-35:29)***

- A. The birth of Jacob and Esau (25:19-28).
- B. Esau sells his birthright (25:29-34).
- C. Isaac and Abimelech (26:1-35).
- D. Jacob steals Esau's blessing (27:1-40).
- E. Jacob's increase in exile (27:41-32:32).
 - 1. Jacob sent to Laban (27:41-28:9).
 - 2. Jacob's dream at Bethel (28:10-22).
 - 3. Jacob's marriage to Leah and Rachel (29:1-30).
 - 4. The birth of the tribal patriarchs (29:31-30:24).
 - 5. Jacob plunders Laban (30:25-43).
 - 6. Jacob flees from Laban (31:1-55).
 - 7. Jacob prepares to meet Esau (32:1-21).
 - 8. Jacob wrestles with God (32:22-32).
- F. Esau and Jacob reconciled (33:1-20).
- G. Transition to Jacob (34:1-35:29).
 - 1. Dinah's rape and her brothers' revenge (34:1-31).
 - 2. Return to Bethel (35:1-15).

3. The death of Rachel (35:16-20).
4. Jacob's sons (35:21-26).
5. The death of Isaac (35:27-29).

IV. ***The Account Of Esau (Genesis 36:1-43)***

Notes

Genesis 15:1-20:18; 21:22-34

- Abram had defeated the kings of Assyria, but his victory might expose him to their vengeance, or bring down the jealousy of those around him. He was a stranger in a strange land, with no other possession than a promise -- and not even an heir to whom to transmit it. Abram thought that he would have only Eliezer as an heir, but God assured him that his seed would be as numberless as the stars in the sky.
- The sacrifices that Abram offered were representative of the kinds which were afterwards used as sacrifices under the Old Covenant. They were divided, and the pieces laid one against the other. It was customary for the covenanting parties to pass between the pieces. God alone passed between these pieces, signifying that this covenant was of grace -- one party undertaking all of the obligations while the other receiving all the benefits.
- Abram learned that his descendants would possess the land in the fourth generation, when the iniquity of the present inhabitants of Canaan would be full.
- Sarai seems to have been impatient in waiting for the Lord. Ten years had elapsed since Abram had entered Canaan, when Sarai, following the custom of the day, sought a son by a joining of Abram and Hagar. Hagar bore Ishmael, and this began a period which must be regarded as a difficult trial in Abraham's faith. Thirteen years elapsed without apparently any revelation on the part of God.
- For the final time, God appeared visibly to Abram and established the covenant which He had formerly made. The rite of circumcision was a sign and a seal. At the same time, Abram's name ("father of elevation") was changed to Abraham ("father of a multitude"). Sarai's name ("the princely") was changed to Sarah ("the princess"). This change signified that the chosen race would descend through them.
- God chose to tell Abraham of the impending doom of Sodom and Gomorrah. This was not to be regarded as an isolated judgment, and it would always show Israel the necessity of following God. As Abraham had been called to fight for its deliverance, he now gets to intercede for its preservation. Regrettably, ten righteous people could not be found.
- Mercy was extended to Lot, but he did not escape the consequences of his selfish and sinful choice. Lot's wife lingered because of her feelings

for the cities, causing her to look back and be turned into a pillar of salt. It is sad but necessary to note that terrible judgments have little effect on those closest to them. Lot and his daughters were allowed to go to Zoar, but the same weakness of faith which had made them reluctant to leave their city now made them forsake Zoar.

- Ironically, in his own drunkenness Lot carried out the shameful act that he himself had suggested to the men of Sodom (19:8): he lay with his own daughters. The account is remarkably similar to the story of the last days of Noah after his rescue from the Flood (9:20-27). Thus at the close of the two great narratives of divine judgment, those who were saved from God's wrath subsequently fell into a form of sin similar to those who died in the judgment.
- Clearly the focus in 20:1-18 is not so much the fate of Sarah as it is that of the Philistines. Many of the details are withheld until Abraham is given an opportunity to speak on his own behalf (vss. 11-13). At that point his actions cast more light on the Philistines' inner motives than on his own. Abraham's words show that he had mistakenly judged the Philistines to be a wicked people, but their actions proved otherwise. The narrative goes to great lengths to demonstrate the innocence of Abimelech.

Genesis 21:1-25:18

- The long time between the promise and the fulfillment of an heir would make it very clear to everyone that the gift was supernatural. According to God's direction, Abraham circumcised Isaac on the eighth day. Ishmael must have been a young boy, perhaps at least 14 or maybe even 15 years old.
- The sending away of Ishmael was necessary, not only because of his unfitness, and in order to keep the heir of the promise unmixed with others, but also for the sake of Abraham himself, whose faith must be trained to renounce, in obedience to the divine call, everything -- even his natural, fatherly affection.
- As bitter as was the trial to cast out Ishmael, it was only a preparation for a far more severe test of Abraham's faith and obedience. This was the steepest ascent in Abraham's life, and it stands out in scripture like a grand mountain peak, which only one climber has ever been called to attain.
- In the story, nothing was spared Abraham in the bitterness of his trial. There was not a single promise of deliverance given to Abraham to cheer him. Yet, Abraham "staggered not" at the demand of God. We do not know how young Isaac was, but Josephus calculated his age at 25.

- When Isaac did not resist, and allowed himself to be bound and laid upon the altar, he entered into the spirit of Abraham, took upon himself his faith, and showed himself to truly be an heir to the promises.
- After the offering of Isaac, Abraham lived many years, but no event worth recording in scripture occurred during that period of time. The first event we read of after the offering of Isaac is the death of Sarah at the age of 127. She is the only woman whose age is recorded in scripture. Isaac was at this time 37.
- Three years after the death of Sarah, Abraham resolved to fill the gap in his own family and in the heart of Isaac by seeking a wife for his son. Abraham also took a wife, Keturah, and they had six sons who became the ancestors of Arab tribes which will be referred to later in Old Testament history. Scripture records the death of Abraham at the "good old age" of 175, just 75 years after the birth of Isaac. The Bible said he "was gathered to his people," an expression far different from dying or being buried, and which implies reunion with those who had gone before, and a firm belief in the life to come (cf. Hebrews 11:13).

Genesis 24:1-67; 25:19-26:35

- Abraham knew that Isaac could not take a wife from among the Canaanites, so he used his servant Eliezer to find a suitable wife. However, during this situation Abraham did not have any new revelation from heaven, but he did not need any. All he needed to do was apply to his present circumstances what he had learned from previous revelations of God's will.
- Eliezer's prayer was barely finished when the answer came. Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came to the well by which the stranger stood with his camels.
- Isaac was 40 when he married, and Abraham not only lived to see the marriage, but he lived 15 years beyond the birth of Esau and Jacob. Even before the birth, Rebekah knew that the firstborn would not possess the birthright which God's promise had given to the family of Abraham. This alone accounts for the conduct of Jacob and his mother in seeking to steal the birthright.
- The wild disposition of Esau, which found an outlet in the roaming life of a hunter, reminds us of Ishmael, while Jacob, gentle and domestic, was inclined to stay at home. The quiet, retiring Isaac preferred his bold, daring, strong, roaming older son while Rebekah preferred her gentle son Jacob.
- Jacob, carefully watching the situation, soon found an opportunity to take advantage of his brother. It is interesting to note that scripture in no way excuses nor apologizes for Jacob's conduct. However, Esau showed his true character when he traded his holy privileges for his

carnal lusts. He was a “profane person” (Hebrews 12:16), and therefore unfit to become the heir of the promises.

- God did not expose Isaac to a greater trial that he would have been able to bear in Egypt. Imitating the example of Abraham, Isaac passed off his wife Rebekah as his sister, but God spared him. The famine was very intense and God blessed him with an unusually large return to encourage his faith during his trials. However, the increasing wealth of Isaac stirred up the envy of the Philistines. When Isaac returned to Beersheba, he built an altar and began to call upon the Lord.

Genesis 27:1-28:9

- It had been prophesied before the children were born that Jacob would be greater. Esau had proven himself unfit to be the heir of the promise, first by his profanity, and second by his allegiance with the Canaanites. Despite these clear indications, Isaac lagged behind, reluctant to follow the direction of God.
- It is interesting to note that if Rebekah would have had the faith of Abraham, she would have been content to wait for God in faith, knowing that He would work out His will in His time. In pursuing her purpose, she convinced Jacob to deceive his father in the matter of the blessing and birthright. Unfortunately, deceit, equivocation, and lying, repeated over and over, were required to calm the growing suspicion of Isaac.
- If Isaac, Rebekah, and Jacob had been equally wrong in their share of the matter, Esau deserves at least equal blame. He did not tell his brother Jacob that he was about to obtain from his father what he had already sold to Jacob!
- Isaac saw the influence of God in the entire episode which his own weakness had caused. While all the parties had been in error and sin, God brought about His own purpose, and Isaac recognized this fact. Also, for the first time, Esau obtained a glimpse of what he really lost (cf. Hebrews 12:17). At his earnest pleading for some kind of a blessing, Isaac pronounced a prophecy of the future of Edom.
- Esau, full of hatred and envy, determined to murder his brother. He decided, though, to wait until Isaac was dead. Rebekah, knowing the plan, arranged to send Jacob to his uncle Laban to stay for a short time and find himself a wife.
- Regrettably, the darkness surrounding Esau grew deeper and deeper. Upon learning the charge given him by Isaac, and apparently for the first time realizing that his wives did not please his father, he took one of the daughters of Ishmael for a wife. The spiritual problems of Esau were apparent at every stage of his life.

- After this event Isaac lived another 43 years, but he does not appear anymore in Old Testament history. The thread is now taken up by Jacob, upon whom the promise is transferred.

Genesis 28:10-31:55

- After traveling more than forty miles through the mountains, Isaac came to the place where Abraham had first rested upon entering the land, and where he and Lot, before their separation, had surveyed the country.
- After piling some stones for a pillow, Jacob slept and saw "a ladder," or more correctly, a flight of steps. The vision and the words which the Lord spoke explain each other, one being the symbol of the other. God explicitly renewed to him, in the fullest possible manner, the promise and the blessing first given to Abraham, and added to it a great amount of comfort. From this point, the place was known as Bethel ("the house of God").
- Laban was a selfish, covetous man, and Jacob proved himself to be useful as a shepherd. Without consulting God in the matter, he proposed to serve Laban seven years for Rachel's hand. As he had deceived his father, so Laban now deceived him. Taking advantage of the Eastern custom that a bride was always brought to her husband veiled, he substituted for Rachel her older sister Leah.
- As God had overruled the error and sin of Isaac and Jacob, so He did also in the case of Laban and Jacob. Leah, as far as we know, was the one whom God intended for Jacob. From Leah came Judah, in whose line the promise to Abraham was to be fulfilled. It deserves special notice that in the birth of at least three of her sons, Leah not only recognized God, but acknowledged Him as Jehovah, the covenant God.
- Fourteen years' servitude to Laban had left Jacob as poor as when he had first come to him. Laban, with pretended liberality, invited Jacob to name his wages for the future. But this time the deceiver was about to be deceived.
- Jacob seemed to make a very modest request regarding the sheep and goats, but Laban carefully made the selection himself. Laban reversed the conditions of the agreement again and again, but God eventually made everything come out to the benefit of Jacob (Genesis 31:12-13).
- Because God had blessed Jacob, Laban and his sons were very envious. Jacob had to leave quickly, and Laban's anger grew even deeper by the theft of his household gods. God warned Laban in a dream not to hurt Jacob, and there was peace between them.

Genesis 32:1-36:43

- One enemy was now behind him (Laban), but a far more formidable one had yet to be encountered. As Jacob entered back into the promised land, angels welcomed him. Jacob needed the comfort because he had sent Esau a message from Mahanaim intending to reconcile with him.
- Through all of his difficulties with Esau, Jacob was now learning to obtain what God had promised to give in God's way. Jacob sent his brother a large gift of cattle and sheep. When he was alone on the banks of the Jabbok River, Jacob wrestled with an angel. As Jacob recognized the character of his opponent, he no longer expected to prevail by his own strength. He asked to be blessed by the angel so he could prevail. Before blessing him, God changed his name from Jacob ("supplanter") to Israel ("a prince with God"). Jacob had been the believing heir to the promises, but all his life he had wrestled with God, and sought to attain success by his own skill and luck. Now that old part of his life was abandoned, and he has a name worthy of a new, devout character. The limp reminded him of God's graciousness in blessing him.
- When the brothers finally met, Esau fell upon the neck of his brother, and embraced and kissed him. Now that they were reconciled, their good relationship remained until their death.
- Once again, Jacob crossed the Jordan and settled in the city of Shechem. This was the same land which Jacob gave to his son Joseph (Genesis 48:22), and where the bones of Joseph were buried (Joshua 24:32).
- However, Jacob's stay at Shechem proved to be a sad occasion of trouble for him. Dinah, who was about 15 years old, wanted to take part in a feast of the Shechemites. The event led to the ruin of Dinah, a proposal of an alliance between the Hivites and Israel, and deceit on the part of Simeon and Levi for the purpose of exacting revenge.
- Because of Simeon and Levi's actions, God directed Jacob to return to Bethel. Jacob was able to purge his family from idolatry, a task that he was perhaps too weak to do up until this point. From Bethel they continued their journey to Mamre. Rachel died in giving birth to Jacob's twelfth son, Benjamin (cf. Jeremiah 31:15).
- Scripture records the death of Isaac at the age of 180, although the event took place 12 years after Jacob's arrival at Hebron. Isaac had, of course, lived to share his son's sorrow when Joseph was sold into Egypt, having only died 10 years before Jacob and his sons settled in Egypt.