

## GENESIS 21-25

### 1) THE BIRTH OF ISAAC 21: 1-7

Isaac is finally born to Abraham and Sarah. His name means 'laughter' and Sarah, for one, enjoys laughing with joy at this wonderful and miraculous fulfilment of God's promise. The emphasis on laughter also reveals God's sense of humour, but also the fact that Isaac is a gift beyond any expectation of possibility Abraham and Sarah have. It's all about grace and Abraham's and Sarah's faith is tested to the breaking point.

### 2) HAGAR AND ISHMAEL 21: 8-21

Now that Isaac is born, Sarah asks Abraham to send off Hagar and Ishmael. The politics of who is the full heir and who is not would become a greater issue as the boys grew into men. Abraham provides Hagar with some food and transport and sends them off. Hagar, however, works through all her supplies and becomes desperate in the middle of the wilderness. In her distress God comes to her once again (as God does in an earlier time she had run away) and promises to bless her and Ishmael. God provides for them in the moment, and we read about how Ishmael prospers and how his descendants are blessed. The Arabic people today trace their ancestry to Ishmael. Hagar is also the inspirational ancestor of black slaves. God is on the side of the oppressed, and both Abraham and Sarah must carry shame for how they treated her.

### 3) ABRAHAM AND ABIMELECH 21: 22-34

The relationship (or covenant) between Abraham and God, becomes the pattern of Abraham's relationships (covenants) with his neighbours. He and Abimelech develop a deep respect, honesty, and generous regard toward one another. They trust each other and treat each other with the utmost grace.

### 4) ABRAHAM AND ISAAC ON MOUNT MORIAH 22: 1-19

It is virtually impossible to understand the reasoning of Abraham in willing to sacrifice Isaac because he hears God asking him to do this. It suffices to say that in the world then, sacrifice was common, and in some cultures human sacrifice was also committed. The Old Testament was strongly against human sacrifice and the story of Abraham and Isaac is in no way speaking against the biblical prohibition on human sacrifice. What's important here are two things:

A) When Isaac asks his father where the lamb for sacrificing will come from, Abraham tells him 'The Lord will provide.' The word 'providence' has the same root as 'provide.' It speaks of Abraham's faith in that God will provide a way through this potentially disastrous situation.

B) The focus of this 'testing' of Abraham, is faith. How strongly and absolutely does Abraham trust God, even when all sense and reason seem to speak against there being any positive way out?

Abraham's faith is rewarded, and a way out is provided, and God's promises to Abraham as Abraham carries them in his mind and heart, are confirmed and affirmed once again.

#### 5) NAHOR 22: 20-24

We recall that when Abraham, Sarah, and Lot left Haran, they left behind Abraham's brother Nahor. We are not told about his descendants because this is a prelude to the story of Isaac meeting Rebekah.

#### 6) SARAH'S DEATH AND BURIAL 23

Sarah dies quite a bit earlier than Abraham does. Her importance in Abraham's life and in the story is indicated by the trouble Abraham goes to secure a permanent burial plot where she, and eventually he, will be buried. Again, as with Abimelech, so too with the Hittites, we are privy to Abraham's wonderful relationships and agreements (covenants) secured. Abraham is respected and admired. He is trusted and treated with the utmost kindness and generosity.

#### 7) THE MARRIAGE OF ISAAC AND REBEKAH 24

This is a wonderful story about how Rebekah is discovered as the candidate to be wife to Isaac. The process is so foreign to us for a number of reasons. First of all, it is Abraham's responsibility to secure a wife for his son, not Isaac himself. Abraham makes arrangements with his senior servant to go back to his home country and his kindred (Nahor's family) in order to find a suitable wife for Isaac. Second, the reason why Rebekah is chosen seems to be that she was the first to appear and do what Abraham's servant considers a test of her suitability. Obviously, beyond doing what the servant was expecting, Rebekah exuded generosity, consideration, and kindness, making her that much more an answer from God. Thirdly, even though Rebekah had some say in the matter (even though she had never met Isaac or his family), there is some pressure for her to respond positively to this request of kin. Thankfully when Isaac and Rebekah meet it seems to be love at first sight and Isaac finds great consolation in Rebekah as he is still grieving the death of his mother.

## 8) THE BIRTH OF ESAU AND JACOB 25

As is typical for a wealthy patriarch of the ancient world, Abraham marries again and fathers more children. Moreover, he also has children with several concubines. In the ancient world, building up the family business also includes having many children to do the work and expand the production. However, Abraham is also careful to separate Isaac from his other children in terms of where they fit in the hierarchy of privilege and authority.

Abraham dies, Ishmael's descendants are listed, and then the story moves to Isaac, Rebekah, and the birth of their children. What is fascinating is that the pattern in the story of Abraham and Sarah is repeated here. Rebekah, too, has difficulty getting pregnant, and here, too, there is a story of the younger brother claiming the birth-right of the older first born (Isaac vs Ishmael). In the case of Esau and Jacob, the difference in age is but a few minutes. But in terms of personalities, interests, and abilities, the two could not be farther apart. Esau is an outdoorsman, a skilled hunter, a man of the field, whereas Jacob is more of a quiet, indoor kind of man who likes to hang around the house. We are also told that Isaac prefers Esau while Rebekah prefers Jacob. This is where the trouble begins. Jacob is a conniving schemer, and later we will see how he is aided and abetted in this inclination of his by his mother. Esau, on the other hand, has no use for schemes or planning. He lives for the day and doesn't think much about tomorrow unless it has to do with his hunting or figuring out how to fulfil his parents' requests.

Both Jacob and Esau reveal their weaknesses in the story. Jacob's weakness is that he schemes to take something from his brother by deception. Esau's weakness is that he cares so little about his birth right that he lets it go for bread and stew. The devastation all of this will cause will become evident in the coming chapters. What will also become evident is how God works to fulfil the divine plan in spite of, and even through, the wickedness and thoughtlessness of human actors in the drama of life.

How have God's plans for your life worked themselves out with all that's come to be for good or ill? God's plan is always about how you can become a blessing in the world (hands, feet and heart of Jesus, as we say) through the particular circumstances of your life with all the choices made for you as much as by you, and all of who you are as a person and personality. Your uniqueness is part of the plan too.