

The Life and Times of Isaac & Rebekah

GENESIS 25:19-26:35; 35:28-29



Opening Thoughts

- * The "Isaac" story is strikingly brief
 - ◆ Abraham, Jacob and Joseph all get approx. 12 chapters
 - ◆ Only 1 chapter and a few verses are fully devoted to Isaac — Gen 25:19-26:35 ...
 - ◆ And his death in Gen 35:28-29
 - ▶ He lived the longest ... 180 years ... yet was covered the least

Opening Thoughts

- * It would seem that we have learned as much about Isaac as the author wants from ...
 - ◆ His prominence in the “seed” narrative
 - ◆ And his faith in submitting to his father’s sacrifice
- * With the account of Gen 26 functioning like a “slideshow” or “snapshots” of his life
 - ◆ Kind of like the “life in review” picture collages we see at weddings, family reunions, etc.

Opening Thoughts

- * Yet ... Isaac is not insignificant
 - ◆ He does receive and pass on the covenant promises and blessings
 - ◆ He is one of the four patriarchs
- * Although his life, perhaps like his general personality, is somewhat “bland”
- * And his legacy seems to be a bridge from his father Abraham to the greater narrative of his son Jacob

Structure

- * These are the generations of Isaac - 25:19-26
- * Marriage and family dynamics - vv. 27-34
- * The life and times of Isaac - 26:1-35
 - ◆ Comprised of six vignettes and a closing disappointment

Structure

- * What is the main point of Gen 25:19-26:35?
 - ◆ God's [unfailing faithfulness](#)
- * One key thing about the structure clues us in to this main point ... **what is it?**
 - ◆ The complete parallel with the Abraham narrative in Gen 26 ...
- * There is essentially "no new data" in the Isaac narrative — rather a recapitulation of the events of Abraham's life ([in Isaac's life](#)) and God's faithfulness!

The Parallels

- * Both sought wives from their people
 - ◆ Sarai came with Abram; Rebekah was brought from Haran
- * Both wives were barren
 - ◆ Sarai approx. 39 years; Rebekah for 20 years
- * Both patriarchs experienced bitter family dynamics arising from sibling rivalries
- * Both patriarchs face a famine after the opening act
 - ◆ With both men exercising human effort “to find food”

The Parallels

- * Abraham and Isaac both resort to deceit for protection
 - ◆ This is my SISTER!
- * Both patriarch's grew rich at the expense of the Philistines
- * Both experienced persecution from the Philistines ... conflict over water ... leading to “peace-treaties”
- * Perhaps most important — both men receive and are assured of God's promises and blessings ... leading to worship

The Differences

- * Isaac prayed and waited on the LORD for a child
- * Isaac's faith does not seem to be tested quite as deliberately as Abraham's
- * Isaac seems more passive in every way — and he comes across more “self-centered”
- * The Isaac narrative is a “re-run” of Abraham's life — a “highlight reel” of key events, affirming that ...

“God's faithfulness in the past can be counted on in the present and the future.”

“What God has done for the fathers He will also do for the sons.”

— John Sailhamer

Reminding us that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” Heb 13:8

The Generations

- * We begin with the 10-fold repetition of the phrase אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת - “this is the account of”
- * Each time this occurs, the focus of attention narrows to the generation(s) that follow
 - ◆ All leading and pointing to the ultimate seed ... the Messiah
- * After a cursory “placing” of Isaac and Rebekah, the narrative immediately turns its focus to “the kids”

The Generations

- * Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah, who ... like Sarah, was barren
- * Yet unlike Sarah, she did not resort to Plan B
 - ◆ N.B. I think we can give some credit to Isaac for this — he seemed wholly devoted to Rebekah
 - ◆ And ... she was relieved of her barrenness in half the time (20 years to Sarah's 39)

The Generations

- * Nevertheless, they pursued God for the solution ... **How?**
 - ◆ Isaac PRAYED
 - ◆ So, I should note that some of what we may see as **passivity** is actually **piety**
- * And — unlike Abraham, God doesn't make them wait quite as long in answer ... only 20 years
 - ◆ Don't let v. 21 mislead you — it wasn't immediate
 - ◆ Note v. 26 — Isaac was 60 at their birth ... I don't think it took him 20 years to figure out she was barren and start praying 😊

The Generations

- * In their "patience" we see Isaac and Rebekah's **piety** and **faith** over and against "A&S's" man-made plans
- * **These two aspects of Isaac's character seem to be his most notable attributes**
- * God answered, but it was an "unusual pregnancy" - vv. 22-23
 - ◆ Apparently, it was a "difficult pregnancy" as the "kids" started squabbling from conception ...
 - ◆ Leading Rebekah to inquire of the LORD
 - ◆ Who promptly answers with prophetic insights

The Generations

* What do we learn in God's response?

- ◆ Affirmation of the 'many nations,' aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant and ...
- ◆ A distinction among the nations

* What do learn about God's methods?

- ◆ He often works with the weaker vessel (one stronger, one weaker)
- ◆ He unconditionally [elects](#) whom & what he will use — cited by Paul in Rom 9:6ff; and Hos 12:2-3; Mal 1:2-3
- ◆ In Jacob's selection God overruled [natural custom](#) with [super-natural revelation](#)

The Generations

* V. 23 is really quite remarkable ... *Why?*

- ◆ God gives Rebekah "the plan" right up front!
- ◆ No guessing and no wondering about how things will proceed to the next generation

* When her time was complete — vv. 24-26

- ◆ The "twins" were born
- ◆ Most obviously "[fraternal](#)" and not "identical"
- ◆ Esau = "Hairy;" Jacob = "Heel Grabber" or "Supplanter"

Marriage & Family Dynamics

* Twins of two natures - v. 27

- ◆ Esau was a nomadic outdoorsman ... a "man's man"
- ◆ While Jacob was more "refined" preferring to live and work from a settled location
- ◆ They are functional, temperamental and physical opposites
- ◆ Whose only commonality are Mom & Dad, **who ...**

* Show parental partiality - v. 28

- ◆ Isaac loved Esau ... because he loved "wild game" ... maybe also because Esau was everything "he was not"
- ◆ Rebekah loved Jacob ... why ... doesn't say though likely more in line with her own temperament

Marriage & Family

- ◆ We see abjectly poor parenting ... partiality guarantees trouble
- ◆ With Isaac demonstrating poor leadership — vs. that of his father

* The great exchange - vv. 29-34

- ◆ Esau gives up everything ... for nothing

* What's one lesson we can be mindful of at the outset?

- ◆ The destructive power of uncontrolled **DESIREs**
 - It always comes down to something we desire more than God "in the moment" ... desires per se are not the issue, but rather what we do with them when they are pulling on our heart!
- ◆ We don't set out to ruin our lives ... but Satan is prowling!

Marriage & Family

- * Esau comes home from the hunt ... tired and hungry - v. 29
- * Esau politely asks for some of the “red stuff” to eat - v. 30
 - ◆ Edom is a word play — means “Red” in Hebrew
- * Jacob seizes the moment and makes a demand - v. 31
- * Does this seem like a reasonable request?
 - ◆ Certainly seems excessive to me!
- * What does it suggest to you about Jacob?
 - ◆ Knowing Esau’s character, he had been planning for a moment just like this

Marriage & Family

- * Esau tries a flanking move in v. 32
 - ◆ I think he’s trying to get Jacob to relent at this point with a dramatic, evasive reply ... “Let up Jacob — I’m about to DIE!”
- * But Jacob presses the issue in v. 33a ... “Swear to me”
 - ◆ Same root as the word “oath” ... Swear an oath to me!
 - ◆ Further confirming to me his premeditated intentions
- * Though foreign to the “West” we should not take the oath lightly
 - ◆ It was “legally binding” and no amount of remorse, crying, or repentance ... or parental intervention ... could reverse it

Marriage & Family

- * And then we see Esau's true character - vv. 33b-34
 - ◆ He sold the birthright
 - ◆ He ate, drank, and went on his way ...
 - ◆ Completely unconcerned ... Esau **despised** his birthright
 - ◆ The NT has even stronger language for him - cf Heb 12:16-17
- * **What do you think Esau was thinking?**
 - ◆ First off, I'd have to say he wasn't thinking — just feeling
 - ◆ If he was thinking, he obviously placed no value on the promise ... kind of like rejecting the gospel for the here and now
 - ◆ OR ... maybe he'd overheard 'Mom' talking about God's plan??

Marriage & Family

- * **But what is the deeper "sub-text" of the exchange?**
 - ◆ **Jacob's lack of faith** — He had the right goal ... but the wrong method! A pattern that will continue ...
 - ◆ Jacob valued the better thing, but he was not the better person — rather he was **God's choice**
- * **What's involved with the birthright?**
 - ◆ One — A double portion of material blessing
 - ◆ Two — Succession rights to head the family

Marriage & Family

- * So ... it is not a trivial matter and Esau gave up everything for a bowl of stew — seems incredulous
 - ◆ Even though it is God's plan, He still works through our character ...
- * What contrasts do you see in Jacob and Esau's character from this exchange?

Marriage & Family

| ESAU | JACOB |
|---|---|
| FREE RANGE CHICKEN | HOMEBOY |
| A MAN OF THE MOMENT | PREMEDITATED OPPORTUNIST |
| PLEASURE SEEKER | PROMISE SEEKER |
| DRAMATIC ... URGENT | RUTHLESS ... UNCOMPASSIONATE |
| DISMISSIVE ... CARELESS | SCHEMER ... DEVIOUS |
| SPIRITUALLY DULL ... HE DESPISED THE BIRTHRIGHT | SPIRITUALLY ALERT ... HE COVETED THE BIRTHRIGHT |

Marriage & Family

📖 Implications — food for thought

- ◆ Can you identify parallels in your own life?
- ◆ How are you compromising your inheritance by pursuing trivial temporal pleasures?
 - You won't lose salvation, but you will lose greater reward
- ◆ As you will hear/heard today — *Salvation is a free gift, but it will cost you everything!*
- ◆ Are YOU considering the demand of discipleship ... or are you an Esau?

The Life & Times of Isaac

GENESIS 26:1-33

Opening Thoughts

- * This is the only chapter devoted to Isaac ... his recorded life is a [recapitulation](#) of Abraham's life
 - ◆ Reminding us that the nature of man doesn't change ... nor does the nature of God!
- * He seems a man inexorably wedged between Abraham and Jacob
- * As one commentator says ...
- * Isaac is the [ordinary son](#) of a great father, and the [ordinary father](#) of a great son.

Opening Thoughts

- * Yet, he is no less a patriarch ... just less prominent
 - ◆ As we will be in the millennium ... no less saved, but some with greater and some with lesser roles "in the Kingdom of God" 😊
- * Gen 25:19-34 is chronologically "prospective" ... and Gen 26 is chronologically "retrospective"
 - ◆ In other words, the events of Gen 25 occur after the events of Gen 26 ... at least that of Gen 26:1-11

Opening Thoughts

* How do we know this?

- ◆ Because if they already had the kids, the lie and exposure of Gen 26:6-9 would make no sense

* So why this order?

- ◆ To introduce Jacob & the reason for what follows in Gen 27
- ◆ Poor Isaac seems primarily to be a "footnote" acting as a bridge from Abraham to Jacob
- ◆ But we don't feel too bad, he lived the longest and we learned what God wanted us to know about Isaac in Abraham's narrative ... i.e. His patient faithfulness

Structure of the Narrative

* Six vignettes of Isaac's life — vv. 1-33

- ◆ Covenant reaffirmation ... Part 1 — vv. 1-5
- ◆ Like father, like son — vv. 6-11
- ◆ God blesses Isaac — vv. 12-14
- ◆ Trouble with the "locals" — vv. 15-22
- ◆ Covenant reaffirmation ... Part 2 — vv. 23-25
- ◆ Peace in the land — vv. 26-33

* Esau's fateful marriages — vv. 34-35

Covenant Reaffirmation

- * The focus of vv. 1-5 is covenant reaffirmation
- * Verse 1 “sets the table” for vv. 2-4
 - ◆ A summary statement of the situation ... famine in the land and Isaac is sojourning for food
 - ◆ This is not the same Abimelech - almost 80 years have intervened since the “Abraham” famine ...
 - The name was a title for Philistine kings
- * In vv. 2-4, God appears to Isaac the 1st of 2x's
 - ◆ God commands Isaac to stay in the land ... NO Egypt (v. 2)

Covenant Reaffirmation

- ◆ And then reaffirms covenant blessings (v. 3a) and covenant promises (vv. 3b-4)
 - The “oath” is a reference to Gen 22:16ff ... interesting statement as Isaac would have heard this at Mt. Moriah
 - The “third” instance of זרע (seed, descendant) in vv. 3-4 is likely best translated in the singular ... with reference to THE SEED who will bless all the nations
- * We remember from Abraham ...
 - ◆ That covenant promises will **unilaterally** endure, while the fullest enjoyment of covenant blessings are **conditioned upon obedience**

Covenant Reaffirmation

- * And then this enigmatic reason for the reaffirmation in v. 5 ... **What is going on?**
 - ◆ Abraham did not have the law, or the commandments, or the statutes ... but he did keep [God's charge](#)
 - ◆ Abraham believed and was declared righteous ... AND he demonstrated the "[obedience of faith](#)"
 - ◆ [FAITH INTUITIVELY OBEYS](#) ... with or w/o the law - Rom 2:14-15
 - ◆ And as Paul ably notes in Gal 3:15ff law and promise are not in conflict with one another

Like Father, Like Son

- * At the outset, it is interesting to note ...
 - ◆ How quickly sin follows on the "heels" of blessing
 - ◆ **Can you think of a recent NT example?**
 - How about Peter in Matt 16:13-23!
- * Isaac calls a play from his father's play-book though a "tish" more egregious ... **Why?**
 - ◆ Sarah was a half-sister, Rebekah is his cousin
 - Which is where we get "[kissin' cousins](#)," ... I guess
 - ◆ AND — because Isaac had seen how God protected Abraham

Like Father, Like Son

- ◆ Reminding us that sin is just not logical!
- * Isaac's fears don't materialize, yet he persists in the deception
- * Why should Isaac have changed course by now?
 - ◆ Note v. 8 ... he'd been in Gerar a long time and nothing had happened!
- * Well — Abimelech catches Isaac in the act of “sporting” with Rebekah (word play - participle of the verb “to laugh”)

Like Father, Like Son

- * And summons him to the palace for a chat- v. 9
 - ◆ Summons is better translation than “called”
- * What's wrong with Isaac's response?
 - ◆ Like his father ...
 - ▶ He has assumed the worse without cause
 - ▶ He has exposed Rebekah & the seed line
 - ▶ He has acted in a cowardly manner
 - ▶ He has no apparent contrition

Like Father, Like Son

- * Abimelech delivers a well-deserved rebuke
- * But what is interesting about his further actions?
 - ◆ He has a measure of integrity absent in Isaac
 - Perhaps no more than a carry-over from his father's interactions with Abraham ...
 - ◆ Nevertheless, he recognizes adultery as wrong (i.e. guilt)
- * Ironically, the pagan king seems to have a better sense of morality than God's chosen vehicle ...
- * And he acts to uphold that morality - v. 11

God Blesses Isaac

- * As with his father, despite his failures God bestows divine favor on Isaac
 - ◆ A stupendous crop — 100-fold
 - ◆ And riches upon riches ... God added to the considerable possessions Isaac had already inherited from Abraham
- * He was so rich as to attract the envy of his neighbors ... leading to inevitable strife

Trouble with the “Locals”

- * Having stirred up their envy, the “locals” start to cause trouble ... striking where it hurts - v. 15
 - ◆ To a “herdsman” — cutting off the water supply would be a big problem
- * Leading to a formal request from the government to leave the country - v. 16
- * What's interesting about Isaac's reply?
 - ◆ He yields and leaves despite “having the power” to resist
- * What NT biblical quality does he demonstrate?
 - ◆ MEEKNESS ... power under control

Trouble with the “Locals”

- * But he doesn't go far ... he settles in the valley of Gerar
 - ◆ So — he's still on their turf, just moved out of the city proper to the “burbs”
- * A series of conflicts over wells follows in vv. 18-20
- * What's going on ... other than the obvious ... in these verses?
 - ◆ God is trying to get the prodigal back HOME
 - ◆ He wants Isaac “back in the land” ...
 - ◆ So he uses the conflict to keep Isaac moving in the right direction

Trouble with the “Locals”

- * After several attempts, God finally has Isaac where he wants him and the opposition ceases - v. 22
- * Recognizing God's providence, Isaac acknowledges that “God” has made room for he and his flocks naming the place Rehoboth
 - ◆ The place name and the verb “has made room” is a word-play arising from the same Hebrew root ...
 - ◆ רחב - to make large, wide

Covenant Reaffirmation

- * Having settled his herdsmen, Isaac moves on to Beersheba - v. 23
 - ◆ Where-upon Yahweh makes his 2nd appearance to Isaac
- * Yahweh indicates his approval of Isaac's actions by “immediately” appearing to bless him
- * **What is the substance of Yahweh's blessing?**
 - ◆ Have no fear ... FOR, I am with Abraham “now,” and I am with you also

Covenant Reaffirmation

- ◆ Blessings and many descendants reaffirmed
- * What is the basis of Yahweh's blessing?
 - ◆ His original promises to Abraham ... signaling Covenant continuity
- * And like his father, Isaac responds with worship
 - ◆ An altar, his tent, and a well

Peace in the Land

- * The final vignette again parallels Abraham's final interaction with the former Abimelech
- * Like their fathers before them, both men recognize the value of "peaceful co-existence"
- * Abimelech approaches Isaac with his retinue ... and Isaac is puzzled by, or "toying with," their coming
 - ◆ Why are you here ... you kicked me out?
 - ◆ At a minimum, Isaac is establishing their "ill-will" toward him
- * Abimelech expresses the same motivation as his father had ... because God is with you

Peace in the Land

- * What is disingenuous about Abimelech's response?
 - ◆ He ignores what he must have known of their "harassing" Isaac out of their territory ...
 - ◆ Which in fairness he may not have entirely known
 - ◆ But is more likely "diplomatic license" ... putting his best "spin" on the matter to achieve his goal

Peace in the Land

- * Isaac ... the meek ... responds by "not responding"
 - ◆ Seeing no value in needless quarreling, Isaac shows restraint by not disputing Abimelech's oversight ...
 - ◆ Which is fully consistent with his "retreat" to Rehoboth
- * Instead, Isaac signals his agreement by preparing a "covenant-feast" ...
- * Followed by formal ratification and bidding them farewell the next morning

Peace in the Land

- * Shortly thereafter ... perhaps as a sign of God's providence ... Abraham's servants "strike water"
 - ◆ Prompting Isaac to memorialize the place with the name "Shibah" ... perhaps remembering the location's prior significance
 - ◆ Same root (שָׁבַע) as Gen 21:30 ... different "vowels"
- * Regardless of reason, the place is perpetually known as Beersheba

Esau's Fateful Marriages

- * W. 34-35 turns our attention back to family matters
- * Before moving on to Jacob, we have a final expression of Esau's values ...
- * He eschews all concern for his "spiritual heritage" by taking two Hittite women for wives
- * Resulting in grief ... literally "bitterness of spirit" ... to Isaac and Rebekah
 - ◆ Reminding us that some kids are harder to shepherd than others ... but weakness only results in later grief

Isaac's Interment

- * From here on, the story largely centers on the exploits of Jacob ...
- * Only to return to Isaac in Gen 35:28-29 to record his death
 - ◆ Interestingly, Rebekah's death is never recorded
- * Isaac lived to 180 years old ...
- * And was buried by his two sons — Esau and Jacob

Closing Thoughts

- * Isaac succeeds and fails in the same *fashion* as his father
 - ◆ Reminding us parents and grandparents ... that the kids are watching
- * God was intent upon returning Isaac to the land ... *What is it taking God to get you home?*
- * Though Isaac was imperfect ... He was still God's man
 - ◆ God was not ashamed to be his God — Heb 11:16, and ...
 - ◆ God used Isaac to pass on the covenant promises — Heb 11:20
- * *Reminding and reassuring us that God can work with broken and imperfect vessels*

Just in Case You Need a Visual


