



Reverend Dr. Charles L. McNeil, Sr., Senior Pastor
15 E. Charleston Avenue Lawnside, New Jersey 08045
www.gracetemplebaptist.org

A STUDY OF THE WHOLE BIBLE

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

PASSING ON THE PROMISES (23:1-26:33)

The Place of the Passage

In this section, the torch of God's promise is passed from Abraham to Isaac. In the closing days of Abraham's life, Sarah dies, and Abraham turns his attention to finding a wife for his son Isaac. The story of Abraham continues in the account of Isaac and the birth of his sons, Esau and Jacob. God's promises are reiterated to Isaac, just as they were previously to Abraham. Isaac not only receives the promises of God to Abraham but also inherits some of the same foibles, as we will see. In this section, we want to focus on how the promises to Abraham are passed down to the next generation. God is preserving an offspring (Gen. 3:15).

Reflection and Discussion

Read through chapter 23 — At the twilight of Abraham's life, he passes down the torch of his faith to Isaac. Genesis 23-24 is a picture of transition. Chapter 23 captures the scene of Sarah's death. Chapter 24 opens with Abraham aging (Gen. 24:1). He wants his son not to marry a Canaanite but a woman from his own country (Gen. 24:3-4). Why is the matter of a wife for Isaac such a matter of grave concern for Abraham (cf. Deut. 7:3-4)? What is the significance of the location of Sarah's burial? Consider God's promises such as Genesis 12:1, 7; 13:15; 15:18; 17:8.

Read through chapter 24 — How do the details of this story confirm Abraham's confidence that "the Lord, the God of heaven . . . will send an angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there" (Gen. 24:7)? Note again Abraham's concern about intermarriage.

Read through chapter 25 — A new section begins in Genesis 25:19. In what ways do you see the faith of Abraham passed on to Isaac in Genesis 25:19-26? Observe, among other things, also how long it takes for Isaac to have his first son (see Gen. 25:20, 26). Conflict sets the stage for the story of Isaac. Jacob is born grasping the heel of his brother Esau, and so is named "Jacob" (literally means, "he cheats"). Division between the brothers is clear from birth, and Isaac favors Esau while Rebekah favors Jacob. How does Gen. 25:29-34 underscore the appropriateness of Jacob's name?

Read Genesis 26:1-16 — Immediately after God confirms his covenant promises to Isaac (Gen. 26:3-4), Isaac utters the exact same lie about his wife that his father did — even in the same place (Gerar) with the same king (Abimelech; see Genesis 20). Nevertheless the Lord blesses Isaac abundantly in that land. He has so many possessions that the Philistines envy him! Why do you

think this account of blessing (Gen. 26:12-16) is juxtaposed with the account of Isaac's deception (Gen. 26:7-11)? What does this suggest about the nature of God's blessing in our lives?

Read Genesis 26:17-33 — The focus here is how Isaac moves about and digs the wells that Abraham had dug. This is not merely about water. It is about something more, since Isaac gives them the names that his father had given them. In particular, Beersheba is dug with remarkable similarities to how it was originally dug in Abraham's time (Gen. 21:22-33). God has promised Isaac that "in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 26:4). How is this seen in these verses?

Gospel Glimpses

PRAYER AND PROVISION — Throughout this section, we see how God provides in response to prayer. The servant's prayer for finding a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24:12) is answered, and the servant celebrates: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master" (Gen. 24:27). Isaac's prayer for his barren wife Rebekah is answered so that she conceives (Gen. 25:21). Indeed, the God who cares for the lilies of the field and the birds of the air cares for his children as well (Matt. 6:26-29). God's fatherly care is ultimately seen in the gift of his Son. This gift reminds us, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Rom 8:32). The gospel shows that God cares intensely even for the personal needs of his people, and that in his Son's work any reason for God to resist hearing us has been swept away. We can come before him boldly in prayer.

"I AM WITH YOU" — God appears to Isaac as he settles in Gerar, and God appears to him at Beersheba to remind him, "I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake" (Gen. 26:24). Similarly, God calls Moses to lead Israel out of slavery, assuring him that, "I am who I am," and, "The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob . . . will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt" (Ex. 3:14-17). When God's people are under threat, God gives a sign to Ahaz that "the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14), which means "God is with us." God's presence is assured during the exile, just as God assured Isaac of his presence in his exile in Gerar and Moses in Midian. Ultimately, Jesus manifests God's presence with us to save us from our sins, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 (Matt. 1:21-23). Indeed, in Jesus, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

BARRENNESS — The fall brought "pain in childbearing" to women (Gen. 3:16). This consequence is filled out throughout Genesis as the wives of the patriarchs are afflicted with barrenness: Sarah (Gen. 11:30), Rebekah (Gen. 25:21), and Rachel (Gen. 29:31). Throughout Scripture, the pain of barrenness is also seen with the wife of Manoah (Judges 13), with Hannah (I Samuel 1-2), the Shunammite woman (II Kings 4:8-17), and Elizabeth (Luke 1). Barrenness is not the direct result of sin. Nevertheless, in these cases God brought it about (Gen. 16:2; 30:2; I Sam. 1:5) to accomplish a divine purpose. God not only closes the womb but opens it, and some of the most important heroes in history are born from such formerly barren woman (Isaac, Jacob, Joseph,

Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist). As a result, barrenness is not a cause for despair but for expectation; Isaiah calls out, “Sing, O barren one, who did not bear. . . . For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married” (Isa. 54:1).

INTERMARRIAGE — Abraham focuses on getting a wife for Isaac from his own country and kindred (Gen. 24:4). The problem of intermarriage is highlighted by Esau’s marriage to Hittite women who “made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah” (Gen. 26:35). The concern here is not simply familial but spiritual. The danger of intermarriage is that it would lead the hearts of Israel towards idolatry (Ex. 34:16; Deut. 7:3-4). Intermarriage leads to idolatry during the period of the Judges (Judg. 3:6; 14:3) as well as with Solomon (1 Kings. 11:1-2). As a result, the discovery of intermarriage after the exile is a matter of grave concern for Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 10; Neh. 13:23-27). The post-exilic prophet Malachi continues to lament, “Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god” (Mal. 2:11). In a similar vein, Paul insists that Christians should not marry non-Christians (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

Theological Considerations

GOD OF ABRAHAM AND ISAAC — God does not change. The God who has promised and revealed himself to Abraham now extends those same promises and revelation to Isaac. God appears to him at Beersheba and assures him, “I am the God of Abraham your father” who “will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham’s sake” (Gen. 26:24). Even as Isaac faces the same challenges that Abraham did in famine (Gen. 26:1), God appears and leads him in specific ways. Throughout the Bible, God will reveal himself as the “God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” He is a self-consistent, utterly reliable God.

STEADFAST LOVE — God’s steadfast love is evident throughout this passage. When the servant looks for a wife for Isaac, he pleads for “steadfast love to my master Abraham” (Gen. 24:12). When his prayer is answered, he celebrates: “Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master” (Gen. 24:27). Abraham does nothing to deserve this steadfast love, but God’s character is demonstrated in the grace that abounds in Abraham’s life. While God has bound himself to his people by formal covenant, the steadfast love that binds him to his people, which the covenant expresses, issues forth from his very heart. He is love (1 John 4:8). He is “the God of all grace” (1 Pet. 5:10).

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Angel

A supernatural messenger of God, often sent to carry out his will or to assist human beings in carrying out his will. Though angels are more powerful than humans and often instill awe, they are not to be worshiped (Col. 2:18; Rev. 22:8-9). The Bible does, however, note various appearances of an “angel of the Lord,” apparently a visible manifestation of God himself.

Intermarriage

Marriage between a man and a woman of different ethnicity. In the Old Testament, intermarriage often led to spiritual compromise.

Idolatry

In the Bible, idolatry usually refers to the worship of a physical object instead of the true God. Paul's comments in Colossians 3:5, however, suggest that idolatry can include covetousness, since to covet is essentially to worship material things.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Please read the respective chapters prior to answering the following questions:

Genesis 23

1. How old was Sarah when she died, and where did she die — 23:1,2?
2. From what group of people did Abraham want to obtain a burial place — 23:3?
3. When the people said they would give him a burial place, what place did he choose and to whom did it belong — 23:4-9?
4. What did the owner of the property offer to do for Abraham, and what arrangement was finally made for Abraham to obtain it — 23:10-20?
5. What others were later buried in this same place.

Genesis 24

1. What did Abraham want to obtain for his son Isaac — 24:1-4?
2. Whom did he send to find her?
3. From what people did he want a wife for Isaac and from whom did he not want her to be?

4. What can we learn from Abraham's concern about a proper wife for his son?

5. What did Abraham make his servant do to assure he would follow Abraham's wishes, and what did Abraham say God would do to help the servant — 24:5-9?

6. If the girl the servant found would not agree to marry Isaac, what was the servant to do and what was he not to do?

7. What provisions did the servant make for his journey, and to where did he travel — 24:10?

8. When he arrived, what did the servant do first to assure the success of his mission, and what lesson can we learn — 24:12?

9. Describe the method the servant decided to use to identify the correct woman as a wife for Isaac — 24:13,14.

10. Who was the woman who met the servant's criteria? Describe her, and tell how she was related to Abraham — 24:15-21?

11. What gifts did the servant give her, and what did he ask her — 24:22-25?

12. What did he do to express his appreciation to God — 24:25,26?

13. Who was Rebekah's brother? What hospitality did he show the servant — 24:28-31?

14. What did the servant say to Rebekah's family? How did they respond — 24:32-51?

15. Next day, the servant wanted to take Rebekah and leave, but what request did her family make, and who decided the matter — 24:52-58?

16. In what ways does the story show that Rebekah's family shared Abraham's faith in the true God — 24:59-61 and context?

17. Describe the meeting between Isaac and Rebekah, and describe how Isaac felt about Rebekah — 24:62-67.

18. Based on this whole story, tell what good qualities Rebekah had that would make her a good wife for Isaac.

Genesis 25

1. After Sarah's death, whom did Abraham marry — 25:1-4? Name her sons.

2. Who received Abraham's inheritance — 25:5, 6? What about his other sons?

3. How old was Abraham when he died — 25:7-10? Who buried him and where?
4. How many sons did Ishmael have, and what passage does this fulfill — 25:12-16?
5. What problem did Isaac and Rebekah have that was similar to a problem Abraham and Sarah had — 25:19-21? Why would this be a special concern for them?
6. When Rebekah conceived, “the children struggled within her” — 25:22. Where else are unborn children called “children,” “babies,” “infants,” etc.?
7. What prophecy did God make regarding the sons of Isaac and Rebekah — 25:23?
8. What were the sons named? What did the older son look like? What did the younger son do at birth — 25:24-26?
9. What were the two boys like when they grew older and what preference did the parents have between the boys — 25:27, 28? Should parents have favorite children?
10. What is a birthright? How did Jacob obtain the birthright — 25:29-34?

Genesis 26

1. Where did Isaac move and why — 26:1,2?

2. What promises did God make to Isaac — 26:3-5? What is the significance?
3. Why did God give this promise — 26:5?
4. What falsehood did Isaac tell the men of Gerar — 26:7? Why?
5. Who discovered the truth, and how — 26:8-11? What did he do about it?
6. Describe Isaac's prosperity — 26:12-14. What effect did this have on the Philistines?
7. Describe the problems Isaac had with the Philistines as a result — 26:15-22? How did he deal with this?
8. Where did Isaac move next? What happened there — 26:23-25?
9. Describe how Isaac and Abimelech made peace 26:26-31. Where else do we read of a similar event?
10. Describe Esau's wives — 26:34,35. Why is this significant in subsequent events?