

THE FAMILY OF ABRAHAM: ISAAC & ISHMAEL

NRCOC

8, 15, 22, 29 July 2009

Two brothers

- Gen 16:9-16: Ishmael is born a result of human attempts to receive (accelerate) God's promises, after Sarah and Abraham had waited 11 years. In contrast, Isaac, born 14 years later—25 years after the promise was given— was clearly the work of God. His birth was possible only because of the Lord.
- Study Paul's use of *flesh* and *spirit* and *law* in Galatians and Romans. Flesh is the human tendency to take matters into our own hands, rather than trusting God to work in our lives.
- Also study Galatians 4:21-31, for an allegorical interpretation.

Ishmael

- He is Abraham's favorite son. This creates a difficult dynamic for Sarah.
- God had great plans for Ishmael (Genesis 17:20). Ishmael / Ishmaelites are mentioned in Genesis 16, 17, 25, 28, 36, 37; Judges 8:24; Psalm 83.
- Seeking legitimacy, the Muslims eventually chose Ishmael as an "ancestor," although in fact many of the Arab peoples have no Ishmaelite blood in their veins at all. Note: the Qur'an does *not* say that Abraham sacrificed Ishmael (sura 37).

Isaac

- Birth – chapter 21. Marriage – chapter 24. (25:20—marries at age 40.)
- 25:21—prays for Rebekah to conceive—a long wait; though not as long as his father had waited; 25:26 – he is 60 when the twins are born! Two nations are within her: Edom and Israel.
- 26 – During a time of famine, he repeats sins of father; willing to sacrifice wife's honor for his own safety. Isaac is a somewhat fearful character.
- 26:12-13 – became richer and richer. Vis-à-vis the wells – Isaac is quite passive in his dealings with Philistines, considering the treaties made by Abraham that should still have been in force
- Isaac tends to value comfort and cuisine over principle; more by his senses than by his mind; by impulses more than the Spirit. He is willing to compromise in order to avoid conflict (27:46).
- Isaac's conviction about marrying within the covenant (like Esau's but unlike Abraham's) is weak.
- 27 – His plan backfires; he is not as clever as his wife. Deceived by a deceiver.
- In the end, he finally acknowledges God's sovereign choice, relinquishing *his* right to determine who received the blessing. Hence the favorable verdict in Hebrews 11:20.
- Isaac is surrounded by relational conflict. Was he affected by Moriah (ch.22)?
- Hebrews 11:20 – he finally gives in, acknowledging that God will have his way. (Gen 27:33, 28:1ff)

Some things we learn about God:

- God often reverses the natural order of things. Esp. in Genesis, the younger supplants the older.
- God cares for those *outside* his covenant people: Gen 14 – Melchizedek; Amos 9:7, Jon 4:11, etc.
- If God kept his promises to Ishmael, who was not a son of promise or child of the covenant, how much more will he keep his promises to those of his chosen line?
- God's marriage plan is based on spirituality, not Hollywood-style fantasy or romance. He expects us to wait patiently for his blessings—even if it takes 20 years!
- God may improve us husbands' judgment through our wives.
- His purposes will prevail! It is not necessary to resort to short-cuts or compromises in order to receive God's promises. Let *him* work things out; we need not take matters into our own hands.