
Chronological Study

Genesis 20:1 – 33:20

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Genesis 20 & 21

Chapters twenty and twenty-one focus on Abraham's repeated failure and God's faithfulness in fulfilling his promise to give Abraham and Sarah a son.

In chapter 20, Abraham, in his wonderings, moves *toward the land of the Negev* and settles in *Gerar*. While there, Abraham's humanness is again exposed; we see his fear and lack of faith; yet his faithfulness remains. Abraham repeats his previous error of chapter 12 when he traveled to Egypt and told the people that his wife, Sarah, was his sister. As in Egypt, Abraham's deceitfulness is exposed; God intervenes and warns the king to return Sarah to Abraham.

Genesis 12:11-13: *It came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, "See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; 12 and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, "This is his wife"; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. 13 "Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you."*

Genesis 26:6-7: *So Isaac lived in Gerar. 7 When the men of the place asked about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," for he was afraid to say, "my wife," thinking, "the men of the place might kill me on account of Rebekah, for she is beautiful."*

If chapter 19 is considered one of the darkest chapters in the Bible, chapter 21 stands out as one of the brightest, particularly in the context of Abraham's story. Here, God fulfills His promise by providing Abraham and Sarah with a son, Isaac. It is in this chapter that God affirms the fulfillment of His promises to Abraham through Isaac.

The truth of God's promise being fulfilled in Isaac is seen in God telling Abraham to "*Drive out this maid and her son;*" God promises to bless Ismael because he is the son of Abraham. Despite the anguish of sending Ismael away, Abraham obeys God.

In chapter 21 we see, the oft-repeated conflict between the children of the world and the children of promise; between Ismael and Issac, instigated by Ismael out of jealousy and unfounded hatred. This conflict continues today and will continue until Christ Jesus returns and subjugates the world to His authority.

Chapter 21 ends with the Abimelech, the king whom Abraham had deceived regarding Sarah, acknowledging God was with Abraham and calling on Abraham to establish a covenant to show *kindness* and not to *deal falsely* with one another and their descendants.

Genesis 22 & 23

Of greatest, in chapter 22 we see God's greatest testing of a mere human in God's call for Abraham to offer Isaac *as a burnt offering on one of the mountains*. This was the supreme test of the faithfulness and obedience of Abraham, far exceeding the command to send Ishmael away. All of Abraham's hopes for the future were in Isaac.

From Hebrews, we learn that Abraham's obedience was grounded in his belief that even if he obeyed God's command and sacrificed Isaac, God possessed the power *to raise people even from the dead*. The testing was not for God; God already knew Abraham. Indeed, God knows us far more intimately than we (Abraham) know ourselves. Quite often, God's testing is designed for us to discover truths about ourselves that God already knows – both weaknesses and strengths. In the testing of our weaknesses, we can learn of or acknowledge areas in which need Him to strengthen and deliver us. Some testing is designed to unveil strengths of which we may have been unaware, empowering us to step forth in faith and fulfill the tasks God is calling or will call us to do for Him. **Hebrews 11:17-19**

Hebrews 11:17-19: By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; 18 it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED." 19 He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.

In chapter 23, at the age of 127, Sarah dies (meaning Isaac was around 37). The narrative details the profound impact of Abraham's life as a foreigner in the land on its people. At the loss of Sarah, the people of the land extend gracious condolences, sympathy, and assistance to Abraham, who humbly accepts their expressions of comfort. Much like Abraham's refusal of a blessing from the king of Sodom (Genesis 14), he declines to let others take glory for what God had done in his life. Abraham graciously refused the generous offer of a free burial place for Sarah and instead insisted on paying for the land.

Genesis 24

In chapter 24, we see a shift in emphasis from Abraham, who is well advanced in years, to Isaac, the next patriarch in the promised line to the Messiah. Abraham is concerned that Isaac, who is still unmarried, does not choose a wife from among *the daughters of the Canaanites*. Earlier, when God made His covenant with Abraham, He told Abraham He would judge (Genesis 15:13-17) the people of the land.

Abraham's faith is seen in sending his most trusted assistant back to his homeland to find a wife for Isaac and telling his servant, God would *send His angel before you, and you will take a wife for my son from there*. Immediately when Abraham's servant arrived in the land of Abraham's *father's house, the land of [Abraham's] birth*, he encountered Isaac's future wife, Rebekah. Also, in this chapter, we are introduced to Rebekah's brother, Laban. As the record will show, Laban is a shyster and will play a significant role in the development of one of the sons of Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob.

Isaac: Genesis 25:19 – 26:35

Genesis 25:1-26:35

Chapter 25 provides some limited details of Abraham's life after the marriage of Isaac. We are told that Abraham took another wife, Keturah (from 1 Chronicles 1:32, we are told Keturah was a concubine). Whether the taking of Katurah before or after the death of Sarah, we are not told.

As consistent with the pattern of the Bible, in verses twelve through eighteen we are given the lineage of the rejected lines. In verses one through six, we learn of the six sons born to Abraham by Keturah, who would themselves become nations in the region.

Before his death, Abraham provided gifts to Hagar and Keturah, the mothers of his seven sons, other than Isaac, and sent them all away from Isaac. Abraham's actions demonstrate his faith in the promises of God; he was diligent in doing all he could to ensure Isaac could possess the land of promise without a dispute rising with his brothers.

In verses seven and eight, we learn of the death and burial of Abraham, who died at the age of 175; Ismael was 88, Isaac 75; Sarah had been dead 38 years. Abraham was buried with Sarah; Ishmael and Isaac came together at the death of Abraham; after Abraham's death, God blessed Isaac; and Isaac lived by Beer-lahai-roi.

After the death of Abraham, in verses twelve through eighteen, we are provided with the lineage of Ishmael and his death, at the age of 137.

In verses nineteen through thirty-four, we see the faith of Isaac and Rebekah in the birth of their sons. Rebekah, as with Sarah, was barren; Isaac prayed for her and *the LORD answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived*. Verse twenty-two states Rebekah's pregnancy was not easy and *she went to inquire of the LORD*. The LORD informed her, that she was carrying two sons, Esau and Jacob, who were struggling in her womb and would form two nations, but they would continually be at odds.

Additionally, the LORD informs Rebekah, that as with Ismael and Isaac, the older (Esau) would be rejected and serve the younger (Jacob). At their birth, Jacob came out of Rebekah holding the ankle of Esau.

Esau was a hairy man and a skillful hunter, a man of the field, whom his father loved (at the expense of Jacob). Jacob is described as *a peaceful man, living in tents* (he hung out around his mother's apron strings). Rebekah, likely seeing the preference for Jacob on the part of Isaac and the expense of her gentler and more loving son, Jacob, preferred Jacob. Thus, both parents had a favorite, something every child can detect. This would soon lead to trouble in the home, that would never be resolved.

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Unlike the parents with their sons, *there is no partiality with God*, and where man looks at the outward appearance, God looks deeper, at the heart of the man. ***Job 34:19; Romans 2:11; Colossians 3:11***

Job 34:19: Who shows no partiality to princes nor regards the rich above the poor, for they all are the work of His hands?

Romans 2:11: For there is no partiality with God.

Colossians 3:11: a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

Shortly after the birth of the two sons, we are quickly introduced to their character. Jacob is unwilling to give his brother food, for which Esau easily and willingly “sells” his birthright to his brother. Verse 34 states after eating, Esau *went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright*, which included additional material blessings and special spiritual blessings (he would have been the spiritual leader of the family upon the death of his father). These blessings were of little value to Esau until he realized they were the possession of his brother, by manipulation and deceit.

From chapter twenty-five it appears neither boy would be someone whom God could use, but God told Rebekah, while she was carrying the boys, that He loved and would choose Jacob. As we see Jacob’s life unfold, God’s choice will likely seem hard to understand (I wonder if that would not be true for our own lives too). Eventually, we will see, God made the right choice.

Although rejected before birth, it is not until almost two thousand years later that God says, in Malachi 1:2-3, *I have hated Esau*. The author of Hebrews tells us Esau was an *immoral and godless* man. God has eternity before Him by which to judge men. ***Malachi 1:2-3, Romans 9:10-13, Hebrews 12:15-16***

Malachi 1:2-3: "I have loved you," says the LORD. But you say, "How have You loved us?" "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD. "Yet I have loved Jacob; 3 but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness."

Romans 9:10-13: And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; 11 for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, 12 it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER." 13 Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."

Hebrews 12:15-16: See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; 16 that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal.

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Chapter 26 shifts the focus back to the life of Isaac, who establishes residence in Gerar. The LORD appears to him, telling him, “*Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land*” – the land He had promised to Abraham and that He would bless him in the land; Isaac did as the LORD instructed him. Interestingly, while in Gerar, Isaac repeats the same mistake of his father, Abraham, concerning Rebekah. Isaac falsely claims Rebekah as his sister (although she is his cousin, not his sister). This deception is discovered by the king, Abimelech, who had previously dealt with Abraham in a similar situation.

Once Isaac’s deception was discovered, Abimelech protected Isaac and Rebekah from others in the land. Eventually, as God blessed Isaac, the people became jealous and envious of Isaac and he was asked to leave the area. Initially, every place Isaac stopped he encountered resistance from the people of the land, and there were quarrels over water rights. Rather than fight the resistance, Isaac moved to another location and dug another well, eventually settling in Beersheba, where God again appeared to him and confirmed His covenant with Abraham upon Isaac.

Abimelech and the people of the region recognized God was blessing and protecting Isaac. In verses twenty-six through thirty-three we have the account of the peace accord between Isaac and Abimelech and his people.

In verses thirty-four and thirty-five of chapter 26 we have another glimpse into the lack of spiritual understanding or concern on the part of Esau. Esau married two Hittite women and this greatly grieved both Isaac and Rebekah.

Jacob: 27:1 – 36:43

Genesis 27:1-28:22

For all the lack of spiritual aptitude on the part of Esau, the picture of Jacob given in chapter 27 is not any more flattering to him. But as we move through the next seven chapters, we begin to see changes in Jacob and the development of godly characters in him. Esau's unchanging worldly, and fleshly character will continue to unfold.

In this chapter, Isaac is aged, and as he faces his departure, he desires to bless Esau. It appears that Isaac, showing a significant preference for Esau, is moving to bless Esau, and shut out Jacob. Esau makes no effort to ensure equity in the blessing of his father.

When Rebekah learns of this, she moves to ensure her favorite son is not left out, but rather that Jacob would be the recipient of the greater blessing and Esau would be shut out. In all the conniving and maneuvering, we observe a situation reminiscent of that involving Sarah and Hagar, where human actors (both Isaac and Rebekah) seek to manipulate or fulfill God's plans through human means. Despite God's declaration that Jacob would be the one through whom the promises would flow, Jacob attempts to give the blessing to Esau. Rebekah, in an effort to ensure God's promise stands, instructs her son to deceive his father.

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Despite his protests and reservations, Jacob followed Rebekah's instructions and obtained his father's blessing through deception. Isaac, convinced he was blessing Esau, left no blessing for Jacob. When Esau appeared to Isaac to receive the blessing, he learned that by his brother's deception, Isaac had no blessing left for him, only a curse. Upon learning of this, Esau resolved to murder Jacob for his underhandness. Similar to Sarah's situation, once Rebekah's plan is executed, she will lament her actions and their consequences, realizing that she will never see her favorite son again.

To evade the wrath of Esau, in chapter 28, Rebekah sent Jacob to her brother Laban under the pretense of obtaining a wife from their homeland, unlike Esau who had married two Hittite women. Seeing that his father was pleased that Jacob went Ur to find a wife, Esau married a daughter of Ismael in an attempt to garner favor with his father (she was not a daughter of Canaan).

Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran where God appeared to him at night. In his dream, Jacob saw the angels ascending and descending heaven on a ladder. The LORD stood above the ladder and repeated his promises to Abraham and Isaac to Jacob. When Jacob awoke, he realized “*the LORD is in this place.*” Jacob built an altar there and made somewhat of a vow, really a negotiated agreement. Jacob vowed that the LORD would be his God, if God blessed him, which God had said he was going to do.

Genesis 29:1-30:43

In chapters 29 and 30 we see God working to mold Jacob, build his family and his character, and bring upon his Uncle Laban some just rewards for his actions.

In chapter 29 Jacob meets Rachel, the younger daughter of Laban. He immediately falls for Rachel and agrees to work for his uncle for seven years to marry her. The time passes quickly for Jacob and he marries Racheal, or so he thinks. It seems that Jacob got caught by someone who had a little more experience in deception, Laban, who gave the older sister, Leah, as his wife. To obtain Rachael, Jacob had to work another seven years for Laban.

Unfortunately for Leah, Jacob did not love her, he loved Racheal and *the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, and He opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.* Through the end of chapter twenty-nine and most of chapter thirty, we see the growth of Jacob's family of eleven sons and one daughter. We also see the struggles of alienated affections and the difficulties preferential treatment brought about in the home of Jacob. God never intended for man to have multiple wives, knowing the jealousy and conflict that would introduce; under one roof there where multiple families, and Jacob was at the center of the conflict. We also see that just because something is recorded in the Bible does not indicate God's approval. ***Genesis 2:24***

Genesis 2:24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

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Chapter 30 closes with Jacob, separating from Laban to raise and provide for his family. In doing so, Laban and Jacob arranged to split the flocks. Jacob took all the spotted or striped animals; Laban took all the solid-colored animals. Thus, there would never be a dispute over ownership (neither man trusted the other).

Genesis 31:1-33:20

While serving Laban, every time Laban saw Jacob being blessed by God, he would change Jacob's wages, he did this ten times. In chapter thirty-one, after almost 21 years of serving Laban, the LORD spoke to Jacob and he decided to return to the land of his father and mother. Hearing the jealous complaints of his cousins concerning his success and not trusting Laban, Jacob left without notifying Laban with his family and herds. Before departing, Racheal stole her father's idols, without the knowledge or consent of Jacob.

Upon hearing of Jacob's departure, Laban took out after Jacob with the intent of harm. But God intervened on behalf of Jacob and warned Laban not to harm Jacob. When Laban caught up with Jacob, he put on quite the show but had to admit he could not do anything to Jacob because God had warned him. In the end, they agreed to go their separate ways; Jacob to the west and Laban would return to the east, never to be heard from again in the Scriptures.

In chapter thirty-two, as Jacob approaches his homeland, he must confront his sin of stealing his brother's blessing by deception. He first sends men to inquire of Esau, in an attempt to see if Esau is still intent on killing him. The report they bring back is not good; they tell Jacob, that Esau has heard he was coming and is on his way with four hundred men. This frightens Jacob and he contrives a plan in an attempt to protect his family and flocks and to appease Esau.

First, he splits his assets into two companies. Next, we see the growth of Jacob as a man of God. When he recognizes that he cannot outmaneuver Esau, he calls on God and reminds God of His promises to bless and protect him asking God to deliver him from Esau. After praying, Jacob prepares four sets of animals to present to Esau and sends the servants with the animals ahead to meet Esau and offer the animals as a gift.

Then Jacob sent the remainder of his flocks and his family ahead of him across the ford or stream that evening but he stayed behind that night. That evening the LORD appeared to Jacob and they wrestled all night. Jacob would not relent until the LORD touched his hip and permanently dislocated his hip. Even after having his hip dislocated, Jacob would he let go of God unless He blessed him; God did and changed his name from Jacob to Israel, *for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed*. Jacob, no longer in a position to run from Esau, was going to have to trust in God to fulfill His promise to protect and bless Jacob.

Chapter thirty-three is the reuniting of Esau and Jacob. Jacob found that all his fears were unfounded. Esau's anger was dissipated; when they met, *Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept*. Having reconciled, Esau returned to his home and Jacob *came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Paddan-aram, and camped before the city*.