

Sacred Space in Promise: The Patriarchal Period – Isaac

I. Introduction

1. God promised Abraham that he would become the father of many nations, and the fulfillment of the promise was to *begin with* and then *move through* Isaac.
2. The text highlights two primary roles for Isaac in the salvation history: *first*, he was the covenant bridge between Abraham and Jacob, who was the focal point of God's promise of a *great nation* (hence the narrative space dedicated to Jacob); *second*, he was the vehicle for a crucial development in God's revelation of how His covenant would be fulfilled (Gen. 22).

II. The Progression of the Covenant

A. Sarah's Successor as Covenant Matriarch (24:1-67)

1. The covenant's continuance demanded a new *matriarch* as well as a new patriarch. *Rebekah* was that person, and she is notably introduced before Sarah's death. * ref. 22:23-23:2
2. The text first suggests this status by Rebekah's prominence in Nahor's genealogy, which it later reinforces by the blessing her brothers bestowed on her. * 24:60; cf. 17:15-16
3. So also, after taking Rebekah as his wife, Isaac brought her into *Sarah's* tent. *Thus the text makes it clear that Sarah's place in the covenant household now belonged to Rebekah.*
4. The text also correlates Sarah and Rebekah as both barren. *Isaac was a child of promise and divine power – life out of death – and so it was to be with the next generation seed.*

B. Abraham's Successor as Covenant Patriarch (25:1-26:33)

1. Isaac's Covenant Status as *Monogenes*

- a. God had identified Isaac as the covenant heir before he was born, and again at Moriah.
- b. Abraham's second wife had six sons, but they weren't granted covenant status. *Rather, Abraham sent them away from Isaac to reside in the area east of Canaan.* * Gen. 25:1-6, cf. 3:24, 4:16, 11:2 for the significance of dwelling to the east
- c. So Ishmael was circumcised and God granted him regal status and vast descendents (17:20), but neither he nor his descendents inherited the covenant and its promises. *Like Keturah's sons, Ishmael and his offspring lived outside the covenant land.* * 25:16-18
- d. So Beer-lahai-roi – where God had appeared to Hagar and blessed Ishmael – was now Isaac's dwelling place, *reinforcing the fact that he had displaced his brother.* * 25:11

2. Isaac's Experiences as Covenant Heir

Isaac's covenant status is also indicated by his experiences that echoed those of his father.

- a. The first and most important was God's promises to Isaac, which repeated the covenant blessings He had pledged to Abraham. * 26:1-5

- b. The second involved Isaac's encounter with Abimelech in Gerar. * 26:6-11

“Obviously the story is anachronous [chronologically out of sequence], for if Isaac and Rebecca had children, their marriage would have been apparent to the Philistines from the beginning. The narrator often arranges scenes by poetic and theological concerns rather than chronology. This scene has been carefully placed between the deception stories of the birthright and the blessing. God's obvious blessings to Isaac in this scene illustrate the protection and prosperity entailed in the inheritance of blessing.” (Waltke)

- c. The third parallel is the way God prospered and exalted Isaac, particularly in the sight of Abimelech and the people of his kingdom. * cf. 26:1-3 with vv. 12-17
- d. Fourthly, Isaac restored and took possession of the wells Abraham had dug in the region of Gerar, thus asserting his covenant claim to the land. * 26:18-22
- e. As if to punctuate his claim, Isaac then traveled to Beersheba, Abraham's first land grant in Canaan. There God again affirmed to him his covenant status. So Abimelech also met Isaac there, as he had his father, and the men pledged oaths to one another. * 26:23-33

Conclusions:

1. The Isaac story reinforces God's prerogative and faithfulness in perpetuating the covenant.
 - a. Isaac's life as covenant heir was a matter of divine election and power. * Gen. 17:15-21
 - b. For his part, Isaac proved unfaithful to the covenant just as his father had.
2. This same pattern of divine will, power, and faithfulness would be repeated in Jacob's life.
 - a. This is indicated at the outset in the birth narrative in Genesis 25:19-23.
 - b. It would be demonstrated later in Jacob's receipt of the birthright and blessing and his subsequent life as the son of the covenant.
3. The text wants us to see that God's promises to Abraham ultimately depended upon Him for their fulfillment – *He would provide all that was necessary.* * note again Gen. 22:14
 - a. The human parties to the covenant did nothing to establish it or secure its continuance; to the contrary, their unfaithfulness threatened it in every generation.
 - b. Thus the patriarchs' lives anticipated *Israel's* perpetual failure under the covenant, which would culminate with Yahweh's rejection of Israel and the nation's desolation and exile.
 - c. And yet, the covenant Lord would remain faithful; His intent for His creation, bound up in Abraham and his seed by covenant oath, would yet be realized.
4. Thus Israel's scriptures, which record Israel's history, are the **salvation history**. *They show that God's intent wasn't to “save men's souls,” but to banish the curse and its alienation and gather His creation to Himself, so as to become “all in all.” God's design is that His creation should become **sacred space**, and that through Abraham's Seed. And as He is Himself God's dwelling, the creation attains its destiny by being “summed up” in Him.*