



UNDERSTANDING THE OLD TESTAMENT

Seeing the Big Picture

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Part 4: The Patriarchal Period

I. INTRODUCTION

Why are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob so important to Israel today? First, God made them the “fathers” (patriarchs) of the nation of Israel. Secondly, God gave the land of Israel to them and their descendants. Thirdly, God promised to bless them and their physical descendants.

II. ABRAHAM (GENESIS 12:1—25:18)

A. SUMMARY OF HIS LIFE (2166-1991 BC)

1. His background: Unlike Noah, Abraham was not a godly person when God called him by his grace.
2. His calling: Abram (75) was called out of the blue and told to leave his home and family and go to an unspecified land (Gen. 12:1).
3. His two sons: Even though God promised a son to Abraham (86) and Sarah (76) they grew impatient and so Abraham produced a son through Hagar. The child was named Ishamel. Later, Abraham (100) had a son through Sarah (90) and was named Isaac.

B. KEY EVENTS

1. Abraham’s covenant. God made an unconditional covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3).
2. Abraham’s faith: Abram believed the LORD, and the Lord credited it to him as righteousness. (Gen. 15:6 NIV).
3. Abraham’s name: His name was later changed from Abram (“Exalted Father”) to Abraham (“Father of Many”) Gen. 17:5.

C. RELEVANCE FOR TODAY

1. The Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:1-3; 16:15)
2. It is an unconditional covenant (Gen. 15).
3. It is an inclusive covenant (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:7-9, 14; Rom. 4:16).

III. ISAAC (GENESIS 25:19—26:35)

A. SUMMARY OF HIS LIFE (2066-1886 BC)

1. Abraham had two sons, Ishmael (from Hagar) and Isaac (from Sarah). Abraham was 86 when Ishmael was born.
2. Isaac was born to Abraham (100) and Sarah (90) in their old age, as a result of God's promise to Abraham. His birth is miraculous, as Sarah was barren and well beyond childbearing age.
3. He blesses his sons Jacob and Esau, though his blessing of Jacob, obtained through deceit, leads to tension and conflict within the family.

B. KEY EVENTS

1. The Abrahamic Covenant is reaffirmed through Isaac, not Ishmael (Gen. 17:21; 21:12).
2. God promises to bless Isaac and his descendants, and to make his offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky (Gen. 26:4).

C. RELEVANCE FOR TODAY

1. Isaac helps us to see Christ's complete faith in his Father.
2. The ram caught later in a thicket, which became a sacrificial substitute sparing Isaac's life, helps us to see Christ's substitutionary atonement for us.

IV. JACOB (GENESIS 27:1-37:2A)

A. SUMMARY OF HIS LIFE (2006-1859 BC)

1. Jacob was born to Isaac and Rebekah, the younger twin brother of Esau. He was born holding onto Esau's heel, which is why he was named Jacob (meaning "heel-grabber" or "supplanter").
2. Esau was born first, making him the legal heir to Isaac's birthright.

B. KEY EVENTS

1. The blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant went to Jacob, not Esau.
2. Jacob's twelve sons became the "fathers" of the twelve tribes of Israel.

C. RELEVANCE FOR TODAY

1. We see the meaning of the term "firstborn" in Old Testament to help us understand what it means in the New Testament when referring to Jesus as the "firstborn."
2. We have the name of the people and the nation of Israel from this today.