

The sons of Abraham

Gen. 25:19. And these are the generations [תולדות] of Isaac, the son of Abraham. Abraham fathered Isaac.

-Why repetition? (If "Isaac, the son of Abraham", then surely "Abraham fathered Isaac")

-Rashi (after Midrash Tanhuma): [It had to say Abraham FATHERED Isaac] because scorners were saying that Sarah had conceived from Abimelech, for she had lived with Abraham for many years and had not conceived from him.

See also Talmud, Bava Metzia 87a:

'[The three messengers] said to [Abraham], Where is Sarah, your wife? And he said, Behold, she is in the tent.' [Gen. 18:9]

This is to inform us that she was modest. Rab Judah said in Rab's name: The Ministering Angels knew that our mother Sarah was in the tent, but why [bring out the fact that she was] in her tent? In order to make her beloved to her husband.

-Sforno (1475-1550): To emphasize that Isaac alone is considered the seed of Abraham. Background:

-Abraham had Ishmael with Hagar and, after Sarah's death, married Keturah and had 6 more sons.

Gen. 25:6: ...and [Abraham] sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, to the east country [Josephus: Saudi Arabia] [Midrash [Genesis Rabbah 61:4] says Keturah was Hagar herself; but Rashbam, Abraham ibn Ezra, Radak, and Ramban disagree].

-Hagar and Keturah were righteous, and Ishmael repented before he died

Middle-Eastern conflict is an OLD story

-Talmud records that this line, Gen. 25:19, was used by Abraham's other sons to get a share in the Holy Land:

Sanhedrin 91a

-On another occasion the Ishmaelites and the Keturians [Gen 25:1-4] came for a lawsuit against the Jews before Alexander of Macedonia [356–323 BCE; Jerusalem surrendered to him in 332].

-They pleaded as follows: Canaan belongs jointly to all of us, for it is written, 'Now these are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son'; [Gen. 25:12,]

12. Now these are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's maidservant, bore to Abraham;

13. And these are the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to their generations; the firstborn of Ishmael, Nebaioth; and Kedar, and Adbeel, and Mibsam,
14. And Mishma, and Dumah, and Massa,
15. Hadar, and Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah;
16. These are the sons of Ishmael, and these are their names, by their towns, and by their encampments; twelve princes according to their nations.

and it is [further] written, 'And these are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son'. [Gen 25:19]

19. And these are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son; Abraham fathered Isaac;

[Hence, both being sons of Abraham, they had equal claims upon the land. The Ketureans made a similar claim.]

-Thereupon Gebiha b. Pesisa said to the Sages: 'Give me permission to go and plead against them before Alexander of Macedonia. Should they defeat me, then say, "You have defeated one of our ignorant men"; while if I defeat them, say, "The Law of Moses has defeated you."

-So they gave him permission, and he went and pleaded against them.

-'Where is your proof coming from?' asked he.

- 'From the Torah,' they replied.

- 'Then I too, said he, will bring you proof only from the Torah, for it is written, 'And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. But to the sons of the concubines which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts': [Gen 25:5-6]

5. And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac.

6. But to the sons of the concubines, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, to the east country.

If a father made a bequest to his children in his lifetime and sent them away from each other, does any one have a claim upon the other?

[Obviously not.]

-What gifts [did he give them]? R. Jeremiah b. Abba said: This teaches that he imparted to them [the secrets of] the unhallowed arts. [The knowledge of sorcery, demons, etc. – they went over to the dark side.]

Abraham did not bless Isaac before he died, to avoid including his other sons in the blessing. Midrash:

Genesis Rabbah 61:6

AND ABRAHAM GAVE ALL THAT HE HAD TO ISAAC (Gen. 25:5). ... R. Nehemiah said: [It means] The power of blessing. ... Abraham argued: If I bless Isaac, the children of Ishmael and of Keturah are included; but if I do not bless the children of Ishmael and of Keturah, how can I bless Isaac? On reflection, however, he decided: 'I am but flesh; I will do my duty, and whatever God wishes to do in His world, let Him do it.'

Consequently, when Abraham died the Holy One, blessed be He, appeared to Isaac and blessed him. Thus it is written, 'And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed Isaac his son.' (Gen. 25:11)

God also had made it clear His covenant shall be ONLY through Isaac:

And God said, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son indeed; and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.

And as for Ishmael, I have heard you; Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he father, and I will make him a great nation.

But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time in the next year. [Gen. 17:19-21]

Midrash also records story of lawsuit before Alexander:

Genesis Rabbah 61:7

BUT UNTO THE SONS OF THE CONCUBINES THAT ABRAHAM HAD, ABRAHAM GAVE GIFTS

-In the days of Alexander of Macedonia the Ishmaelites came to dispute the birthright with Israel and they were accompanied by two evil families, the Canaanites and the Egyptians.

-'Who shall go to plead against them?' it was asked.

-Said Gebiah, the son of Kosem: 'I will go and plead against them.'

-'Take heed not to let the land fall into their hands,' they cautioned him.

-'I will go and argue with them,' he replied; 'if I defeat them, 'tis well; while if not, ye can say, "Who is this hunchback to take up our case?"'

-So he went to debate with them.

-Said Alexander of Macedonia to them: 'Who is the plaintiff, and who the defendant?'

-Said the Ishmaelites: 'We are the claimants, and we base our claim on their own laws. It is written, 'But he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the hated', etc. (Deut. 21:17),

If a man has two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son is hers who was hated;

Then it shall be, when he makes his sons inherit that which he has, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, who is indeed the firstborn;

But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he has; for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his. [Deut. 21:15-17]

and Ishmael was the firstborn.'

-Said Gebiah, the son of Kosem: 'Your Majesty! Cannot a man do as he wishes to his sons?'

'Yes,' replied he.

Then,' pursued he, 'surely it is written, 'And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac' (Gen. 25:5).'

'But where is the deed of gift [to his other sons]?"

[Note: A father cannot give all to one son and disinherit his other sons even in his lifetime; if he does, his action is null and the ordinary laws of inheritance become operative.]

He replied: 'BUT TO THE SONS OF THE CONCUBINES, THAT ABRAHAM HAD, ABRAHAM GAVE GIFTS. '

-Thereupon they departed in shame.

-The Canaanites then pleaded: 'We base our suit against them on their own Torah.'

-It is everywhere written, "The land of Canaan"; then let them return us our country.'

-Said he [Gebiah the son of Kosem] to him: 'Your Majesty! cannot a man do as he pleases with his slave?'

'Yes,' replied he.

'Then surely it is written, 'A slave of slaves shall he [Canaan] be unto his brethren' (Gen. 9:25). Hence they are now our slaves.'

-Thereupon they fled in shame.

-Then said the Egyptians: 'We base our suit against them on their own Torah. Six hundred thousand left us, laden with silver and gold utensils, as it is written, 'And they despoiled the Egyptians (Ex. 12:36): let them return us our silver and gold.'

-Said Gebiah the son of Kosem: 'Your Majesty! Six hundred thousand men served them two hundred and ten years, of whom some were silversmiths and some goldsmiths. Let them pay us [for their labor] at the rate of one dinar per day.' [Small silver coin, ~4 grams]

-Thereupon mathematicians sat and calculated [what was owed the Israelites for their labor], and they had not reached a hundred years before Egypt was found to be forfeit [for the sum due], and so they departed in shame. [Sanh. 91a]

Zohar's take on Abraham's sons (Bereshit 1, 133b):

AND ABRAHAM TOOK ANOTHER WIFE, AND HER NAME WAS KETURAH . Keturah was none other than Hagar. For we know by tradition that though Hagar, when she left Abraham, went astray after the idols of her ancestors, yet in time she again attached herself to a life of virtue. Hence her name Keturah (lit. attached). Abraham then sent for her and took her to wife. From here we learn that a change of name acts as an atonement for sin, since that was the reason why her name was changed. The term vayoseph (lit. and he added) here indicates not that Abraham took another wife, but that he took again his former spouse whom he had driven out on account of Ishmael, and who had now abandoned her evil practices, and had made a change in her name symbolical of her change of life...

...AND ABRAHAM GAVE ALL THAT HE HAD TO ISAAC... Abraham transmitted to Isaac the exalted doctrine of the true faith, so that he should be attached to his rightful grade.

BUT TO THE SONS OF THE CONCUBINES THAT ABRAHAM HAD ABRAHAM GAVE GIFTS What sort of gifts were they? They comprised the sides of the low grades, that is to say, the names of the powers of the unclean spirit, so as to complete the whole list of grades. (Isaac was raised above those grades by the power of the true faith.) "The sons of the concubines are the sons of Keturah, who had formerly been a concubine and was now once more a concubine.

R. Hiya said that the term concubines here in the plural must be taken literally.

AND HE SENT THEM AWAY FROM ISAAC HIS SON, so that they should not be on a par with Isaac.

WHILE HE YET LIVED, that is, while Abraham was yet alive and vigorous, so that they should not complain against him after his death, and so that Isaac might strengthen himself in the side of rigor so as to prevail over them all and make them all submit to him.

EASTWARD, TO THE EAST COUNTRY: for the reason that there are the haunts of the impure practitioners of magic and witchcraft. Observe this. It is written: 'And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the East' (1Kings 5:10). Herein is an allusion to the descendants of the very children of Abraham's concubines, who, as already said, inhabit the mountains of the East, where they instruct the sons of men in the arts of magic and divination. It was this very land of the East from which came Laban and Beor and his son Balaam, who were all magicians.'

Islam's take

- Current charge from Islam: The Jews have falsified their own Torah
- Yet the Qur'an itself recognizes Israel as Jewish:

And Moses said to his people: '...O my people, enter the Holy Land which God has assigned to you, and do not turn back ignominiously, for then will you be overthrown, to your own ruin.' [Qur'an 5:20-21]

("Wa izha qala Musa l'qawmu: '... Ya qawm, adchalul ard el muqaddasa ellati kataballahu lakom, wala tartaddu 'ala adbarikom, fatanqalabu chaserin.'" [Al Qur'an el Karim, 5:20-21 (Sura el Ma'eda)]

Discussion: Why?

- Why did God allow such conflicting claims to occur? Why did Abraham not have just Isaac, then Isaac just Jacob?

- Abraham's son Isaac led to Judaism

- Abraham's sons Ishmael + 6 led to Islam

- Abraham's grandson Esau (Edom) led to Rome then to Christianity.

-Result: 4000 years of conflict and going strong.
-Is the future unknown to God?