

## Why Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? The Covenant Line

The question for today's study is "Why does Scripture continually refer to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when all that is really needed is to declare the Jewish people to be descendants of Abraham? In Deuteronomy we find Moses making reference to the nation in relationship to their fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In the New Testament we find Peter, after having healed a lame man in the temple area, addressing the amazed crowd. Read Acts 3:12-13.

Not only did the nation describe themselves as the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but God used that description to identify Himself. Read Exodus 2:24 and Exodus 3:6 Read Matthew 22:31-32 to see what Jesus said.

The Jews identified themselves as descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as well as identifying themselves as Israelites.

Identifying themselves as descendants of Abraham is understandable. Abraham's story begins in Ur of the Chaldees. Read Genesis 12:1. God communicated His desire for Abraham to leave and Abraham obeyed. How God communicated that to him is a mystery. In our mobile society the idea of moving from one place to another does not seem strange but in Abraham's day it meant the total loss of one's identity and one's connection with one's heritage and family. When God spoke to Abraham he obeyed. Read Hebrews 11:8.

Accompanying that call to leave Ur was a promise. Read Genesis 12:2-3 The covenant is repeated and expanded in future accounts to include the land that we know today as Israel. See Genesis 13:14-18; 17:6; 18:18.

What is important to the question before us today is the two-fold promise that **"I (that is God) will make you into a great nation"** and **"all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."** The last part of that covenant, **"all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."** would, of course, be fulfilled in Jesus so the Gospel writers, in giving the genealogy of Jesus, trace Him back to Abraham through Jacob and Isaac.

The first part of that promise involves Isaac. God said Abraham would be the father of a great nation. To be the father of a nation you must first be a father to at least one individual. Time passed, and Abraham did not become a father. Finally, Abraham's wife Sarah told him to have a child with her maid. In Sarah's mind that way God's promise could be fulfilled. Genesis 16:16 tells us that a son Ishmael was born. The problem was that that was not God's plan and Ishmael was not going to be the one through whom the promise to Abraham would be fulfilled.

Move ahead in time thirteen years. Abraham was then 99 and his wife Sarah, at 90, was well beyond the age when she should have been capable of conceiving a child. God is not limited by our limitations. He came to them and declared that Sarah would have a child and she did,

naming him Isaac, which literally means “he laughs” reflecting on the fact that Sarah laughed when told that at her age she would have a son.

So why was it important for the Israelites to say, “Abraham, Isaac” instead of just Abraham? Because Isaac was not the first born to Abraham and they wanted it understood that the line of promise ran through Isaac. Some other great nations came from Ishmael. In fact, Muslims trace their lineage to Abraham through Ishmael, as do most Arab countries. How do we know that Jesus and not Mohammed is the promised one? Because God made that very clear. Read Genesis 17:19. God went on to tell Abraham in verse 20 that He will bless Ishmael but read Genesis 17:21.

In identifying themselves as descendants of Isaac as well as Abraham they were laying hold of the covenant promise made to Abraham and repeated to Isaac. Read Genesis 26:3

That explains why they claim Abraham and Isaac. What about Jacob? Again, the identification of themselves as descendants of Jacob was important to distinguish them from the Edomites who were descended from Esau. That distinction was important to make sure there was no question about the one through whom the covenant promises made to Abraham would be passed to. By naming Jacob and not Esau, God was making it clear through whom the promised Messiah, the one who through whom **“all peoples on earth will be blessed through you,”** would come.

Read Genesis 25:23. In Isaac’s day just about everything in the family revolved around the birth order and was especially significant for the first born because in time he became head of the family. The firstborn inherited twice as much from his father as the others, so he could care for the family. In addition to being the head of the family in regard to care and decision making, the firstborn was also the spiritual head of the family. From a purely cultural perspective Esau should have been the one to head the family and the one through whom the covenant promises would have passed. But God said it would be the younger of the twins.

It is important to note that God declared, while the two were still in the womb, which one would be the line through whom He would keep His promises. One of the significant messages of Scripture is that our redemption was totally the work of God. Our redemption was a plan of God even before He created man in His image, a plan that would immediately be set into action should man sin, which he did.

God chose Abraham not because he was righteous but simply because He decided to select him. The promises of blessing that ultimately led to the Messiah came through the one whom God had chosen, namely Isaac. There is no other way to explain that apart from God’s miraculous plan. Then came Jacob and God declared he would be the one through whom the covenant would pass. What did Jacob do to deserve being selected? Absolutely nothing. God named him while he was still in the womb. Neither he nor his twin brother Esau was righteous or sinful at that point. Everything about our salvation comes from God. Jacob means “at his heel” and in time the word became a Hebrew idiom for “he deceives.” Read Genesis 26:25-26.

The Israelites identified themselves with Abraham, then Isaac, the son of promise and then Jacob over his older brother Esau because the covenant was passed on through him. Read Genesis 28:13-14

We have the progression that led to the Israelites identifying themselves as descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The covenant was made with Abraham. Its promises were passed on to Isaac and not Ishmael. In turn the promises were passed on through Jacob and not Esau. The lineage of the Promised One was in place.

Jacob became the father of 12 sons who became the heads of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Why do they collectively call themselves Israelites? Genesis 32:28 gives that answer. Jacob was on his way back to the land God had given to His people. He was going to meet with his brother Esau from whom he had, in a sense, stolen a birthright and blessing. He camped alone the night before the two brothers were to meet. That night Jacob wrestled with an angel in the form of a man. At daybreak the angel asked Jacob to let him go. Jacob refused until the angel gave him a blessing. Read Genesis 32:27-28.

The Jewish people today trace their lineage through those to whom God gave His covenant promise. It began with God's promise to Abraham and his descendants, it was passed on through Isaac, the son of promise. From him the promise was passed on to Jacob or Israel with all of the Jewish people today being his descendants in one tribe or another.

God had a plan to care for mankind's sins should there be a need. The moment Adam and Eve sinned every detail of that plan went into effect. Today all who have made a commitment to Jesus are the recipients of that covenant. In a sense we are children of God through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and in the end through Jesus to whom that pointed.