From Abraham to Jacob: The Patriarchal Narrative, continued

1. Themes in Patriarchal Narratives

Between God and humankind	Amongst humankind
• establishment of covenant • promises of land and progeny • blessing (another contrast w/the Primeval History [Gen 1-10], which was marked by cursing)	• barrenness of matriarchs, followed by miraculous births • sibling rivalry between possible heirs, often exacerbated by parental favoritism • younger sons favored (typically: by his mother and by God, with the father less sure) over the elder son

2. Ishmael and Isaac

a. Rivalry between Sarah and Hagar

Gen 16: Sarah expels Hagar upon her pregnancy with Ishmael, fearing that Hagar now feels contempt for the still-barren Sarah. Hagar goes to the desert, is visited by an angel, who tells her that a multitude will spring from her as well and who tells her to return to Abraham's household.

Gen 21: Well after the birth of Isaac, Sarah – despite Abraham's initial doubts, but with divine approval – expels Hagar and Ishmael upon seeing the latter playing with her son Isaac, fearing that Ishmael will lay claim to Isaac's inheritance. Hagar goes to the desert, is visited by an angel who tells her that God will make a nation of Ishmael too, and they settle elsewhere.

b. The endangerment of Abraham's two sons

Gen 21 and Gen 22: Two chapters, both attributed to the E source (Elohist) by the Documentary Hypothesis, tell of the endangerment of Ishmael and Isaac respectively. Their father Abraham plays a role, in each case, in putting them in danger and, moreover, does so at God's behest: God confirms Sarah's desire to expel Hagar in 21, and He commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac in 22 (= the Aqedah ["binding"]). God, by means of angels, saves both sons at the edge of death.

Although each son receives promises after their near-death experiences, the Aqedah serves as dramatic confirmation of God's earlier assertions that Isaac would be the son to continue the chosen line of Abraham. Ironically and poignantly: in order finally to receive the heir that he has sought throughout the story, Abraham must be willing to give him up to God.

c. Promises to Ishmael and Isaac

	Ishmael	Isaac
Divine promises to their mothers	16:10: "The angel of the LORD also said to her (i.e., Hagar), 'I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude.'"	17:15-16: "God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."
God's explanation to Abraham	21:12-13: "But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the boy (i.e. Ishmael) and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you. As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring."	
Promises after endangerment and salvation	21:17-18: "And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, 'What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.'"	22:15-18: The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, "By myself I have sworn, says the LORD: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice."

3. Functions of the theme of sibling rivalry
- As means of integrating neighbors (literally as brothers) into Israelites' national aetiology
- As means of reflection on the mysterious character of chosenness and the problems that divine favor raises when worked out in human terms

4. Jacob and Esau
a. Jacob in Genesis 25-35

Themes of Gen 25-35	Structure of Gen 25-35

Jacob as eponymous ancestor of Israel
Jacob as trickster
Jacob's life as a series of struggles
    o   Jacob and Esau
    o   Jacob and Laban
    o   Jacob and the angel
	A--Birth of Jacob and Esau: Jacob gets the <u>birthright</u> (25)
	  B--Isaac and Abimelech: Conflict over land (26)
	   C--Jacob flees from Esau with the <u>blessing</u> (27)
	    D--Jacob at Bethel = "house of God" (28)
	     E--Jacob stays with Laban (29-31)
	    D'--Jacob at Penuel = "face of God" (32)
	   C'--Jacob and Esau reconciled (33)
	  B'--Jacob and Shechem: conflict over marriage (34)
	A'--Return to Canaan and death of Isaac (35)

b. Twins struggling in the womb
Gen 25:23: God's revelation to the pregnant Rebekah: "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger." Esau emerges as the first-born, but Jacob comes out of the womb gripping his brother's heel.

c. Birthright & blessing
Gen 25:29-34: Jacob convinces a hungry Esau to sells him his birthright in exchange for stew.
Gen 27: Following Rebekah's plan, Jacob tricks his blind father Isaac into blessing him instead of Esau.
→ Jacob, although not the first-born, obtains through trickery the rights due the first-born, to Esau's distress.

Genesis Firstborn / Chosen Son

Adam
/ \
Cain [Seth]
|
Noah
|
Shem Ham Japheth
|
Abraham
/ \
Ishmael [Isaac]
/ \
Esau [Jacob]
/ \ \
Reuben [Judah] [Joseph]
/ \ / \
Zerah [Perez] **Manasseh** [Ephraim]
|
[David]

| = line of descent
Bold = firstborn
[ ] = chosen son

Genesis References:
Seth, 4:25
Ishmael and Isaac, 21:10
Esau and Jacob, 25:23
Reuben and Judah, 49:3, 10
Manasseh and Ephraim, 48:19
Zerah and Perez, 38:27-30 (Ruth 4:18-21)