



Old Eyes
take a
Fresh Look
At three
Old Stories

by,

Frank Leeds III

D. Min., S.T.M.

Abraham & Sons

Issac & Sons

Jacob & Sons



Introduction

Three components went into this little booklet. The first has to do with the awareness of the blindness of familiarity. The more familiar we are about some things, the greater the danger of increased blindness. **Psychologists** will tell us that we all seek confirmation of held belief. It is why conservatives have a tendency to watch the news on one TV station while liberals would watch another. We seek confirmation of what we already know. Thus we skip over some facts while clinging to others. When we are on familiar turf, we seemed to be designed in such a way that we travel that route almost blindly. Thus, someone like me would often find myself driving to my office even though my wife sent me to the **store** to pick something up for our family. The familiar simply takes over.

Another component has to do with the experience of buttoning a shirt or a blouse. Have you ever done that and all is going along smoothly and everything looks straight and in order and you find yourself at the top or bottom of the buttoning process only to discover that you are a button off? I find that I can not button the top button because the top button and button hole no longer line up. The lesson is, if one is wrong on the first button then one will be wrong at the end. Perhaps you have never had that experience but I have had it more times than I **care** to mention. This led me to want to start again at the beginning to make sure the first button in reading of the Hebrew Scriptures was in order.

There are even those who question why someone like me would even be interested in the Hebrew Scriptures. For me it is an easy question. The world's wisest literature is what we need to know for our contemporary society. I guess I have become convinced that one can not build a society until one can first build a family. To build a family one has to know who one is, who the 'other' is, and to who we as a people belong. Whatever else I am in life, I

am grateful, and my abundance of gratitude requires that I know whom to thank. I find that in the scriptures and thus call it Holy.

When I retired from my church on May 15th of 2016, one of my dear Jewish friends asked if I would conduct a Bible study for she and some other neighbors who knew nothing or very little of the Bible. I agreed to do so and **decided** to start with the Pentateuch or the five books of Moses and to see if I could do so with a new set of eyes, old as they have become.

I started in Genesis and in the looking of the whole book before beginning, the chapter and a half about 'who' created as opposed to "how it was created" very quickly turns to family issues and the outrageously radical four words of "And the Lord said."

What follows is something that may not be **new** to you. Much of it is new to me however. I share it with you incase you want to learn something new. If you know it all already, you may want to throw this booklet out or pass it on to a friend who knows less than you. If you have learned something you may still want to pass it on. In either case, I hope "And the Lord said" can be heard by you as you tune your ears to the one WHO IS.

*Grow
in Christ*



Old Eyes...

Abraham & Sons: The story of Abraham and Sarah's son Isaac is fairly well known to those with some biblical literacy. One of the things I have learned about myself over the years is that the more familiar something is, the more I have a tendency to see the portion of the story that I already know and skip over the portions that do not fit my already assumption that "I know this already". Thus, as I reread the story, I wish to tell it to you with my new set of eyes. My old eyes seems to see things differently than my younger ones did.

Abraham and Sarah are promised a child. It is part of the radical event of history in which "The Lord said to Abraham..."

I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you;

I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

*I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*

Later it is added: *To your offspring I will give this land.*

God makes it clear that this offspring will be from Abram's own body. Abram believes the Lord and it is credited to him as righteousness. Years pass, but Abram's wife bares him no children. His wife decides to take matters into her own hands and request from her husband that he take her handmaiden, Hagar, and have a child by her. That way **they** can start a family. Abram agrees and he sleeps with the Egyptian maidservant and she becomes pregnant.

Being pregnant by Abram, she begins to feel more entitled and then begins to **despise** Sarah. Then Sarah begins to **mistreat** [I will come back to this word later on] Hagar. Hagar can not take it so she runs away. She runs into the desert and the Lord found

her and said, *“Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?”*

The angel then tells her to return to her mistress and to submit to her. “I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count.”

You are now with child and you will have a son.
You will name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard of your misery.
He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone’s hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers.

Hagar says, “You are the God who sees me, for I have now seen the One who sees me.” This is why the well was called **Beer Lahai Roi**. [another word we will be returning too later].

She returns and is submissive to Sarai and when Abram is 86 years old she bore him a son Ishmael. When Abram is 99 years old, the covenant is renewed and circumcision is instituted as a sign of the generations to come. With the renewed promise of another son, **Abraham’s** plea to God is, *“If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!”* The Lord answers **“Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son and you will call his name Isaac.”**

Abraham and Ishmael were then both circumcised on the same day. Ishmael was 13 years old. A year later, Sarah gives birth to Isaac. Abraham held a great feast when Isaac was weaned and Sarah noticed that Ishmael was **“mocking”**. The word can be translated “laughing” as in Sarah insisting that if she has a child in her own age the entire world would be “laughing” but we will leave it at mocking for the time being.

With this, Sarah says to Abraham, “Get rid of that slave woman [a significant change in title from maidservant] and her son, for that slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with

my son Isaac.” Now Ishmael and Hagar have lived with this family as one family now for 14 years and Abraham loved Ishmael. The Lord then promises that he will make Ishmael into a great nation also because he is the son of Abraham, so Hagar and Ishmael are sent away. At this part of the story, it looks like we have seen the end of Hagar and Ishmael.

This is followed by the familiar story of Abraham being told to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice. As I read this story anew, I am taken back by the matter of factness of the entire story. Years ago I read Soren Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*, in which he tries to give various emotional interpretations to this story. But the scriptural recording itself is just cold hard facts. It is strangely void of feelings. When Ishmael was “sent away” Abraham was distraught because he loved him. In this case, Isaac is being “sent away” as a sacrifice but the story is totally void of any emotion. I don’t get it. Why is that?

In the midst of the sacrifice, the Lord says “Now that I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, **your only son.**” Isaac is not his only son - he has another son Ishmael. Both sons are from Abraham’s body. Isaac may be the only son left at home but he is certainly not the ‘only’ son.

By chapter 25 of Genesis, these old eyes are really seeing differently. The Hebrew Scriptures gives a back-story a ‘behind the scenes’ if you will. It is the story of Abraham taking on a new wife after Sarah dies and having several more children. Why did I think that Abraham had only two sons? He took a wife named **Keturah** and they had six sons and several grandchildren. The story makes it clear that upon his death he left everything to Isaac, but it also stresses that while he was alive he made ‘gifts’ to his sons and concubines and sent them away from his son Isaac.

Then, when Abraham breathed his last, guess who shows up for the funeral? He was buried by his two sons, **Isaac and Ishmael**. Who would have thought? After Ishmael was sent away, I thought we had seen the last of him. The story then tells us that Isaac lived in **Beer Lahai Roi**.

As I tried to piece this strange story together, Beer Lahai Roi is the place where Hagar and Ishmael escaped to when they ran away and or were sent away. What was Isaac doing there? Then there is the question of Keturah. Who is she and where did she come from?

Drawing a blank, but still being curious, I turned to the Mishra which is the writing of the rabbi's. They connect two dots that I have not thought of. One is about names. Names are never just 'labels' they are descriptions of character. They say that the name Keturah means a fine smelling fragrance that one projects upon entering a room. We all know people who can enter a room and everyone gets all 'up-tight and nervous'. This is the opposite. It describes someone who enters a room and everyone relaxes with the pleasantness of their presence.

The second dot they connect is the location of Beer Lahai Roi. That is Hagar's place. They join the two dots and say the only thing that makes sense is that Keturah = Hagar. After Sarah died, Abraham returned to Hagar.

There are other details that these old eyes have never noticed: I never **noticed** that no where does Abraham ever bless Isaac but God does. Likewise, God blesses Ishmael.



God tells of his blessing of Ishmael four times.

- He tells Hagar of Ishmael's blessing. [Gen. 16:9-10] Your descendants will be too numerous to count.
- He **tells** Abraham [Gen. 17:20] I will make him a great nation.
- He **tells** Abraham [Gen. 21:12-13] His descendants will bless your name.
- He **tells** Hagar [Gen. 21:17-20] Take him by the hand and I will make him into a great nation.

Sarah rejected Ishmael - but God does not...and I ask myself, "whom have I rejected that God has not?" I would ask you the same question. Whom have you rejected that God has not? Is it a single person? Perhaps it is a group of persons. We are all quick to divide the world into "us" and "them" and it is easy to fall into the trap of rejecting the 'them'. Isaac was chosen for a specific identity, but Ishmael was by no means rejected - **in** fact he was quite loved!

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Mistreat is the word used to describe how Sarah treated Hagar the Egyptian. It is also the word used to describe how the Egyptians treated the family of Jacob after the Pharaoh, who knew not Joseph, came into power. Mistreating seems to be cyclical into the generations. One could suggest that the Egyptians mistreated the family of Jacob because Sarah mistreated Ishmael. Once again, the lesson is: Be careful whom you mistreat.

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Isaac & Sons is the next family that the Hebrew narrative deals with. He is now an adult, married to Rebecca, and she is pregnant with twins. While still in the womb, we are told that Jacob the younger is holding on to the heel of Esau and that Jacob will end up ruling over his older brother. We will see how this plays out in time.

As the story unfolds, we get a small glimpse of the character of both the boys when Esau asked his brother for some of the food he is eating and he agrees to give his brother some in exchange for the blessing of his birthright as the eldest son. Hungry Esau readily agrees and his impulsiveness is made rather clear. From this, I readily assumed that what follows was asked for and deserved - he gave his birthright away.

As Isaac is increasingly elderly, the old man has “his boy” Esau the hunter [Jacob is a mamma’s boy] hunt some fresh meat and to return so the father and his eldest son can share a meal together before the **father passing** on the blessing to him. The mother knows what is going on and she gets hold of “her boy” and then plots a way to get the birthright blessing away from Esau to Jacob. She dresses him with Esau’s clothes so he has Esau’s smell, makes his arms feel hairy like Esau’s and prepares a meal to take to Isaac.

When Jacob comes to his father Isaac who is blind, Isaac asked him “Who are you?” and Jacob replies that he is Esau. He touches him, and he feels like Esau, and he smells like Esau, but I find it interesting that on three different occasions he asked him “Are you really Esau?” I am now convinced that he did not really believe Jacob and gave him three chances to confess. Jacob insist that he is really Esau so after they share a meal, the blind father passes on his blessing to Jacob thinking that it was Esau.

Jacob leaves, and Esau enters his **father’s** tent with the game that he has killed and the meal that he has prepared, and the father asked him. “Who are you?” He replies that he is Esau and the father and son become unnerved with the reality of what has happened. Isaac’s suspicions that he was being **conned** have proven correct. Father and son then cry together. Notice the special bond between father and son. The love relationship between father and son comes through rather clearly. “Is there no blessing for me?” asked Esau?

For obvious reasons, Esau then wishes to kill his brother. Their mom knows of Esau's desire so she quickly gets Jacob to run away to her **brother's** home, which he does, and once there he takes a wife and ends up with two **wives**. He fell in love with the younger sister but got conned into taking the oldest sister first. [He conned his brother now he is the one who gets conned. Life **has** a tendency to work that way]. His life with his **father-in-law** and his two wives is an interesting story but one that I will skip over for the time being.

The strand of thought that I want to pick up with is for the 15 or so years that Jacob is with his **father-in-law**, he lives in fear of his older twin. Need I remind the reader that is a terrible way to live. Wanting to leave his **father-in-law**, he is afraid of traveling lest he run into his brother who might kill him.

In hopes of 'greasing the palm' he sent gifts to his brother both to insure his own safety in travel and to try to get on his brother's good side with these gifts. These gifts are significant. They are not just a 'gift card' to Starbucks. He sends, 200 female goats, 20 male goats, 200 ewes, 20 rams, 30 camels, etc. You get the picture. They eventually meet. But here is the twist in the narrative. **The older does not bow down to the younger but the younger bows down to the older.** He **bows** repeatedly as does his wife and he refers to his brother as "my Lord". Esau embraces his brother, assures him that he has no need of the gifts and that God has dealt very kindly and generously to him and that he has all that he needs.

What has happened here in this unexpected reversal of roles? Part of the back story is that Isaac did bless Esau. The blessing was:

*Your dwelling will be away from the earth's richness
away from the dew of heaven above.
You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother.*

***But when you grow restless
you will throw his yoke from off your neck.***

Esau had thrown the yoke [the burden of his brother] off his neck. He was at peace with himself. Isn't it great to see two brothers reunited in love? They now have come to terms with their differences and both are at peace with each other and thus with themselves.

As for Jacob, chapter 32:20 is rather significant and my Hebrew language skills are too poor to do this justice. There is a word that appears in Hebrew four times that does not appear in the English translation at all. It is the word "panim" which means "face".

The English reads: *"I will pacify him with these gifts I am sending on ahead, Later, when I see him perhaps he will receive me."*

The Hebrew reads: *"I will wipe the anger from his **face** with the gift that goes ahead of my **face**; afterward, when I see his **face** perhaps he will lift up my **face**"*

Remembering that Isaac was blind and could not see Jacob's face, he knew his blessing was fraudulent and based on deception. Literature often refers to **vis-à-vis**, or face to face, and these encounters are much more powerful than a text message or an email. There are certain things in life that need to be taken care of "face to face". Please do not try to solve personal issues with people via texts or emails. It will only lead to more discord. Do it face to face.

There is also the back story of the "other blessing". Knowing that Jacob is going to leave his parents and go to his mother's brother, Isaac gives Jacob another blessing. This one is different because this time he knows who he is blessing and the deception

is no longer. He knows it is Jacob whom he is blessing. He does **it** with these words:

May God Almighty bless you, make you fruitful and increase your numbers so that you become a community of peoples. May he give you and your descendants the blessing of Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as a foreigner, the land God gave to Abraham. Genesis 28:3-4.

The other back story component is found in 32:30 where Jacob is wrestling with God and he says that he saw God face to face, and yet his life was spared. To see God face to face is to see exactly who you are and who you are not. He learned that he was not his brother. He was not the hunter, not the archer, not the tough brother, but the mamma's boy, and that was OK.

Thus, when he meets up with his brother, he comes face to face with who he is, who **his** brother is, and he bows to his brother. Five times he calls his brother Esau, "My Lord". The result, both brothers are now free to live their lives. As Jacob says in 33:10, "*For to see your face is like seeing **the** face of God.*"

Jacob is now free to live his life, and so he does. That is my hope for you the reader, and for myself, that you may realize who you are, and to whom you belong, and then find the freedom to live your life.

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Before leaving the story of Jacob, there is in the book of Malachi and in Romans an expression which says, "Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated." Hated is from the word Sanen which is pronounced saw ye meaning thorn seed. A thorn is something from which you keep your distance. Leah for example was loved,

but she was 'less loved than her sister'. The Hebrew word does not mean the same as its English translation.

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Jacob & Sons: Jacob now lives and lives well. By telling his brother that he had 'everything,' he knows that he no longer needs wealth and power to be complete. He knows who he is. He has two wives, a few concubines, and twelve sons. One of his **sons**, the youngest - named Joseph is his favorite. In the story of Abraham's Ishmael and Isaac, and in Isaac's Jacob and Esau, we had a vivid picture of sibling rivalry. In this case, with twelve sons, we have the same thing but the play-board is different. Joseph is the favorite. There are a few reasons for that. Firstly, he is the youngest and one born to Jacob in his old age. If he is like most parents I know, the oldest one is raised rather strictly and the laws **relax** a little with each child that comes along. By being the 12th child, he is probably spoiled to death. Perhaps more importantly, he is the child from Rebecca, the wife that Jacob has loved from the beginning. It is at this stage, the very first child from Rebecca and Jacob.

Joseph is not only the favorite child, but Jacob makes no attempt to **hide** the fact. Rather, he delights in showing it off. He presents Joseph with a valuable coat of many colors - excessively expensive and as expected, this does not sit well with the other brothers. To top it off, Joseph not only has a dream but makes sure that everyone else in the family is aware of it. The dream is that the day is coming when all of the brothers will bow down to Joseph. Thus the brother's are not only sickened by what they have to look at it, they are angry **with** what they have to listen to. Little brother is simply problematic to the family.

The well **known** part of the story centers on the brothers not only wanting to kill Joseph as they see him coming their way while Joseph is still a long way off. The plan to kill is then

converted to a plan to sell him. As soon as that is implemented, the dream that Joseph had begins to take place. The brothers sell him. They then take blood from an animal, smear it on Joseph's coat of many colors and report back to their father that Joseph has been devoured by an animal. Years later it turns out that Joseph is Pharaohs' right hand man and the manager of Egypt.

There is a famine in the land, and all of the peoples surrounding Egypt are beginning to starve. Jacob **sent** his sons to Egypt to purchase food that has been made available via the dream that Joseph interpreted for Pharaoh that there would be seven years of plenty and that would be followed by seven years **of** famine. Thus the need to store up food to have enough for the seven years of famine.

When the **brothers** arrive, they come face to face with their brother Joseph. Following is a really interesting play on words that gets missed in the English translation. For fun, turn in your bible to Genesis 42:6-8. As you read it, underline the words *recognized* and *stranger*. Now these two terms are based on the same word, but it is a word that can be translated with opposite meanings. Just as the English word "Cleave" can mean either to cling to or to cut into two, so this word may mean either "Stranger" or "Recognize". If you were hearing this story as it was read, the task would be yours as to how you interpreted it. If you are reading it, it has already been interpreted for you. But here is the takeaway. In life, when we see a person, the task is always ours to determine if this other person is going to be a stranger or someone we recognize. Will you treat the stranger as a stranger or as a friend?

Back to the story, Joseph recognizes his brother but they do not recognize him. He does not tell **them** who he is, as I think I would expect. Rather, he accuses them of being spies. They insist that they are not but are rather 12 brothers with one

younger brother left at home. Joseph **insists** that the brothers send one brother back home and bring the youngest brother to him. A strange insistence! Joseph then throws them all in jail for three days.

At the end of the three days, he keeps Simeon but sends the other brothers back home. He fills their sack with grain and hides the silver they brought to pay for the grain within their sack. They are to go home and bring back Benjamin and if they do, Joseph will let Simeon out of prison to join them. When they return to Jacob and discover that they have returned with the grain they have purchased, and the money they took to pay for the grain within their sacks, they became **frightened**. {Note: Always follow the money}.

When they run out of grain, they know they must return for more grain, to get back their brother Benjamin and to return the silver plus to take more silver to buy more grain. They also take gifts. When they return to Egypt, they are taken to Joseph's house, and are scared to death. They are scared over the silver that was still in their sacks when they returned home, scared of the consequence of what they did to their brother many years ago. When they tried to explain things to the Steward at Joseph's house, the Steward said:

Don't be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks; I received the silver you had brought.

Question: Do you find it of interest that this Egyptian, a non member of the covenantal family, would tell them that the silver in the sacks was a gift from their God and the God of their father?

The brothers are all then brought into Joseph's house. He sees his brother Benjamin, the only one with **whom** he shares a

common mother, and he is so moved that he leaves the room to have a good cry and to wash his face.

The men have been seated at the table in order of their birth and the **brothers** know something is going on. Then Benjamin is given a portion of food five times that of his brothers. They enjoy their meal and are then **sent** away with as much grain as they can carry and the silver they have brought is put back into their sacks. Remember my saying “follow the money”. So far, they have acquired a lot of grain but have yet to pay a penny for it. A Silver Cup is also placed in the mouth of the sack of the youngest - Benjamin. When they got just a little ways out of the City, they were stopped and **searched** and the Silver Cup was found in the youngest’s sack. They are then brought back to Joseph.

Joseph then decrees that Benjamin must stay in Egypt but the brothers are free to leave. This is when Judah, the 4th son, then steps forward and pleads for his brother Benjamin and for his father who would die if Benjamin were not returned. He offers himself as the slave in place of his brother so that his father would be spared the misery.

With this, Joseph then proceeds to reveal himself to his brothers. Judah is all about repentance. He offered to be the slave whereas he had sold his brother into slavery. Joseph refuses to see himself as the victim who had been abused by his brothers but rather saw that he was used by God. The brothers are then sent back to their father Jacob loaded down with the grain they came to get plus 10 more donkeys loaded down with all of the good things of Egypt, plus new clothes. Benjamin was also **given** three hundred shekels of silver. [Follow the money]

Later, Jacob and sons and the entire covenantal family return to Egypt to be reunited with Joseph. They are given the best land to live and work. They work hard, and they **grow** in number and

they prosper greatly. This is perhaps my favorite story in all the Hebrew Scriptures.

But, before leaving these three families, let's reach back and pull forward some significant strands throughout this story.

- Genesis 1:26 tells us that God made man in His image and the accent is that I am made in God's image.
- Genesis 9:6 says basically the same thing but the accent is, "the other" is made in God's image. Which takes us back to the strangers and the need to treat the stranger kindly.
- **Covenant with Noah:** As long as the earth endures; seedtime and harvest, **cold** and heat, summer and winter, day and night, will never cease...Never again will life be cut off by the waters of a flood to destroy the earth. [Gen. 8 & 9]. This is a covenant for all mankind. How to have a decent society, respect for God, for life, for family, for others. **It is universal.**
- **Covenant with Abraham:** This is not about a master race, it is about a covenantal people who have been chosen by God with a specific task - to serve God for God's purposes to bless the earth. **It is particular.**
- The Hebrew Scriptures use different terms for God. **Elokim** for universal and **Hashem** for particular. One God, but two different terms.
- In each of the families we have looked at: Abraham/Sara [Ismael & Isaac] it was the younger who was chosen. With Isaac/Rebecca [**Esau** and Jacob] it was the younger who was chosen. With Jacob/Leah & Rachel it was the younger Joseph who was chosen. Even when Jacob chose his wife, it was the younger sister who was chosen.

As these three stories close, it is the end of the youngest child being chosen. The continuing stories then switch to the “First Born”. The first born is now the Covenantal Family as a unit...but that is another story for another day.



Dr. Frank Leeds III
136 Boca Ciega Pt. Blvd. N.
St. Petersburg, FL 33708
fleeds3@yahoo.com