

THE EVIDENCE

“Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac” (Gen. 25:5)

In this brief study we will consider the evidence presented by two sons of Abraham regarding his inheritance. The firstborn was, Ishmael, and the younger son was Isaac. There were, as you know, laws in existence in the days of Abraham 430 years before the Law of Moses (Gal. 3:17). Note that God said: “Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws.” (Gen. 26:5).

The word “patriarch”, as you know, literally refers to rule by the father. (Pater = father and archein = to rule) Let us consider the “law” or “right” of the firstborn in the Age of the Patriarchs.

- One right inherited by the firstborn was that of ministering at the family altar. The oldest male member of the family was the priest of the family. Thus Job, Noah, Abraham, and other patriarchs built altars and made sacrifices. (See Job 1:5; Gen. 8:20; 12:8; etc.) When the patriarch died, this birthright was inherited by his oldest son. When Esau, the firstborn son, sold this “birthright”, he was giving up the right to be the priest for his family. Consequently he was considered as “profane” or “godless” (Heb. 12:16).
- Another privilege of the firstborn son involved property. If the patriarch did not have a son, his property went to the servant in his household that had the greatest seniority. Abram made reference to this law when he complained to God: “O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.” (Gen 15:2-3).
- God operated by a different law and promised Abram and said: “This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.” (Gen 15:4)
- When Abram was 86 years old he fathered his firstborn son, Ishmael. By “law” Ishmael had “rights”. These rights were apparently later incorporated into the Law of Moses: “If a man has two wives, and he loves one but not the other, and both bear him sons but the firstborn is the son of the wife he does not love, when he wills his property to his sons, he must not give the rights of the firstborn to the son of the wife he loves in preference to his actual firstborn, the son of the wife he does not love. He must acknowledge the son of his unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double share of all he has. That son is the first sign of his father’s strength. The right of the firstborn belongs to him.” (Deut 21:15-17)
- When Abraham was about 100 years old he fathered a second child named Isaac. This sets the stage for a legal confrontation between Ishmael and Isaac regarding their father’s inheritance.
- From the human standpoint it seems that Ishmael had an air tight case. He could come to court with legal documents, witnesses, and judicial precedence. There was no doubt that Ishmael was the firstborn son of Abraham and that “by law” the inheritance was his.
- When Isaac showed up in court he had nothing to offer but himself. He had no legal documents or established precedence. Yet we are told emphatically in our text that “Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac.”
- Note: “It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.” (Rom 4:13).
- Even though Isaac had nothing to present but himself, the evidence was overwhelming. He was born in a dead womb (Rom. 4:19). His mother was past the age of childbearing (Gen. 18:11; Heb. 11:11). There was no earthly law capable of accurately considering his case.
- Remember that the birth of Ishmael and Isaac represent two different covenants (Gal. 4:21 - 31). What the law could not do, God has done by the power of faith (Rom. 8:3).
- If you are truly “born again” you have the same kind of miraculous life that Isaac had. That’s all the evidence you need to receive your Father’s eternal inheritance.