

The Patriarch Cycle in Genesis

The bulk of Genesis follows the stories of three Patriarchs: Abraham (ch. 11 – 25), Jacob (ch. 25 – 39), and Joseph (ch. 37 – 50). Each of these patriarchs are connected through Isaac – Abraham’s son, Jacob’s father, and Joseph’s grandfather (Isaac’s story is in ch. 25-27). The book of Genesis is not focused on individual characters as examples of faith (good or bad) but on the activity of God to create his covenantal people who will experience his promises of descendants, land, and blessing. Genesis intentionally draws many parallels between the patriarchs for the purposes of highlighting God’s steadfast character throughout the generations. Each story is written to be read in conjunction with the others to highlight the experiences of each generation, with the differences enhancing the individual characters’ portraits. Here are some of the similarities:

Event	Abraham	Isaac	Jacob	Joseph
Leave homeland	12:1	n/a	28:2	37:28
Arguments with family	13:7	n/a	27:41	37:4
Go down to Egypt (or towards Egypt)	12:10	26:1	46:6	37:28
(Almost) seduction of (by) wives	12:14 – 16, 20:1 - 14	26:10	n/a	39:6 - 18
Barren wives and quarreling (Abraham and Jacob)	16:1 – 6	25:21	29:31 – 30:8	n/a
Younger sons divinely favored (and Joseph’s sons)	17:18 – 19	27:28 - 29	37:3	48:14, 49:8 – 12, 22 - 26
Brides met at well	n/a	24:15	29:9	n/a
Promises of children, land, divine blessing	12:1 – 3	26:2 – 5	28:13 – 14	n/a
Gentiles acknowledge God’s blessing on patriarchs	21:22	26:28 – 29	26:28 – 29	41:39 – 40
Buried in cave in Machpelah	23:1 – 20, 25:9	35:27 - 29	49:29 - 32	n/a