Abraham begot Isaac. We should note the difference between the language that the Torah uses regarding Isaac and the language used for Ishmael. This substantial difference sheds light on two different educational and moral approaches to raising children. Here, the Torah tells us, *These are the generations of Isaac son of Abraham: Abraham begot Isaac.* However, in regard to Ishmael, we read, *these are the generations of Ishmael the son of Abraham, whom Hagar the Egyptian, the maidservant of Sarah, bore* (25:12). The formulation is almost identical, but there is a difference in the terms ἀνεγέρθη ἐκ τούτου, as applied to Ishmael, denotes a biological process of continuity. The Hebrew word אברך, as applied to Isaac, implies a multi-generational educational process with an eternal effect. The plural form for the word אברך is found on the verse in Genesis 50:23: *Joseph saw children of a third generation [born] to Ephraim; also the sons of Machir the son of Manasseh, were born, on Joseph’s knees.* While אברך is generally translated as born, according to Ibn Ezra, this term suggests raising and educating children.

The progeny of Ishmael multiply exponentially, occupy large swaths of territory, and are dispersed geographically. It appears that they accomplished their growth and territorial expansion by military might. There are no Akedos in the lifetime of Ishmael. He grows freely, unencumbered by tension, struggles, or internecine quarrels.

The story of Isaac’s family is quite the opposite. Isaac and Rebecca had only two children, whose births were complicated and painful. Their lives were riddled with conflict. Jacob was compelled to leave his paternal home to wander from place to place and was never able to establish himself in any one location for long. The covenantal community must pay a steep price for its accomplishments.

Sarah is often criticized for her banishment of Ishmael from the household, as it seems to demonstrate a lack of kindness. In reality Sarah was making a critical assertion about membership in the covenantal community. She prevented Ishmael from becoming part of the history of the covenant because his nature would not have allowed him to live the sacrificial life that the people of the covenant must live.

Abraham suggested that Ishmael be included in the covenant: “Abraham said to God, ‘O that Ishmael might live before You!’” (17:18) But God Himself sanctioned Sarah’s decision. Ishmael is not ready to live a life of heroism and self-sacrifice, which includes readiness for possible martyrdom. He cannot be part of the covenantal community.

All this is embedded in the two contrasting verbal forms for giving birth. The Hebrew word ילד, as applied to Ishmael, denotes a biological process of continuity. The Hebrew word בכור, as applied to Isaac, implies a multi-generational educational process with an eternal effect. The plural form for the word בכור is found on the verse in Genesis 50:23: *Joseph saw children of a third generation [born] to Ephraim; also the sons of Machir the son of Manasseh, were born, on Joseph’s knees.* While ילד is generally translated as born, according to Ibn Ezra, this term suggests raising and educating children.
19 And these are the generations of Isaac the son of Abraham; Abraham begot Isaac.*

20 And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebecca the daughter of Bethuel.