

Genesis 25

We were introduced to Abraham at the end of chapter 11 and began following his life from chapter 12, with God giving Abraham some incredible promises. That illustrious life comes to an end here in chapter 25. But the next stage of the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham begins with his son, Isaac, having twins. God predicts that the older son will serve the younger son and we see the beginnings of an animosity between the two which will take center-stage in chapter 27.

TRANSLATION - 25:1-6:

1 Now Abraham did it again and he took a wife and her name was Keturah. **2** Then she gave birth for him Zimran and Jakshan and Medan and Midian and Jishbach and Shuach. **3** And Jakshan gave birth to Sheba and Dedan and the sons of Dedan were Ashurim and Letushim and Leumim. **4** Now the sons of Midian [were] Elpah and Eper and Enoch and Abida and Aledaah; all these [were] sons of Keturah. **5** Now Abraham gave all which [belonged] to him to Isaac. **6** Even to the sons of the concubines which [were] to Abraham, Abraham gave gifts and he sent them from Isaac, his son. They were still eastward to the land of the east.

WORDS:

“Gifts” (verse 6; 17 times) is used first here. On the verb “to send,” see at Gen. 3:22-23.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

Sheba is the country from which a queen came to test the wisdom of King Solomon (1 Kings 10:1-13). The “Ashurim, Letushim, and Leumim” seem to be ethnicities or people groups.

COMMENTS:

We do not know if Abraham married Keturah after Sarah died, as it appears chronologically, or if she was a concubine as Hagar had been. She is clearly identified here as a “wife.” Through Keturah, Abraham had six more sons in addition to Ishmael and Isaac. Abraham had already sent Ishmael away so as not to inherit the blessing. Now he sends away these other sons from “concubines.” In contrast to Ishmael (21:14), Abraham gave gifts to these sons and they settled east of their father and half-brother.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - God continued to bless Abraham, whether he married Keturah after Sarah's death or simply sometime after Isaac's birth (which we doubt). Abraham has eight children in all and clearly becomes the “father of nations” (cf. 17:5).

Contemporaries of Moses - Israel is again reminded that her neighbors are her cousins, if from many years past. Jethro was a priest of Midian (Exo. 2:16-21) and eventually the Midianites will form an alliance against Israel with the Moabites in Numbers 25:6-18.

Later Hebrew writers - Keturah is only mentioned one other time, in the genealogy in 1 Chronicles 1:32-33. In this text, Keturah is identified as a “concubine,” the same word used here at 25:6. Gideon would lead the Israelites in war against the Midianites (Judges 6-8).

TRANSLATION - 25:7-11:

7 Now these [were] the days of the years of the life of Abraham which he lived: one hundred, seventy five years. **8** Then Abraham perished and he died, in an age good [and] old, and he was satisfied and he was gathered to his people. **9** So they buried him, Isaac and Ishmael, his sons, at the cave of Machpelah, at the field of Ephron, son of Zohar, the Hittite, which [was] before Mamre. **10** The field which Abraham bought from the sons of Heth, there was buried Abraham and Sarah his wife. **11** Now it was after Abraham died that God blessed Isaac, his son, and Isaac dwelt in Beer La Hai Roi.

WORDS:

“Perished” (verse 8; 24 times) is a synonym for “to die.” “Old age” is used 19 times. “Satisfied” is actually a noun rather than a verb. The noun is found ten times, but the verb is found 97 times. “Gathered” (200 times) can mean “to gather, take in, or destroy.” “Bought” (verse 10) is a verb found first in 4:1; 14:19, 22.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

For “Beer La Hai Roi” or the “well” of La Hai Roi, see 16:14 and 24:62.

COMMENTS:

God has blessed Abraham in many ways, including a very long life of 175 years. Abraham perished. He passed away in a good, old age, with satisfaction at life, and he was gathered to his people. This latter phrase, which is only used in the Pentateuch (Gen. 25:8, 17; 35:29; 49:29, 33; Num. 20:24, 26; 27:13; 31:2; Deut. 32:50), suggests strongly that Moses, if not the patriarchs believed in life after death, if not a resurrection. The Egyptians surely did; it should not be a surprise that Israel did as well. The expression “gathered to his people” is distinguished both from dying and from being buried. Therefore, it likely means something else. It cannot mean to be buried with one’s ancestors since four of the individuals so described were *not* buried in ancestral tombs (Abraham, Ishmael, Moses, and Aaron). It probably means joining their ancestors in heaven.

Isaac and Ishmael, perhaps never really at enmity with each other since Ishmael was 13 when Isaac was weaned (chapter 21), came together as brothers should and buried their beloved father. The burial was in the same cave of Machpelah in which Abraham had buried Sarah. That event was important enough for much space (all of chapter 23) to be dedicated to it. Moses reminds us here that Abraham bought that cave; he owned land in the land of Canaan. After his father’s death, Isaac lives in Beer La Hai Roi.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries of Moses - Israel is again reminded that Abraham’s grave is in the land promised to him and his family. As they move toward Canaan under Moses’ leadership, they are inheriting the land in which their forefather is buried.

TRANSLATION - 25:12-18:

12 These [are] the generations of Ishmael, son of Abraham, whom Hagar, the Egyptian, slave woman of Sarah bore to Abraham. **13** Now these [are] the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names for their generations: the firstborn of Ishmael, Nebiot and Chedar and Adbeel and Mibsam **14** And Mishma and Dumah and Masa **15** Hadad and Tema, Jetur, Napish and Chedmah. **16** These [are] they, the sons of Ishmael and these [are] their names, by their settlements and by their encampments, twelve princes for their tribes. **17** Now these [were] the years of the life of Ishmael: one hundred thirty-seven years and he perished and he died and he was gathered to his people. **18** Now they dwelt from Havilah as far as Shur, before Egypt as you come to Asshur before all his brothers he fell.

WORDS:

“Generations” (verse 12) is the word used in 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1, 32; 11:10, 27; 25:12-13, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2 which indicates some type of prior division of the book, perhaps family records which had been passed on to Moses or carried among the families of Israel. See the Introduction for a discussion.

“Settlements” (verse 16; 192 times) means “courtyard, village, or settlement” while “encampments” (7 times) denotes some type of military fortification. “Princes” (130 times) means “chief, leader, or prince.” Abraham was called “prince” in 23:6. The word does not necessarily denote royalty.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

“From Havilah as far as Shur, before you come to Egypt” shows that Ishmael’s descendants dwelt in the southern part of the land of Canaan. This area is known as the Arabian peninsula. The Ishmaelites are not mentioned in ANE literature outside the Bible. If the city of Tema is associated with Tema (verse 15), it is the city where Babylonian King Nabonidus (556-539 B. C.) was living when Babylon fell to the Persians (Dan. 5:1-30).

COMMENTS:

Before Moses concentrated on the line of the seed in Isaac, he records the genealogy of Abraham’s other son, Ishmael, and the princes which descended from him. Just as the angel of Jehovah had promised (16:12; 21:13), God blessed Ishmael with many descendants. There are twelve princes / tribes of Ishmael, a parallel to the twelve sons / tribes of Jacob. It is not possible to know exactly what is meant by the last phrase: “before all his brothers he fell.” Most scholars tend to interpret this phrase in a sense of animosity, consistent with such an interpretation of 16:12.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries of Moses - The Ishmaelites buy Joseph, a son of Jacob, in Genesis 37:25-28; 39:1.

Later Hebrew writers - The genealogy of Ishmael is found in 1 Chronicles 1:29-31 and they are also found in Judges 8:24 and Psalm 83:6. They are also found in David’s administration (1 Chron. 2:17; 27:30).

NT writers - As far as Christians are concerned, we point out that while Muslims claim descent from Ishmael, there is no reason to believe that claim is accurate. Mohammed did not claim descent from Ishmael and the Arabs on the peninsula to whom Mohammed was born were pagans for centuries. We doubt they would have kept a genealogy tying them to Ishmael and Abraham over 2,000 years before! Additionally, throughout that time, there were many nations which had invaded the Arabian peninsula so that keeping a pure bloodline would have been extremely hard. Israel had a special reason to keep such a lineage - they were waiting for the Son of David to be born!

TRANSLATION - 25:19-26:

19 These [are] the generations of Isaac, son of Abraham. Abraham caused to be born Isaac. **20** Now Isaac was the son of forty years when he took Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean, from Padan Aram, the father of Laban the Aramean, for himself for a wife. **21** Now Isaac prayed to Jehovah on behalf of his wife because barren she [was] and Jehovah was prayed to by him. Then Rebekah, his wife, conceived. **22** The sons wrestled in Rebekah and she said, “If thus, why [is] this I [am experiencing]?” Then she went to seek Jehovah.

23 Then Jehovah said to her, “Two peoples in your womb and two nations from your belly they will be spread out and nation to nation he will be strong and the oldest will serve the youngest.”

24 Then they found her day to be born and behold, twins [were] in her womb. **25** Then the firstborn came out red all over like a hairy robe and they called his name Esau. **26** And afterward there came out his brother and his hand seizing by the heel of Esau and he called his name Jacob and Isaac was the son of sixty years when she gave birth to them.

WORDS:

“Prayed” (verse 21; 20 times) means “pray, plead, or entreat.” Prayer in the OT was not a fixed liturgy; it was spontaneous, personal, and depended on the need of the moment. Sarah had also been “barren” (11:30). “Conceived” was found in 4:1, 17; 16:4-5; 21:2.

“Wrestled” (verse 22; 19 times) means to “crush, oppress, mistreat.” “Womb” (verse 23; 72 times) means “belly, stomach, or womb.” The synonym is “belly”, which means “entrails,

intestines, or abdomen.” “Nation” (31 times) is a synonym for “people.” “Seize” (verse 26) is used 63 times, meaning “to seize, grasp.”

ARCHEOLOGY:

Padan Aram may be another name for Haran. The phrase means the “way or road of Aram” or the same as “Aram Naharaim” (24:10). Arameans are found 77x in the OT. In Deuteronomy 26:5, Israel is identified as descendants of “Arameans.”

COMMENTS:

Isaac is the son of promise so Moses directs the reader’s attention more carefully to him and his life. Isaac, the only patriarch to be monogamous, was forty when he and Rebekah married in chapter 24. Their twins will be born when Isaac is sixty (25:26), which means Isaac had to wait almost as long (20 years) as his dad (25 years) before he became a father. Like Sarah, Rebekah was also barren; she had waited, and perhaps prayed, for twenty years for a child. Finally, God answered a prayer offered by Isaac and Rebekah became pregnant.

But there were issues in the womb, strange issues, so Rebekah sought God in prayer. Notice how her prayer is not a complete sentence, due to her emotional distress. We again see no evidence of a patriarchal society that did not value and appreciate women. Modern scholars suggest that Rebekah went to a prophet or priest for them to pray for her, but the text does not say that and we are compelled to believe that she was able to pray directly to Jehovah God on her own.

God responded to Rebekah with two facts: she had twins who were going to be heads of two nations. And the older child will serve the younger child! What a fascinating prediction and we can’t help but believe this influenced Rebekah in her subsequent behavior relative to Jacob. We also can’t help but believe that Rebekah shared this information with Isaac, which will put a different light onto the events in chapter 27!

When they were born, Esau was born first and he was red, whether that is his skin tone or hair color we do not know, and he was hairy, like a robe made from animal skin. So, he was named “Edom,” a wordplay with “red.” The word translated “red” here is only used again to describe young David (1 Sam. 16:12; 17:42). Jacob was born grasping onto the heel of Esau, his brother, so Jacob was named thus, a wordplay with “heel”. Now we have the third generation from the promise God made to Abraham back in Genesis 12:1-3.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - “Prayer” has not been a major part of the patriarchs’ lives, but here both Isaac and Rebekah go to God looking for answers and help. God gives them the answer they are seeking but perhaps not an answer they wanted.

Contemporaries of Moses - Esau will become the father of the Edomites who will be a thorn in the side of Israel for centuries to come.

Later Hebrew writers - Esau is mentioned in Joshua 24:4; 1 Chronicles 1:34-35; Jeremiah 49:8, 10; Obadiah 6, 8-9, 18-19, 21; and Malachi 1:2-3. Jacob will be mentioned well over 300 times in the OT! Hosea (12:3) will make reference to the birth of Jacob and Esau. In Jeremiah 9:4, the prophet will warn Israel to be on guard against a brother because “every brother deals craftily;” the latter word is a wordplay on “Jacob / heel.” King David will have the Edomites under subjugation (2 Sam. 8:14).

NT writers - Jacob is in the lineage of Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:2) along with a second Jacob (1:15) and the father of Joseph, the earthly grandfather of Jesus (Matt. 1:16). This Jacob will be found a total of 25 times in the NT, mostly in reference to the stay in Egypt. Esau will be mentioned only three times: Rom. 9:13; Heb. 11:20; 12:16-17.

TRANSLATION - 25:27-34:

27 Now the young men grew up and Esau was a man knowing game, a man of the field and Jacob [was] a man of completeness, dwelling in tents. **28** And Isaac loved Esau because

of game in his mouth but Rebekah loved Jacob. **29** Now Jacob cooked a dish and Esau came from the field and he was exhausted. **30** So Esau said to Jacob, "Let me gulp down, please, from the red [stuff], that red [stuff] because exhausted I [am];" therefore he called his name Edom.

31 So Jacob said, "Sell, even today, your birthright to me."

32 Esau said, "Behold, I am on the way to die and what [is] this birthright to me?"

33 So Jacob said, "Swear to me today." And he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob.

34 So Jacob gave to Esau bread and the dish of lentils and he ate and drank and he arose and left and Esau despised his birthright.

WORDS:

"Game" (verse 27; 14 times) means "game, hunting, or hunter." "Completeness" (23 times) means "completeness, perfection, or integrity." A related word was used of Noah in Gen. 6:9 and of Abraham in Gen. 17:1. "To cook" (verse 29; 10 times) can also be translated "to act insolently, to boil, to become hot, to be arrogant." It is a related word to "dish." "Exhausted" (17 times) means to be "tired, exhausted, or weary." Many translators, because of the context, translate the word "hungry" or "famished." Likely, the two went together in this case.

"Red stuff" is a wordplay on Esau's skin tone or hair color but also the color of the food Jacob had prepared. This is the first time "sell" (verse 31) is used, out of its 80 times. "Birthright" (12 times) means "birthright, right of the firstborn." It is a related word to "firstborn." The whole word family is used 158 times. The birthright went to the oldest son who would become the head of the family, at his father's death, and receive a double amount of the estate. This was true under Moses (Deut. 21:15-17), as well as other ANE cultures such as Mari and Nuzi and Middle Assyria. The relationship between the birthright and the "blessing" (chapter 27) is not clear. We presume that the blessing was the formal distribution of the birthright. "Despised" (verse 34; 42 times) also means "to disregard."

COMMENTS:

Moses gives us some insight into the personalities of the sons which will play a role in the text as well as in chapter 27. Esau is an outdoorsman, a man who loves to hunt. Isaac prefers Esau because Isaac loves to eat wild game. Jacob is a man of "completeness." What that means, we do not know. But he loves to stay in tents, which pictures Jacob as, perhaps, a more quiet man than Esau. Rebekah prefers Jacob; we are not told why, but we suspect God's prophecy of the younger serving the older might play a role.

On the day in view, Esau had no success hunting but had been at it for a while. He comes home exhausted and extremely hungry. Jacob had been cooking something red. When Esau asked for the "red stuff" (we are only told in verse 34 that it was lentils), Jacob immediately saw an opportunity for him to receive the headship of the family, that is, the birthright. Being short-sighted, Esau was willing to sell out his right to the headship of the family if he could just get something to eat. Jacob obliged and Esau swore, which means it could not be retracted. From that moment, Jacob would be the head of the family. Moses, we have seen, rarely makes moral comments on the behavior of the patriarchs, but here he comments that Esau "despised" or "disregarded" his birthright.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - God foresaw and predicted the nature of the two boys in Rebekah's womb (25:23). They would become heads of nations, but the older son would eventually serve the younger. As far as the text is concerned, Jacob does not know about the prophecy. He is simply shrewd and takes advantage of his brother's weakness and short-sightedness.

Contemporaries of Moses - The life of Jacob will span practically the entire rest of the book of Genesis. In Genesis 36:6-8, we learn that the Edomites will live in the hill country of

Seir, a wordplay with “hairy” (cf. Deut. 1:2; 2:1, 5; Josh. 15:10; 24:4). This was located southeast of the Dead Sea. Under the Law of Moses, Israel was to have amicable relationships with Edomites (Num. 20:14; Deut. 23:7).

Later Hebrew writers - The entire prophecy of Obadiah is directed against Edom and its hatred of Israel. In Malachi 1:2-3, God will comment to Israel that he loved Jacob and “hated” Esau so that He chose Jacob to be the conduit for the Messianic seed.

NT writers - Paul will echo the thoughts of Malachi 1:2-3 in Romans 9:13 to the effect that God can choose through whom He desires to fulfill His promise. In the context of Romans 9, the promise eventually comes, not through the nation of Israel as a whole but through Jesus Christ. In Hebrews 12:15-17, the writer uses Esau as a negative example of how Christians ought to live. They should not be short-sighted as Esau was but weigh their actions against the consequences of those choices.