

# Gen 25 Study Notes

Commentary by Adam Mabry

Author of Text: Moses

Audience: Israelites in Exodus moving toward the promised land

## Introduction

Genesis 25 contains three vignette accounts consisting of the story of Abraham's remarriage and death, the account of Ishmael's life and death, and the story of Jacob and Esau's birth. Much happens in these passages to communicate to us the rather hairy nature of God's chosen family, bringing solace that God ordains to work through broken, sinful families, much like the ones many of us come from. This passage is unified by a few themes, God's election of some instead of others, the inheritance of God's promises (or God's covenant), and God's faithfulness to his own promises. While each of these three accounts has much to teach us historically and practically, these themes emerge as prominent in the text overall and should not be missed.

## Abraham's Remarriage, Death, and Burial (v1-11)

*Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. Jokshan fathered Sheba and Dedan. The sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah. Abraham gave all he had to Isaac. But to the sons of his concubines Abraham gave gifts, and while he was still living he sent them away from his son Isaac, eastward to the east country. These are the days of the years of Abraham's life, 175 years. Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people. Isaac and Ishmael his sons buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, east of Mamre, the field that Abraham purchased from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried, with Sarah his wife. After the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac his son. And Isaac settled at Beer-lahai-roi.*

These verses wrap up the story of Abraham that started in chapter 11. First we notice that Abraham has gotten remarried. There is much controversy surrounding this chapter as to whether or not Abraham committed polygamy and taking on a second wife with whom to have more children. Some commentators believe this to be the case, while still others do not. It seems from the narrative that Sarah has died earlier and this is a remarriage, but we cannot be certain of this. Either way, the point of this text is not this particular debate, but rather to emphasize that, despite the fact that Abraham had other children, only Isaac was the one chosen by God through whom the **covenant of grace** would come. This was his **inheritance**, and not the inheritance of the other children. Moses was, no doubt, including this detail to shore up conviction among the people of Israel that they were indeed God's chosen people, and they best not forget it.

Additionally, we see that while Abraham gave good gifts to his other children, he reserved the proper inheritance for his son, Isaac. This brings out further the theme of God's special inheritance that only Isaac was to bear from Abraham, and none of the other children.

Finally, we see that there was a funeral and burial for Abraham. It is explicitly mentioned by Moses that both Isaac and Ishmael were present at the funeral of their father. This is significant, as it is the last time such a meeting is mentioned in Scripture. It was no doubt a contentious relationship that existed between these two, and no doubt as well that they looked at their father rather differently, Ishmael seeing Abraham as more of a source of pain, and Isaac a source of blessing and promise.

### **Ishmael's Descendants and his Death (v12-18)**

*These are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's servant, bore to Abraham. These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, named in the order of their birth: Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael; and Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, 14Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphtish, and Kedemah. These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names, by their villages and by their encampments, twelve princes according to their tribes. (These are the years of the life of Ishmael: 137 years. He breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people.) They settled from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria. He settled over against all his kinsmen.*

This section is marked off clearly in the narrative by the phrase, "these are the generations..." Here we see a bow being tied on the life of Ishmael. The purpose of this narrative is two fold: first to illustrate that God is faithful to his promises that he made to Ishmael and his mother (Genesis 17:20) where she was told that Ishmael would be blessed and also father nations. Ishmael went on to produce the collective peoples most commonly known as Arabs. Many of the names of his sons can be identified with families and geographies of the same region even today. In fact, the entire Muslim faith claims Ishmael for its collective father, in much the same way Jews do Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The second purpose of this narrative goes to illustrate Ishmael's willful departure from God's *covenant of grace* and any *spiritual inheritance* that one might claim through Abraham. Moses seems to be using this to explain people groups to the Israelites in exodus, and yet to also remind them that God has not chosen the descendants of Ishmael, but of Isaac.

### **Jacob and Esau (v19-34)**

*These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham fathered Isaac, and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife. And Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren. And the LORD granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived. The children struggled together within her, and she said, "If it is thus, why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. And the LORD said to her,*

*"Two nations are in your womb,  
and two peoples from within you shall be divided;  
the one shall be stronger than the other,  
the older shall serve the younger."*

*When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak, so they called his name Esau. Afterward his brother came out with his hand holding Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them. When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.*

*Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. And Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!" (Therefore his name was called Edom.) Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright now." Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" Jacob said, "Swear to me now." So he swore to him and(AI) sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.*

This passage is loaded with important content. First, we see that Isaac, learning from his father, decides to pray for Rebekah instead of seeking an adulterous relationship with some other woman that serves him. This was a good idea to learn from dad's mistakes. So, he perseveres in prayer with his wife for 20 years until they see God's promises come true in the birth of their two sons. Much can be learned from this, mainly that God's is always faithful to his promises, and we would do well to cling to them, praying his promises into our lives.

During pregnancy, Rebekah noticed that it seemed like her children were fighting each other even from within the womb. Obviously, this would concern any first-time mother, so she prays to the Lord to help her understand what is going on. Again, we see that Rebekah, unlike Sarah, was happy to ask God about her issues, and not try to force the answer she wanted. So, she asked God what was going on inside her body, and she was given a surprising answer.

God was using the battle between Jacob and Esau in utero to illustrate the battle that would rage between God's people (represented by Jacob) and by God's enemies, a people that came to be called Edom (represented by Esau.) This was also prophetic of the Lord Jesus's struggle with Pontius Pilate, who was from the nation of Edom in Palestine. Here we also see one of the major themes of the remaining portion of Genesis come out, that the relationship between Jacob and Esau would be largely hostile.

Election, or God's sovereign choice, is also illustrated here. This fact has been alluded to in other parts of this passage as God sovereignly chooses Abraham, then Isaac, and now Jacob. The Apostle Paul unpacks this idea in his commentary located in Romans 9:10-13, where he states

*And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— she was told, "The older will serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."*

One can almost anticipate the reaction against such an idea. "How is that fair!?" we bluster back at God. After all, it doesn't seem fair that God would choose to use Jacob, and not to bring his saving grace to the world through Esau as well. Anticipating this rebuttal, Paul answers

*What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like*

*this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?*

Notice here what Paul *doesn't* say. He doesn't say anything about man's free will, but he does seem to say a lot about God's free will. To be sure, he says, we have moral responsibility before God. But God, being God, has the right to do with his creation as He wills. We can trust that God will do what is best, because he is, by his nature, love and justice and mercy. We can trust a God like this, that he will bring *this precious inheritance* to those whom he wills.

Next we see that Jacob and Esau were two very different boys. Esau was a man's man, hunting the fields for wild game, killing it, and eating it. Because of his masculine nature, he was his dad's favorite. This is then contrasted with Jacob who was quiet, and more of a mamma's boy. He and his brother couldn't have been much more different.

The final act in this chapter is that of Esau selling his *inheritance* (or birthright) for a bowl of soup. This condemnable act is illustrated to be a stupid, hateful thing to do, and it was an affront to both his father Isaac and all that he was willing to give him, and God, who was bringing an inheritance of redemption through this family. One has to remember that Esau and Jacob would have been very aware of their family's special place before God, because Abraham was around until they were 15 years old. They would have heard these promises from their grandfather and their father. But to Esau, none of these promises (material or spiritual) seemed to matter much, because he traded them all for a stupid bowl of Lentil soup - the most common food of the day.

## Conclusions

What does this story tell us about Jesus? What does this mean for our lives? Jesus has come at great cost to himself to give us an *inheritance* that is free for us, undeserved. For someone to have an *inheritance*, it means that someone else had to die. That's just what God himself did. From Abraham, through Isaac, and then Jacob, we see that God's precious inheritance was coming down to a broken, sinful humanity. Abraham died to give it to Isaac. Isaac would die to pass it on to Jacob. Eventually, Jesus would die to make it available to us.

In writing this passage, it is as if Moses was saying, "God didn't choose Abraham's brothers, he chose Abraham. He didn't choose Isaac's brothers, but he chose Isaac. He didn't choose Jacob's brother, but he chose Jacob. You are in the line of Jacob, so don't forget that you bear this *inheritance* too!" Today it seems that Jesus could be saying, "I have chosen you, Christian. Now don't forget your inheritance."

Consider the following questions...

- ▶ Who was more in the wrong? Jacob for stealing the blessing, or Esau for seeing it as so valueless that he'd sell it for soup?
- ▶ Will we be like Jacob and do whatever we have to do to get God's inheritance in our lives, or will we be like Esau and simply not care for it at all?