



## Genesis - Chapter Twenty Five

### **II. Genesis 11:27-50:26 - Patriarchal History (continues)**

#### **II.a Genesis 11:27-25:18 - Abraham (continues/concludes)**

##### Summary of Chapter Twenty Five

This chapter commences with a brief account of Abraham's second marriage and the fate of his children to this marriage. It then recounts the death of Abraham at 175 years of age. He was buried by his two principle sons, Isaac and Ishmael, in the cave that he had purchased for his beloved Sarah.

This part of patriarchal history is completed with a listing of the twelve sons of Ishmael who are listed as princes and became the heads of various Arabic tribes throughout the neighbouring areas.

The chapter continues by introducing a new section of the history; the story of Isaac with the birth of his twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Esau was the eldest and his father's favourite, but Jacob was the one anointed by God to bear the seed of promise. Trouble lies ahead for these siblings and this chapter recounts how Esau gave up his birthright to his brother for a bowl of stew!

#### **II.a.xx Genesis 25:1-6 - Abraham Marries Keturah**

This brief passage recounts Abraham's second marriage to Keturah and the children they had together. Although Abraham provided for his children, he sent them away from Canaan so that Isaac and his descendants alone would form the Hebrew nation in later years.

Jewish tradition holds that Keturah is Hagar, the Egyptian maidservant of Sarah, with whom Abraham had a son, Ishmael. While Rashi seems confident that he knows Keturah is Hagar, however, Rashbam, Radak and Ibn Ezra, following a simple reading of the text, state unequivocally that Keturah is not

Hagar, but a different woman. Perhaps the Sages were bothered by Abraham's treatment of Hagar and hoped to make midrashic amends.

<sup>1</sup> Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. <sup>2</sup> She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. <sup>3</sup> Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan. The sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. <sup>4</sup> The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah.

#### Genesis 25:1-4

Abraham took another wife. Only minimum information is given regarding Abraham's relationship with Keturah. Like Hagar, she has the status of a concubine: <<*The sons of Keturah, Abraham's concubine: she bore Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. The sons of Jokshan: Sheba and Dedan*>> (1 Chronicles 1:32); refer also to the comment made on vv.5-6.

No indication is given as to when this relationship was established; it possibly existed before the death of Sarah, but this remains uncertain. Reflecting the culture of the ancient Near East, it was not unknown for men to take second wives, but this was usually an action of those who were wealthy. The precise status of the second wife could vary, depending on the nature of the relationship; she might, for example, be an actual wife as were Leah and Rachel to Jacob, although this was through Laban's trickery; or she could be the maidservant of the first wife, such as Hagar (16:1-3), Bilah (29:29), and Zilpah (30:9).

She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. Abraham would have been well over 100 years of age when he fathered these six sons, although there is no evidence to suggest this was other than through natural conception rather than the miraculous intervention again by God. He may also have had daughters but, in accordance with cultural traditions, they are not recounted in the genealogies.

<sup>5</sup> Abraham gave all he had to Isaac. <sup>6</sup> But to the sons of his concubines Abraham gave gifts, while he was still living, and he sent them away from his son Isaac, eastwards to the east country.

#### Genesis 25:5-6

These verses highlight Isaac's position as Abraham's main heir by noting that (1) Abraham gave all he had to Isaac , and (2) the sons of Abraham's concubines were sent away to the east country. He gave them gifts, probably silver and livestock, that would help them become established in their new homes. However, the bulk of his wealth and, in particular, the right of heir, passed to Isaac.

These descendants of Abraham are probably the peoples of the east country referred to elsewhere in Scripture and are often opponents of the Israelites, for example: <<For whenever the Israelites put in seed, the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the east would come up against them>> (Judges 6:3), and: <<God gave Solomon very great wisdom, discernment, and breadth of understanding as vast as the sand on the seashore, so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt>> (1 Kings 4:29-30).

His concubines probably refers to Hagar and Keturah, who both bore Abraham children, although neither woman shares the status of Sarah, Abraham's first wife. The term concubine, Hebrew *pilegish*, may give the impression that no formal relationship existed between Abraham and these women. Yet since their sons are publicly recognised as Abraham's children, some type of formal relationship evidently existed. In Judges 19:9, the father of a man's concubine is designated as his father-in-law, suggesting that a form of marriage has taken place between the man and the woman. However, the sons of Hagar and Keturah are clearly distinguished from Isaac; refer also to 1 Chronicles 1:28-34.

#### II.a.xxi Genesis 25:7-11 - The death of Abraham

This brief passage recounts the natural death of Abraham at a good old age and his burial in the same cave that he bought for Sarah. Both Isaac and Ishmael took on the joint responsibility for the burial of their father.

<sup>7</sup> This is the length of Abraham's life, one hundred and seventy-five years. <sup>8</sup> Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people.

#### Genesis 25:7-8

This is the length of Abraham's life, one hundred and seventy-five years. Although Abraham lived a very long life compared with modern day standards it was considerably less than his post-flood descendant Shem, who was 600 years of age, and his own father Terah (205 years old).

Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years. Thus ends the life of one of the greatest men in the OT. He is mentioned seventy times in the NT alone with only Moses, 80 times, referred to more often.

Adam Clarke gave a good eulogy of Abraham: "Above all as a man of God, he stands unrivalled; so that under the most exalted and perfect of all dispensations, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, he is proposed and recommended as the model and pattern according to which the faith, obedience, and perseverance of the followers of the Messiah are to be formed. Reader, while you admire the man, do not forget the God that made him so great, so good,

and so useful. Even Abraham had nothing but what he had received; from the free unmerited mercy of God proceeded all his excellences; but he was a worker together with God, and therefore did not receive the grace of God in vain. Go thou, believe, love, obey, and persevere in like manner.”

The term gathered to his people is commonly used when someone dies or is about to die, for example: <<*And Isaac breathed his last; he died and was gathered to his people, old and full of days; and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him*>> (Genesis 35:29), <<*When Jacob ended his charge to his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed, breathed his last, and was gathered to his people*>> (Genesis 49:33), and: <<*Let Aaron be gathered to his people. For he shall not enter the land that I have given to the Israelites, because you rebelled against my command at the waters of Meribah*>> (Numbers 20:24).

<sup>9</sup> His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, east of Mamre, <sup>10</sup> the field that Abraham purchased from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried, with his wife Sarah.

#### Genesis 25:9-10

The cave of Machpelah that Abraham purchased. Refer to Chapter 23 for the full account of how Abraham bought this burial site for the primary purpose of burying his beloved Sarah. It would become the tomb for Isaac, Jacob and several of their wives as well. It remained the only land that was owned prior to the Exodus.

<sup>11</sup> After the death of Abraham God blessed his son Isaac. And Isaac settled at Beer-lahai-roi.

#### Genesis 25:11

After the death of Abraham God blessed his son Isaac. Abraham was a great man, but he was only a man. God’s work passed on from one generation to the next. Now God would carry on the work of the covenant first promised to Abraham through Isaac.

#### II.a.xxii Genesis 25:12-18 - Ishmael’s Descendants

Before proceeding to recount in detail the events associated with Isaac’s immediate family, a short section is devoted to naming the twelve sons of Ishmael, who became chieftains of tribes in Arabia. This information confirms that God’s promise in 17:20 was fulfilled.

<sup>12</sup> These are the descendants of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah’s slave-girl, bore to Abraham.

## Genesis 25:12

These are the descendants of Ishmael. This phrase marks the start of a new section or *toledot* in the Book of Genesis. Refer to the comments made on 2.4. The tribes and nations that would come from Ishmael have played a significant role in shaping world religion.

Abraham's son. Although he was the son of a slave woman, he is still reckoned as having the status of a son. This was recognised by God in the promises he gave about Ishmael that are borne out here in these verses.

<sup>13</sup> 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, <sup>14</sup> Mishma, Dumah, Massa, <sup>15</sup> Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. <sup>16</sup> These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names, by their villages and by their encampments, twelve princes according to their tribes. <sup>17</sup> (This is the length of the life of Ishmael, one hundred and thirty-seven years; he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people.) <sup>18</sup> They settled from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria; he settled down alongside all his people.

## Genesis 25:13-18

This is the length of the life of Ishmael, one hundred and thirty-seven years; he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people. Ishmael's life too comes to an end but the legacy that God gave him through his sons is marked out in the history of the Arabic nations and the Islamic faith.

They settled from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria. Although there is some contention to the exact locations of these lands, it is generally accepted that it is a large part of northern Saudi Arabia with Shur perhaps forming part of the Sinai Peninsula and Havilah being as far east as modern Kuwait.

## II.b Genesis 25:19-36:43 - Isaac's Descendants

A new heading, identified by the expression these are the descendants of introduces the next main section of Genesis. While these chapters focus on the immediate family of Isaac, special attention is given to Jacob because the unique family line of Genesis is continued through him. This section of Genesis has been skilfully composed through the use of particular themes and through the structural arrangement of the material into a mirror-image pattern.

## II.b.i Genesis 25:19-28 - The Birth and Youth of Esau and Jacob

This section plays an important role by introducing Isaac and Rebekah's twin sons, who become the central characters in Chapters 25-36. Significantly, the account of their birth is proleptic in nature, i.e. it anticipates future developments in the story that is about to unfold.

<sup>19</sup> These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham was the father of Isaac, <sup>20</sup> and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramæan of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramæan.

### Genesis 25:19-20

These are the descendants of Isaac. The ninth *toledot* in Genesis and also one of great significance to the whole bible for: <<*It is not as though the word of God had failed. For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel, and not all of Abraham's children are his true descendants; but 'It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named after you.'* This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants>> (Romans 9:6-8).

The repeated use of the term Aramæan and the designation of their dwelling place as Paddan-aram, meaning the 'plain of Aram', indicate that Abraham's family were considered to be Aramæans. In Deuteronomy 26:5 a patriarch, more likely Jacob than Abraham, is described as a 'wandering Aramæan.'

<sup>21</sup> Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived.

### Genesis 25:21

Like Sarah, Rebekah is also barren. But the Lord responds to Isaac's prayer, and Rebekah conceived. God will frequently respond to prayer in this way, as he did to prayers for victory on the east of Jordan: <<*for they cried to God in the battle, and he granted their entreaty because they trusted in him*>> (1 Chronicles 5:20b), in response to kings to aid their faith: <<*He prayed to him, and God received his entreaty, heard his plea, and restored him again to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD indeed was God*>> (2 Chronicles 33:13), and when he hears a request for protection from his people: <<*So we fasted and petitioned our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty*>> (Ezra 8:23).

<sup>22</sup> The children struggled together within her; and she said, ‘If it is to be this way, why do I live?’ So she went to inquire of the LORD. <sup>23</sup> And the LORD said to her,

‘Two nations are in your womb,  
and two peoples born of you shall be divided;  
one shall be stronger than the other,  
the elder shall serve the younger.’

### Genesis 25:22-23

Rebekah went to inquire of the LORD. As Rebekah sought God, the Lord spoke to her regarding the sons within her womb.

The observation that the children struggled together within her introduces one of the main themes of Chapters 25-36. The relationship between the twin boys will be largely hostile. Conflict between brothers is a recurring motif in Genesis, beginning with Cain and Abel, and is a constant reminder of the negative impact of the fall on human existence. Yet the divine revelation that the elder shall serve the younger prepares the reader to expect that Jacob will have a significant role to play in the development of the unique family line in Genesis. Normally, younger brothers were subservient to the firstborn male, who enjoyed special privileges associated with the concept of primogeniture.

The elder shall serve the younger. God chose to go against the accepted pattern of the younger serving the elder. In Romans 9:10-13, the apostle Paul used this choice of Jacob over Esau before their birth as an illustration of God’s sovereign choice:

- God’s choice of Isaac instead of Ishmael seems more logical to Christian believers. Yet his choice between Jacob and Esau, regarding which one would be the heir of God’s covenant of salvation, was just as valid, although it seemed to make less sense.
- Paul wrote that God’s choice was not based on the performance of Jacob or Esau. The choice was made when they had not yet been born, nor had done any good or evil (Romans 9:11).
- God announced these intentions to Rebekah before the children were born and, through his prophet, he repeated his verdict long after Jacob and Esau had both passed from the earth: <<*I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau*>> (Malachi 1:2b-3a).
- Some object questioning the fairness of God making such a choice before Jacob or Esau were born. Yet one should regard the love and the hate God

spoke of in Malachi 1:2-3 and Romans 9:10-13 as having to do with his purpose in choosing one of these two to become the heir of the covenant of Abraham. In that regard, God's preference could rightly be regarded as a display of love towards Jacob and hate towards Esau. The real thought in Malachi Chapter One and Romans Chapter Nine is much more like 'accepted' and 'rejected' more than it is like the traditional understanding of the terms loved and hated.

- God did not hate Esau in the sense of cursing him to a doomed life in either this world or the next. All told, Esau was indeed a blessed man, in some ways more well-adjusted than Jacob (33:4-9). Yet in regard to the passing of the covenant, it could be rightly said that God hated Esau and loved Jacob.

**Two nations are in your womb.** What God said is simple; Rebekah would give birth to twins. The twins would each father nations. **One shall be stronger than the other,** of great relevance to God's people who will prevail over the other. Edom's fate would be given by the prophet after they played their part in the exile of Judah: *<<For the slaughter and violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off for ever. On the day that you stood aside, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you too were like one of them. But you should not have gloated over your brother on the day of his misfortune; you should not have rejoiced over the people of Judah on the day of their ruin; you should not have boasted on the day of distress>>* (Obadiah 10-12).

Jewish legends say Jacob and Esau tried to kill each other in the womb. Also, every time Rebekah went near an idol's altar, Esau would get excited in the womb, and when she would go near a place where the Lord was worshipped, Jacob would get excited. The bible does not state this as true however.

<sup>24</sup> When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. <sup>25</sup> The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau.

#### **Genesis 25:24-25**

**The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau.** The circumstances surrounding the birth of each child were responsible for their names. Esau referred to the hairiness of the first-born child. The relevance of **red** becomes clearer in v.30.

<sup>26</sup> Afterwards his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

## Genesis 25:26

Gripping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. The name Jacob not only resembles the Hebrew term for heel, 'aqeb, but also has the connotation of 'deceiver.' To grasp someone by the heel was apparently a figure of speech meaning 'to deceive.' The motif of deception appears in a number of episodes associated with Jacob. The prophet wrote of Jacob: <<*In the womb he tried to supplant his brother, and in his manhood he strove with God*>> (Hosea 12:3).

Isaac was sixty years old. The twins are born 15 years before the death of Abraham, which is recorded in vv.7-8. Occasionally in Genesis, for specific reasons, some events are narrated out of chronological order, as here.

<sup>27</sup> When the boys grew up, Esau was a skilful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. <sup>28</sup> Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.

## Genesis 25:27-28

When the boys grew up. The contrast between Esau and Jacob is reflected in their personalities. The manlier, outdoor-oriented Esau is loved by his father, whereas the quieter, domesticated nature of Jacob makes him his mother's favourite.

Jacob was a quiet man. The Hebrew word for quiet has the idea of wholeness instead of someone who is weak or effeminate. The Hebrew word *tam*, i.e. quiet or mild, is used of Job in: <<*The LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil'*>> (Job 1:8).

Living in tents. The nomadic lifestyle would continue throughout the lifetime of Jacob and his sons as well.

### II.b.ii Genesis 25:29-34 - Esau Sells His Birthright

This episode centres on Esau's dismissive attitude toward his birthright. While Jacob may be criticised for exploiting his brother in a moment of weakness, Esau is indifferent toward his firstborn status. He does not grasp the significance of all that God has promised to fulfil through the unique line descended from Abraham, of which he is the natural heir.

<sup>29</sup> Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. <sup>30</sup> Esau said to Jacob, 'Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!' (Therefore he was called Edom.)

### Genesis 25:29-30

Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field. Here, each son acted consistently with his own natural inclination: Esau hunted and Jacob cooked.

In Hebrew the name Edom is similar to the word red. Refer back to the comments made on vv.24-25. This would become the name of the land and his descendants, who would oppose the Exodus to the Promised Land (Numbers 20:14-21).

<sup>31</sup> Jacob said, ‘First sell me your birthright.’ <sup>32</sup> Esau said, ‘I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?’ <sup>33</sup> Jacob said, ‘Swear to me first.’ So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob.

### Genesis 25:31-33

First sell me your birthright. Jacob knew that the birthright was valuable and he wanted it. Passages like Deuteronomy 21:17 and 1 Chronicles 5:1-2 reveal that the birthright involved both a material and a spiritual dynamic. The son of the birthright received a double portion of the inheritance, and he also became the head of the family and the spiritual leader upon the passing of the father. The Nuzi texts from the 15<sup>th</sup> Century BC in Mesopotamia give evidence for transferable birthrights, mentioning one particular case in which a man sold his birthright for a sheep. Even that was more valuable than a bowl of stew!

I am about to die. This, of course, was a dramatic over-exaggeration and not true. He may have felt very hungry after a day’s hunting but he would have lived.

Swear to me first. Jacob acted in the character of his name, acting like a heel-catcher. He was acting like a trickster in taking advantage of his brother. Jacob was guilty of scheming in the flesh to gain something God said was already his. Yet it should be remembered the far greater blame was placed on Esau, who despised his birthright.

Luther drew attention to an important fact: this was not a valid transaction, because Jacob tried to purchase what was already his, and Esau tried to sell something that did not belong to him.

Spiritually speaking, many today despise their birthright. Ephesians 1:3-14 reveals a treasury of riches that belong to a believer in Jesus by birthright:

- Every spiritual blessing
- The blessing of being chosen in Jesus
- Adoption into God’s family
- Complete acceptance by God in Jesus
- Redemption from our slavery to sin
- True and total forgiveness

- The riches of God's grace
- The revelation and knowledge of the mystery of God's will
- An eternal inheritance
- The guarantee of the indwelling Holy Spirit

Far too many neglect or trade away this birthright for cheap entertainment, momentary popularity, or passing pleasures.

<sup>34</sup> Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

#### Genesis 25:34

Thus Esau despised his birthright. Esau was contemptuous of his special firstborn status. On the basis of this, Hebrews 12:16 describes Esau as <<*immoral and godless*>>. Esau did not appreciate that his birthright was linked to God's plan of redemption for the whole world.

Although Esau's character was not the basis for God's choosing, for he chose Jacob over Esau before they were born, Esau's character showed the ultimate wisdom of God's choice.