

GENESIS

Chapter 25

Abraham's Death and His Descendants

Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. 2 She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. 3 Jokshan fathered Sheba and Dedan. The sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. 4 The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah. 5 Abraham gave all he had to Isaac. 6 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. 7 These are the days of the years of Abraham's life, 175 years. 8 Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people. 9 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, 10 the field that Abraham purchased from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried, with Sarah his wife. 11 After the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac his son. And Isaac settled at Beer-lahai-roi. 12 These are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's servant, bore to Abraham. 13 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, 14 Mishma, Dumah, Massa, 15 Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. 16 These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names, by their villages and by their encampments, twelve princes according to their tribes. 17 (These are the years of the life of Ishmael: 137 years. He breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people.) 18 They settled from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria. He settled over against all his kinsmen.

25:1 *took another wife.* Or “married another woman”—his “concubine” (1Ch 1:32). (CSB)

Or, “had taken another wife.” The order of events here is thematic, not chronological. Keturah was Abraham’s concubine. (TLSB)

took. Or “had take,” since Abraham would have been 140 years old at this time if the order is chronological. (CSB)

Moses records a second marriage of Abraham, who lived another thirty-eight years after Sarah died. Luther felt that Abraham (“father of many nations”) recognized that his two sons Ishmael and Isaac hardly finished the background for “many nations.” According to Luther, “Abraham saw the he was to beget more children in order to fulfill the promise of Genesis 17:4, and so in faith he proceeded to enter upon another marriage.” Despite the fact that Abraham’s relation to Keturah is described in 25:1 as a marriage, she is called a “concubine” (Secondary wife) in 25:6, perhaps because the sacred writer hesitated to give Keturah equal rank with Sarah, the mother of the promised seed. (PBC)

25:2 Although the table of Abraham’s descendants through Keturah is brief, it does document the fact that a number of nations did descend from Abraham. The descendants listed here are the fathers of Arab tribes who left southern Palestine and migrated east and southeast. Of Keturah’s six sons, only Midian is subsequently mentioned on the pages of OT history, and always in the context of hostility to the covenant people of Israel. (PBC)

Unfortunately, the mere fact that these nations descended from Abraham did not automatically guarantee that they shared the faith of Abraham. John the Baptist told the religious leaders of his day: “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance, and don’t say: ‘We have Abraham for our father’” (Luke 3:8). Each succeeding generation of God’s people needs to make God’s Word and His promise its own through faith, or those blessings will be lost through unbelief. (PBC)

25:5 *left all he had to Isaac.* The law of primogeniture provided that at least a double share of the father’s property be given to the firstborn son when the father died (Dt 21:15–17). Parallels to this practice come from Nuzi, from Larsa in the Old Babylonian period and from Assyria in the Middle Assyrian period. Isaac was Abraham’s firstborn son according to law. (CSB)

Isaac was the sole legal heir. The Lord promised to give him the offspring through whom the Savior would come (17:19). (TLSB)

25:6 *gifts.* These doubtless represented the inheritance left to Abraham’s other sons. (CSB)

concubines. Polygamy was practiced even by godly men in ancient times, though it was not the original divine intention. (CSB)

sent them away – Earlier in his life Abraham had learned through bitter experience that this son Ishmael despised Isaac’s favored position in the family. To make sure that there would be no misunderstanding after his death, Abraham gave gifts to each of the concubines’ sons and sent them away. With this action he made two things clear. First, he was giving them their freedom, along with enough money for a good start in life. According to several ancient Mesopotamian law codes that have come down to us, sons of concubines were ordinarily considered slaves and received no inheritance. But more important, Abraham was making it clear that Isaac and only Isaac, was the bearer of the covenant, the future head of the clan, the link between Abraham and the Savior. (PBC)

25:7 *a hundred and seventy-five years.* Abraham lived for a full century after “he set out from Haran” (12:4). (CSB)

25:8 *died at a good old age.* As God had promised (see 15:15). (CSB)

Although physically dead, Abraham still lives and enjoys Christ’s glorious presence (Mt. 22:32). (TLSB)

The “Account of Terah” comes to a close with the elaborate obituary of Abraham. His life span was thirty years shorter than his father Terah’s, but it’s described as “a good old age.” According to Genesis 25:26, Abraham lived to see his twin grandsons Esau and Jacob grow up to be young men. He lived to see his wants and his expectation satisfied. (PBC)

an old man and full of years. A phrase used also of the patriarch Job (see Job 42:17). (CSB)

was gathered to his people. Joined his ancestors and/or deceased relatives in death (see 2Ki 22:20; 2Ch 34:28). (CSB)

25:9 *Isaac and Ishmael.* Isaac, legally the firstborn, is listed first. (CSB)

It’s also noteworthy here that although Abraham had dismissed the sons of concubines from his household with gifts, yet Ishmael took part with Isaac in burying Abraham. Since God named Ishmael to a special honor (Genesis 17:20), he was elevated above Keturah’s sons. We are also glad to note that although there had been a separation between Isaac and Ishmael, there was no alienation. (PBC)

25:10 In accordance with Abraham's wishes, and as a final affirmation of his faith that God would keep His promise to make Canaan His people's homeland, Abraham was buried in the cave of Machpelah. (PBC)

25:12 *these are the generations of Ishmael* – The “Account of Ishmael” is brief, but it's long enough to record how God kept His promise. The names of twelve tribal rulers from Ishmael's line are listed, ancestor of the many Arab nations. God's promises do not fail, even those promises given to people outside the mainstream of Messianic history. (PBC)

Genesis is divided into 10 “generations” (genealogy). Ishmael's is the seventh. Although God's promise rested chiefly on Isaac and his line, Ishmael and his line nonetheless received the Lord's special blessing for a time (cf. 16:10). (TLSB)

25:13 *names of the sons of Ishmael*. Many are Arab names, giving credence to the Arab tradition that Ishmael is their ancestor. (CSB)

25:16 *twelve princes according to their tribes*. Twelve major tribes descended from Abraham's son Ishmael (as predicted in 17:20)—as was also true of Abraham's brother Nahor. (CSB)

villages – Often protected by walls. (TLSB)

encampments – Nomadic communities without walls. (TLSB)

25:17 As a member of Abraham's household until his dismissal (cf. 21:14; 25:6, 9), Ishmael heard of the Lord's grace and the promised Offspring (3:15). Because Ishmael was “gathered to his people” as Abraham was, Ishmael also enjoys Christ's eternal blessing among the saints, though his descendants rejected that blessing (AE 4:327-29). (TLSB)

25:18 *settled over against all his kinsmen*. They located in the barren region of the Sinai Peninsula. The Ishmaellites caused ongoing conflict with Israel. (TLSB)

25:1–18 Abraham grows old, being blessed with many children. Yet he makes clear that Isaac alone is his heir. Finally, Abraham dies a blessed death and is given a proper burial by his sons Isaac and Ishmael. Children are a blessing from the Lord that husband and wife should celebrate. Like Abraham, we should instruct our children about the Lord and should bury the bodies of the faithful departed with honor. Such burial is a confession of the resurrection, that Christ will return and raise us from the dead to be gathered to Him. • Lord, continue to give us the blessings of Your cross and the empty tomb as we daily die to sin in our Baptism and await the glorious resurrection with all the saints. Amen. (TLSB)

The Birth of Esau and Jacob

19 These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham fathered Isaac, **20** 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. **21** And Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren. And the LORD granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived. **22** 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. **23** 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.” **24** When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb. **25** The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak, so they called his name

Esau. 26 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. 27 When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. 28 Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

25:19 *generations.* Genesis is divided into 10 “generations” (genealogies). Isaac’s is the eighth. (TLSB)

25:20 *Paddan Aram.* Another name for Aram Naharaim. (CSB)

25:21 God graciously intervenes to preserve the line of the coming Savior. (TLSB)

As we listen to the record of Isaac and Rebekah’s marriage, we hear one of the same sad overtones that we heard in the marriage of Abraham and Sarah a generation earlier. For twenty years God withheld His blessing of children. Growing up under the training of a pious father and mother, Isaac had learned that parents are not the manufacturers of human life, but that God is the creator of it. He uses human fathers and mothers to pass on the gift of life to another generation, but the gift is His to give or to withhold. During those twenty childless years Isaac was concerned, not only because of his natural desire for children, but because he knew that in the present generation he and Rebekah were the only link to the promised Messiah. Isaac therefore begged the Lord, the God of the Covenant, to remove Rebekah’s barrenness. The Lord listened to his prayer, and Rebekah became pregnant. (PBC)

25:22 *struggled together.* The struggle between Jacob and Esau began in the womb (see also v. 26). (CSB)

In the months ahead she was awed by the miracle stirring within her. But at the same time Rebekah was bothered by something going on within her that she was sure was not normal. There seemed to be a pushing and shoving going on (the Hebrew verb means “to crush,” “to oppress”). What was happening and why? (PBC)

went. Perhaps to a nearby place of worship. (CSB)

to inquire of the Lord – Perhaps through her father-in-law, Abraham, who was a prophet of the Lord (20:7) and lived another 15 years after these events. (TLSB)

Like her husband, Rebekah knew whom to ask, and the Lord gave her a surprising answer. (PBC)

25:23 *the older will serve the younger.* The ancient law of primogeniture (see note on v. 5) provided that, under ordinary circumstances, the younger of two sons would be subservient to the older. God’s election of the younger son highlights the fact that God’s people are the product not of natural or worldly development but of his sovereign intervention in the affairs of men (see note on 11:30). Part of this verse is quoted in Ro 9:10–12 as an example of God’s sovereign right to do “whatever pleases him” (Ps 115:3) —not in an arbitrary way (see Ro 9:14), but in order that his “purpose in election might stand” (Ro 9:11). (CSB)

Contrary to ancient custom and family right, Esau would be subservient to his younger twin, Jacob. By this favor for Jacob, the Lord emphasized that the promise does not come by obligation, rights, or works, but by miraculous, undeserved grace. Cf Rm 9:10–12. (TLSB)

Rebekah learned, first of all, that she was to become the mother of twins, each of whom would be the founder of a nation. She learned, furthermore, that there would be conflict, an ongoing rivalry, between them, as well as between their descendants, and that one would overcome the other. Finally Rebekah

learned that contrary to the normal order, “the older will serve the younger.” In the society of that day, normally the firstborn had the position of privilege in the family. It was the firstborn who after the father’s death became the head of the clan and received a double share of the inheritance. Rebekah learned that in the case of her twin sons God was going to reverse that natural order. The younger of the twins was going to be the stronger, the dominant one. In the centuries ahead his descendants would consistently hold the upper hand over those of the older twin. The younger twin would also be the son who would continue the Messianic line. (PBC)

St. Paul refers to this in his epistle to the Romans, to illustrate the truth that God’s election is an election of grace. “Before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad – in order that God’s purpose is election might stand: not by works by him who calls – (Rebekah) was told: “the older will serve the younger” (Romans 9:10-12). The fact that back in eternity God chose us as His dear children before we had done anything good or bad, before we were ever born or had come to faith, is traceable only to the grace of God. (PBC)

25:24–26 For another unusual birth of twin boys see 38:27–30. (CSB)

25:25 *red.* A pun on Edom, one of Esau’s other names. (CSB)

“Red” in Hbr sounds like Esau’s alternate name, Edom. (TLSB)

When the time came for Rebekah’s babies to be born, there was something unusual about each of them. The first was completely covered with reddish-brown hair. That earned him the name Esau, which may mean “hairy”; he was also called Edom, which means “red.” (PBC)

25:26 *his hand holding Esau’s heel.* Hostility between the Israelites (Jacob’s descendants) and Edomites (Esau’s descendants) became the rule rather than the exception (see, e.g., Nu 20:14–21; Ob 9–10).

The younger twin entered the world with his arms stretched out and holding on to his brother’s heel. His name (“heel-grabber”) perpetuated that memory. Someone present at the birth might even have thought he looked like he wanted to hold his brother back so that he himself could be the firstborn. The name his parents chose for him may have been given innocently enough, but as Jacob’s life story unfolds his name came to suggest “one who trips up another, who defrauds him.” We know that on at least one occasion the older twin interpreted the name Jacob that way (27:36). (PBC)

As though trying to prevent Esau from being born first. At this birth Isaac was 60 years old; Abraham was 160 years old. Abraham died when the twins were 15 years old and Isaac was 75 years old. (TLSB)

Jacob. The name became proverbial for the unsavory quality of deceptiveness. (CSB)

25:27 *hunter* – Esau felt at home in the great out-of-doors: he loved the excitement of the hunt. Father Isaac felt attracted to Esau; perhaps he saw in this older son traits he felt lacking in his own personality. (PBC)

quiet man – Or, “a man of integrity.” (TLSB)

The exciting and sometimes dangerous life of the hunter was not for him. He preferred the un-glorious but more secure life of the shepherd, like his father and grandfather. Mother Rebekah quite naturally felt closer to the quiet boy who spent more time in and around the tent. We assume that she shared with him the promise the Lord had made before the twins were born. It is unfortunate that each of the parents had a

favorite child. That fact provided fertile soil for future problems to sprout – problems as serious as trying to interfere with God’s stated intention to transmit the Messianic blessing through Jacob. (PBC)

25:28 Isaac preferred Esau as the firstborn and as an excellent hunter who provided food. Thus, Isaac forgot how the Lord’s favor is not given by right of birth order (v. 23). Rebekah, however, remembered the Lord’s words and gave preference to Jacob (AE 4:386-90). (TLSB)

25:19–28 God’s ways are not our ways. The Lord chooses to give His special blessing to Jacob, who does not deserve this gift either by birth order or by virtue. When we come before God on the basis of rights, claims, and human justice, we fall into the mind-set of Isaac, who wrongfully favored his firstborn, Esau, despite God’s promise concerning Jacob. Thankfully, God does not deal with us on the basis of what we deserve for our sin. He chose us from eternity to be His people. Christ bore all our deserved punishment on the cross. • We thank You, Lord Jesus, that Your ways are not our ways. You have given us undeserved pardon and peace in Your cross. Amen. (TLSB)

Esau Sells His Birthright

29 Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. 30 And Esau said to Jacob, “Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!” (Therefore his name was called Edom.) 31 Jacob said, “Sell me your birthright now.” 32 Esau said, “I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?” 33 Jacob said, “Swear to me now.” So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. 34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

25:29 We learned earlier that Jacob was perfectly content to let his brother roam the fields, while he stayed closer to home. Here we meet him boiling a pot of lentil soup. It may very well be that he and his older twin had discussed the privileges that went with being the firstborn, and that he had sensed Esau did not value those privileges highly. Even though God had promised those privileges to the younger twin, Esau considered them his rightful property, and apparently so did his father Isaac (see 27:29). Jacob considered those privileges rightfully his and looked for an opportunity to make sure he got them. (PBC)

stew – Tertullian: “To you (false teachers) your belly is god, and your lungs a temple, and your paunch a sacrificial altar, and your cook the priest, and your fragrant smell the Holy Spirit, and your condiments spiritual gifts, and your belching prophecy...If I offer you a paltry lentil dyed red...forthwith you will sell all your ‘primacies’” (ANF4:113). (TLSB)

25:30 *let me have some of that red stew* – With the exception of the forbidden fruit, that bowl of lentil soup has got to be the most expensive meal anybody ever bought. To buy the soup Esau sold his birthright. His attitude was: “I’m going to die sooner or later, anyway, since hunting is dangerous business, and then what good will a promise once made to my grandfather do me?” He attached no value to the rich promises God had made to Abraham and Isaac – promises about a chosen nation which would one day own the land of Canaan and about a Messianic lineage that would produce the Savior of the world. (PBC)

Unfortunately Esau passed that attitude down to his descendants, known as the Edomites. They later became bitter enemies of the people of Israel, and God had to pronounce judgment on them. (PBC)

Esau’s attitude is a common one in our day, too. Most people devote their best efforts and most of their time to satisfying their short-term needs: putting food on the table and a roof over their heads and getting the TV set fixed in time for tonight’s favorite show. The result is that a lot of people are making good livings, but mighty poor lives. (PBC)

red – Because of the brown-red lentils, which resemble split peas in size and shape. (TLSB)

Edom – Esau’s descendants were called “Edomites.” (TLSB)

25:31 *sell me your birthright.* In ancient times the birthright included the inheritance rights of the firstborn. Jacob was ever the schemer, seeking by any means to gain advantage over others. But it was by God’s appointment and care, not Jacob’s wits, that he came into the blessing. (CSB)

Jacob wanted to acquire the privileges of the firstborn by trickery. These privileges included a double portion of the inheritance (Deut. 21:17), leadership over the family, and the blessing to carry on the covenant promise (Gen. 27:4, 27-29; 28:4). (TLSB)

We see something here in Jacob that we don’t admire. When you brother is hungry and asks you for food, you don’t answer: “I’ll sell you some.” It’s also difficult to appreciate Jacob’s lack of trust in God’s ability to keep the promise He had announced before Jacob was born. Instead of waiting for God in His own good time to reverse the social custom which awarded the birthright to the oldest son, Jacob grew impatient and though perhaps he could help God keep His promise. (PBC)

25:32 Esau’s ongoing speech shows that he is not near death. Rather, he demonstrated an overdramatic and careless disregard for the right to be the firstborn. (TLSB)

25:33 *Swear to me first.* A verbal oath was all that was required to make the transaction legal. (CSB)

We see one trait in Jacob that we do admire: he had an appreciation for spiritual values. He knew what was worth having, and he made sure he got it. Although Esau agreed to sell him the birthright for a bowl of soup, Jacob realized Esau could easily change his mind after his stomach stopped growling, and after sober second thoughts the following morning. And so he asked Esau to swear, to call upon God as his witness, that he was transferring the privileges of the firstborn from his name to Jacob’s. (PBC)

25:34 *lentil.* A small pea-like annual plant, the pods of which turn reddish-brown when boiled. It grows well even in bad soil and has provided an important source of nourishment in the Near East since ancient times (see 2Sa 17:28; 23:11; Eze 4:9). (CSB)

Esau despised his birthright. In so doing, he proved himself to be “godless” (Heb 12:16), since at the heart of the birthright were the covenant promises that Isaac had inherited from Abraham. (CSB)

Birthright included the supervision of true worship and preaching of the Messiah, who was to come from Abraham’s line. (TLSB)

“Keep these two pictures before your eyes,” Martin Luther once wrote, “because each of is either an Esau or a Jacob.” Esau stands on the pages of the Scriptures as a richly blessed man who despised God’s blessings and lost them. ¹⁵ See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. ¹⁶ See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. ¹⁷ Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.” (Hebrews 12:15-17). (PBC)

25:29–34 Esau disdains his birthright, and Jacob schemes against his brother. Neither is worthy of the Lord’s favor and the honor to carry on the promise. By our sinful nature and our actions, we are unworthy of any blessing of this life, especially the gift of forgiveness and eternal life with Christ. Yet, in His mercy, we receive a great inheritance because Christ has made us a part of His family in Baptism. We are

heirs of the promise made to the patriarchs and fulfilled in Christ. • Praise be to our Savior, who has granted us an inheritance among the saints! Amen. (TLSB)