

JANUARY 11

Genesis 25, 26

Today you read Genesis 25 and 26 and became reacquainted with an irascible set of twins named Jacob and Esau and with their father and mother, Isaac and Rebekah.

Before we focus our attention on their story, however, we need to take note of the end of Abraham's life recorded for us in Chapter 25. Toward the end of his life, whether before or after the death of Sarah, we are not quite certain, Abraham took another wife Keturah. 1 Chronicles 1:32 names her as a concubine and in that same passage her sons are listed separately from Isaac and Ishmael. Verse 5 of Chapter 25 says that before Abraham's death, he gave gifts to the sons of his concubines - presumably that means Ishmael and the sons of Keturah. It is possible, however, that there were other concubines as well of which the Scripture does not inform us. It is probably worth stopping here to note that although God's intention for humanity is clearly monogamy, that is marriage between one man and one woman only, polygamy, the practice of taking multiple wives, was practiced even by godly men in the patriarchal period. This makes sense in the ancient world where many men were killed in battle and a woman's survival and economic vitality was secured only through marriage. However, it is not and never has been God's best plan for marriage. Anyway - a polygamous marriage will very soon play a key role in the redemption history of the book of Genesis.

Abraham's obituary notice is worth citing as we pass through this chapter. We are told he was an old man and full of years and he was "gathered to his people." The clear teaching that men and women live on after physical death is implied all through the book of Genesis, and in the light of the clearer teaching of later revelation, we can look back and see it here. God's people from the earliest days have known that after death we live again.

You'll notice in this place that Moses uses a literary device in writing Genesis at this moment, which he uses in multiple locations throughout. If Moses wants to get on with the main part of the story he is telling, but knows that there are some other loose ends to be played out with respect to people other than the major actors, he will quickly summarize all of their stories before doubling back to pick up the main thread of the account. Thus he briefly summarizes the account of the creation of the world, then doubles back to pick up on the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. He does the same thing here in Genesis 25 by telling us the rest of Ishmael's story very quickly before going on with the account of Abraham's other son Isaac. Did you notice that Ishmael has twelve sons, each of whom became a tribal ruler? In addition to the twelve tribes of Israel, there were also twelve tribes of Ishmael! And, Moses notes, "*they lived in hostility toward all their brothers.*"

The kind of tension and hostility that we regularly see in the Middle East is not a new thing. In fact, it goes all the way back to Ishmael and to Abraham's attempt to help God keep His promise.

Now, when Isaac and Rebekah were married, Isaac was forty years old. Twenty years later, Rebekah who had been barren, is finally pregnant. The pregnancy, Moses notes for us, was God's response to Isaac's prayers. All through Scripture there is this pattern of God often prefacing an exceptional work of redemption with a "supernatural" pregnancy for a barren women. Isaac, Isaac's sons, Joseph, Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist, are all examples of this pattern. The unique thing here for Rebekah is that she is about to have twins. I'll bet that any women who has ever had twins has thought during her pregnancy that she had two nations in her womb, but Rebekah really did, and from the outset God told her that her younger son Jacob would be the one upon whom the blessing of the Lord would stand, even though the oldest would be the one who would normally inherit his father's blessing and estate.

Here comes the million-dollar question. Why did God choose Jacob over Esau? You may not like the answer the Bible gives to that question, but the Bible does answer it, especially in Romans chapter 9:10ff. *"Before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad,"* Paul writes, *"in order that God's purpose in election might stand, not by works but by Him who calls, she (Rebekah) was told the older will serve the younger."* (v.11-13). In this case, God just chose Jacob. We do not know his reasons why and they are never unfolded in the Bible. God is in charge and, as God, he can choose to do whatever he wants to do. This is just like our lives. Sometimes the 'why' behind what happens is a mystery and will be until we come face to face with God. We just need to trust that God is in charge and that his plans are best.

It's just what we saw with Abraham and with Noah before that. God set His love on Jacob so that He could show His power, His mercy, and His love, and so that He could raise up a people for His name. It wasn't because Jacob was such a good fellow - in fact Jacob was a rascal. His very name meant "Heel-catcher", or somebody who just trips people. How would you like your name to be "tripper-upper" or "supplanter?" The little glimpse in chapter 25 of the way in which he got Esau to give up his birthright shows us what kind of man Jacob was - and it was a very long time before God changed his character enough to give him a new name. By the way, when this incident occurred, Jacob and Esau were not foolish teenagers - they were fully grown men.

Esau was not a promising character either. Esau is the prototype of the people Paul describes in the New Testament *"whose God is their belly."* He traded his birthright for a bowl of stew - because he was hungry!

You know where all of this must inevitably lead - back again to asking why God chose you and me. You know the answer is the same one we gave before - *"not because of works of righteousness that we have done"* (Titus 3:4-7) - not because of works of righteousness that we would do - but simply because God wanted to display His love, His mercy, and power and to take some worms and make them into princes. "Amazing love, how can it be, that then my God should die for me!"

Well our time is almost gone - one last thought here. Isaac, in Chapter 26, goes to dwell for a while in Gerar where Abimelech is king. Is this the same king Abraham had dealings with or his son? We just don't know. But can you believe what Isaac does? He says, "I'm afraid. Rebekah, you're so beautiful they might kill me just to get you! Rebekah, tell them you're my sister, after all, we actually are related - we are cousins - it's not a complete lie!" Now where do you think Isaac learned that one? You got it! From Abraham his father who pulled the same stunt two times in his life - once in Gerar with a king named Abimelech! Do you remember the verse in Exodus 20 that says that the sins of the fathers are visited upon their children - to the third and fourth generations? Do you know why that is? It's because children learn to respond in situations exactly as their parents teach them. Want a sobering thought to carry for the rest of the day - here it is - your kids will learn whatever you model for them. Isaac did!

This is Mark Ashton reminding you that the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God and is your best weapon in defeating your enemy. Peace be with you.