

**Text:** Genesis 25:1-34

**Title:** Jacob and Esau

**Truth:** God's displays His sovereignty in individuals and history.

**Date/Location:** Sunday March 26, 2023 at FBC (last spoke on 4/9/2006)

## Introduction

We return to the account of Abraham, now at the end of his life. He has successfully secured a wife for his son Isaac. Abraham then finds another wife for himself after the death of Sarah. The focus of the chapter, however, is to begin the family history of Isaac.

It is helpful to remember that the outline of Genesis is structured around the "generations" or genealogies of its main characters: Adam, Noah, Shem, Terah, Ishmael, Isaac, Esau, and Jacob. Here is the portion of the outline where we are studying presently:

7. History of Terah's family through Abraham, 11:27-25:11
8. History of Ishmael's family, 25:12-18
9. History of Isaac's family, account of Jacob, 25:19-35:29

## I. Death of Abraham, 25:1-11

- A. The rest of Abraham's offspring are listed in the opening verses of chapter 25, with six direct children and several grandchildren and great grandchildren. Some well-known names are present (Midian, Asshurim).
- B. As he neared death, Abraham ensured that Isaac would be his sole heir, except those gifts that he gave to his other sons, including those of his concubines. Unfortunately, his family was a little larger than just the offspring of Sarah. He had Hagar (Gen. 16), and Keturah as well. These two were the *concubines*, which are basically wives of a lower social status than his "official" wife. See 1 Chronicles 1:32 on Keturah as concubine, even though she came after Sarah's death. There are no other concubines mentioned in the text. Abraham sent those other sons to the east so they would not interfere with Isaac. He was the undisputed heir of Abraham's estate (Gen. 24:36).

- C. Sarah died at the age of 127 (23:1); she was 10 years younger than Abraham (17:17), so he was 137 when she died. This passage tells us he lived an additional 38 years to the age of 175. In the meantime, he married again, this time to a woman named Keturah. I never cease to be amazed at the longevity of these folks. *After* he was 137, he was married for 38 *more* years—which is longer than some people today are married the one and only time.
- D. Abraham died, having received part of the promise that God gave to him, namely that he would be personally blessed. He did not see the fulfillment of the entire covenant (Heb. 11:13). He was “gathered to his people” which a polite way of saying that he died. His two eldest sons, Isaac and Ishmael, buried him in the cave of Machpelah, which Abraham had purchased in Genesis 23.
- E. After his father’s death, Isaac lived at Beer Lahai Roi (see Gen. 16:14) and God blessed him in fulfillment of the covenant promise.
- F. On another chronological note, remember that Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born. Isaac was 60 years old when the twins Esau and Jacob were born. This means that Abraham was 160 when these twin grandsons were born, and was alive for 15 years afterward. The order of the text does not indicate this, because Abraham dies early in chapter 25 and the children are not born until late in the chapter. By this, you can see that Genesis is not always arranged chronologically. It need not be to fulfill God’s purpose in authoring it through Moses. Often, it is better to present history in a non-chronological fashion by grouping related events or people together.

## II. Genealogy of Ishmael, 25:12-18

- A. Ishmael is listed here as having 12 sons. Sound familiar? It is similar to Jacob’s family, one generation later. More importantly, it fulfills God’s promise of Gen. 17:20.
- B. Ishmael lived to the age of 137. He was born when Abraham was 86 years old (16:16), so he lived beyond his father’s death by 48 years.
- C. For the geography of this area, see 1 Sam. 15:7 for a similar phrase as we find in 25:18. Shur is east of Egypt amid the Sinai Peninsula.

Havilah is mentioned in Gen. 2:11. There seems to be no certainty as to where this place was located; some suggest the coast of Ethiopia; others place it in the Arabian Peninsula.

### III. Birth and Early Life of Esau and Jacob, 25:19-28

- A. Isaac was married to Rebekah at the age of 40. But they could not have children for 20 years (25:26). What a trial! Isaac prayed that God would allow his wife to become pregnant, and He did permit it. But they got more than they bargained for—twins!

When I first taught this section of Scripture nearly 17 years ago, a timely story came to us from Ed Frampton, missionary with the International Board of Jewish Missions. He wrote (4/7/2006) about the first church that they planted as missionaries in South Africa. The “pastor we installed in this church is a wonderful pastor named Bafana. He speaks Zulu and English. He and his wife of six years (Sibongile) have so wanted to have a child. Today we got word that she is with child. Matter of fact, with CHILDREN! Twins, that is! We are praising the Lord, but they will need prayer and help.”

- B. The twins caused an *extra* amount of consternation for Rebekah because they fought inside her womb. Moms, imagine *that*—two similarly-aged siblings cannot get along *outside* of the womb. Imagine them in confined quarters, duking it out. She did not know what this meant until God told her (next), but she wondered if the pregnancy was going OK. Wouldn't you wonder that? But what did she do about it? She asked the Lord in prayer! She turned to God.
- C. God answered Rebekah that the struggle inside her indicated the babies would be the fathers of two competing nations, one would be stronger than the other, and the nation from the older child would serve the people from the younger. That would be unusual indeed to a mind steeped in that ancient culture. To us, twins are the same age. To them, the firstborn was first, no matter how many moments separated him from the second.
- D. Note this situation is mentioned in Rom. 9 regarding the doctrine of election. God set his love upon Jacob before the boy had done anything to merit it or not merit it, before he was born or had done

anything good or bad. See also Malachi 1:2-3. This is the doctrine that God chooses certain individuals and sets His favor upon them.

You can take this teaching in two directions. One, the way I follow, is that I *trust* He does what He does perfectly well, in accordance with His love and all His other attributes. I do not fault God for doing this, as if it is some impingement on my freedom. In sin, I do not have any freedom except to die. Every man and woman is destined for punishment and eternity apart from God. We *need* someone to choose to help us in this state because it is dire. But you could take the doctrine in another direction, that God is meant to do this, and He should stay out of “our” business, and this makes God evil, or makes us robots, or whatever other variations you might find. Whatever the variation, this thinking makes people mad at God. The problem is that election is very clearly taught in Scripture right alongside God’s goodness and love. So, we cannot well argue against it if we are Christian. For example, we see it in Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:4; 1 Thess. 5:9; John 6:70, 15:16, 19.

This is explained in greater detail in Romans 9:10-24. God has a purpose in election, and He intends that purpose to “stand.” It will not fail—namely that God chooses and saves, but not based on works. My being a Christian is not at all related to my human achievement.

But if God ‘hates’ one person relative to another, does this make God evil? Not at all, Paul explains because God is the sovereign ruler of the Universe, He can have mercy on whomever He pleases, and not on others. God is the determining factor in who is shown mercy—not the person who “wills” or “runs.” Pharaoh is an example, to the end that God could display His power to redeem His people from bondage and His reputation would be spread throughout the earth.

Some people conclude from this that God cannot be critical of our faults. “Since He has made me this way, He cannot complain about my sin!” But this is like the clay pot talking back to the potter! The creator has the power (and brains), not the created thing. God has

authority to make one vessel for one purpose, and another vessel for another purpose. That is His right as King.

Paul then poses a hypothetical in 9:22-23, by which he is teaching a truth: God desires to demonstrate His wrath, make His power known, and show the riches of His mercy. Therefore, He patiently endures people who reject Him, so that He can make known His glory to those whom He has selected for mercy. In other words, God has arranged things as He has because it allows His creation to see most clearly (1) His displeasure against sin, *and* (2) His magnificent mercy toward Jews and Gentiles whom He has called, *and* (3) God's power to deliver people from slavery to sin into glorious liberty and righteousness.

If God were to show wrath only, the created world (angels and people, primarily) would not see the other side of God—His mercy. But if God were to show mercy only, we would not see His utter disgust of sin. By showing both goodness and severity over a long period of time, we see a fuller picture of God—both wrath and mercy. This makes it necessary for God to demonstrate another of His perfections in the meantime—longsuffering, as He endures the sin of some people so that other people can receive mercy. God's way is a marvelous way to show a more complete picture of reality. Unfortunately, that necessitates the existence of evil. It also gives rise to doubts in those people who are laser focused on one aspect of God's plan while not seeing so clearly the other parts of His plan. Those doubts will lessen as you embrace the *entire* revelation of who God is and what He does.

- E. Esau was born, shall we say, with a full head of hair. In fact, he had red hair all over his body. They named him, appropriately, "hairy" (not Harry!). He later was nicknamed Edom (25:30) because he craved the red stew. The nation of Edom descends from him.
- F. Jacob is the supplanter, literally, "one who takes the heel," because he came out holding onto his brother's heel. He supplanted Esau, taking his place, though with subterfuge (using deceit to achieve a desired outcome).
- G. The end of this section, verses 27-28, summarizes the boys' growth and skills. Esau was a rugged outdoorsman, and Jacob was an

indoor fellow. In part because of this, Isaac preferred Esau and Rebekah was partial to Jacob. This favoritism was not good. In our parenting, we must guard ourselves against this tendency, even if one of our children has qualities or tendencies that we ourselves have or especially appreciate.

#### **IV. Sale of the Birthright, 25:29-34**

- A. An important note in this chapter is that Esau sold his birthright, that is, the place of prominence as the firstborn in the family, for a single meal. The Bible tells us that he despised his birthright (25:34). It may at first seem unfair that he lost his birthright to his younger brother in this way, but he really did not care for it in the first place.
- B. Note Heb. 12:16-17. It says there that there was no place found for repentance. It was too late. At some point, it becomes too late for certain things to happen. For Esau, it was too late to get his birthright back. His despising of it had lasting consequences. For other things—like salvation—the door is open until we die.
- C. Why is this sin so severe? Esau was not saying “It does not matter the order I was born or my inheritance.” Much worse than that, he was treating lightly the promise of God to bless and make a great nation of Abraham’s family line. This indicates a lack of respect for the Abrahamic promises that the birthright entitled him to. I take it that he was rejecting his upbringing and did not want to be involved in the plan of God in the Abrahamic covenant.

#### **Conclusion**

This all is interesting history, to be sure. But it is more than that. It shows God’s providential direction of world history and His personal interest in individuals with whom He is working. It begins to warn us of partiality, and thoroughly calls us back from despising the covenant promises of God. If you walk away from God’s promises, you walk away from God and into a frightful and dark situation.

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