

Genesis 25: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Date: 26 January 2020

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[0 : 0 0] Genesis chapter 25 Abraham took another wife whose name was Keturah. She bore him Zimram, Jokshan, Midan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shua.

Jokshan fathered Sheba and Dedan. The sons of Dedan were Asherim, Letushim, and Leumim. The sons of Midian were Ephah, Ephah, Hanoah, Abida, and Eldaiah.

All of these were the sons 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.

[1 : 0 2] There Abraham was buried with Sarah his wife. After the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac his son, and Isaac settled at Beelahairoi. 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, Adbil, Mibsam, Mishma, Duma, Massa, Hadad, Timna, Jeter, Naphish, and Kidama.

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.

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.

[2 : 1 5] 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. Afterwards 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.

[3 : 16] 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 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.

In Genesis chapter 25, we read of the death of Abraham. After the death of Sarah, his wife, Abraham had taken a concubine, Keturah, and through Keturah had a number of children.

Children who among them included Midian, the ancestor of the Midianites. The Midianites are important characters elsewhere in scripture. Moses takes refuge with the Midianites when he leaves Egypt and spends his time with Jethro, the priest of the Midianites.

[4 : 23] In the book of Judges, we meet Jael, who is a Kenite, which is presumably a Midianite group. At other points, we see the Ishmaelites and the descendants of Keturah associated with each other.

For instance, in chapter 37 of Genesis, where the Midianites and the Ishmaelites are both involved in taking Joseph down to Egypt. Isaac is the sole heir, the one who bears the destiny of the covenant though.

And while these groups may come into the orbit of the narrative of scripture, they are not the central stage characters that Isaac and his seed will be.

Abraham dies at the age of 175. And why do we pay attention to the numbers in scripture? Well, because sometimes they have interesting details. 175 is 7 times 5 squared.

Now, that's not especially interesting. But it becomes interesting when you consider that Isaac's death is at 180, which is 5 times 6 squared.

[5 : 26] Jacob dies at 147, which is 3 times 7 squared. And then Joseph dies at 110, which is 5 squared plus 6 squared plus 7 squared.

So these numbers connect characters together. And so we should pay attention to them. Ishmael and Isaac seem to be joined together in the burial of their father. And Isaac ends up settling at Beelahairoi, which was associated with Ishmael and Hagar in chapter 16.

Ishmael here is associated with princes, much as Esau is associated with chiefs and kings in chapter 36. There are 12 children of Nahor in chapter 22. And now the descendants of Ishmael include 12 princes.

In these stories, we're seeing that other parts of the godly line or other associated families are reaching this 12 before Israel. They're reaching also the state of kingdom and rule.

Whether it is Abraham's brother or his son who is not of the promised seed, we see people arriving at this state of maturity before the true seed.

[6 : 39] We might then wonder why it is taking so long for the 12 tribes of Israel to come. The story of Rebecca is another story of a barren woman.

We've already had the story of Sarah whose womb was opened. But now there is another barren woman within the promised line. It seems as if the promised line is struggling to bring forth children and also struggling to reach those landmarks that lie ahead of them.

The landmarks of 12 tribes, the landmarks of kingdom, all these sorts of things. Everyone else seems to be going out ahead of them and beating them to that mark. They seem to be far more fertile.

They seem to be far more successful in these respects. But yet the focus here is upon God who gives the seed. It may only be one child of Abraham, but from that child, a great nation will be raised up.

The womb is opened through Isaac's intercession. He seems to be playing something of a role of a prophet, prophetically interceding for someone in need, much as we see the story of Abraham earlier on as he intercedes for Abimelech's house and then intercedes for Pharaoh and intercedes for Sodom.

[7 : 52] The character of the twins is also something that has been debated. Are they identical twins? Now this might seem a strange thing to say as they appear very different when they're born.

Yet some have suggested that since Jacob comes out holding his brother's heel, they might actually be in the same amniotic sac. Why do they come out looking different? Some have suggested, again, that there's a twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome here.

So one comes out pale and sallow and the other comes out far more red. There's a significant pairing here, again. As we go through the story of Genesis, we'll often see diptychs, two frames held alongside each other, whether that's Cain and Abel, or later Cain and Seth, or we see characters such as Lamech and Lamech, or the characters of Abram and Lot, or Ishmael and Isaac.

Here we have a further two characters that are set alongside each other, Esau and Jacob. And going through this chapter, we'll see that this has already been set up from birth.

These two characters are at odds with each other, in tension with each other, wrestling within the womb. And the events of the womb cast a deep shadow over everything that follows. Two key issues hang over Jacob's life in all that follows.

[9 : 11] One having to do with his name, and the other having to do with the blessing. And both of these begin in this story. The story of the name is set off by the fact that Jacob is given a rather unflattering name at the beginning.

The name itself may have been given to him by his father alone, not by his mother. As in the case of Esau, both parents are involved in naming the child. But in the case of Jacob, it is not necessarily the case.

The two characters appear very different. One is very red and hairy, and the other is smooth. And a man who seems to be cunning and shrewd. He's like the serpent who takes the heel.

He's the one who takes and usurps, and later on we'll see these things playing out in his story. Esau is a skillful hunter. He's a man of the field. But Jacob is a man who dwells in tents.

A man who will end up being associated with keeping sheep. Think again. These are parallels, perhaps, with the man of the field, Cain, and the man of tents, Abel.

[10 : 17] Isaac, however, loves Esau because of his game. But Rebecca loves Jacob, so there's a tension here between the two parents. And the story of the stew incident is a very important one that plays out in different ways in what follows.

Esau says to Jacob that he wants some of the stew that he's cooking. The red, red stuff, literally. And that red, red stuff, does he think it's blood? Some have suggested it is, in his understanding, blood.

And so it would be forbidden food. He wants some of the forbidden food. And Jacob, quite willingly, plays the part of the serpent, the one who deceives him to take the forbidden food and to lose his birthright as a result.

As Adam lost the birthright in the Garden of Eden, so Esau loses his birthright as a result of this. He's immediately afterwards called Edom. Edom, as a name, reminds us of Adam.

The names are very similar. And that connection with Edom and the colour red is also important. He wants the red stew, therefore he's called Red.

[11 : 21] In the story of Laban, Laban's name is associated with white, and he's deceived with white strips taken from the white tree to reveal white beneath. And so the colours are an important part of this story too.

Esau despises his birthright. He takes the food and then immediately goes his way. He's not at the point of death. He suggests he is, but he is not actually at the point of death.

In fact, what he does is despise the covenant. And as we go through the story of Esau, we'll see how often he does not take the covenant seriously. So it's a good thing that it passes into the hands of Jacob.

And Jacob's shrewdness at this point should not necessarily be condemned as an action of wicked deception. He may be trying to save the covenant and the destiny of Abraham's promise from the hands of Esau, who would despise it.

One final question to reflect upon. In the story of Esau and Jacob, Esau is described as hairy. He's associated with goats.

[12 : 25] And these are all plays upon the name of Seir, which is the land where he finally ends up. We also see plays upon the colour red. And there are other things that are worth noting about the character and the way he's described for us.

He's described as ruddy. There is one other character in scripture who's called ruddy. What character is that? And what could a comparison between Esau and this character teach us about both of them?