

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**
[Adapted from Bethel Bible-
Presbyterian Church, 10 Downing St.
Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 18

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Chapter 25

INTRODUCTION

This chapter closes the life of Abraham and shifts the focus to Isaac (v.11). The genealogy of Isaac and Ishmael attests once again to God's faithfulness in keeping His covenant promises to Abraham (12:1-3; 15:3-19; 17:1-22). God's plan and purpose will continue until it is finally accomplished. People come and go. One leaves and another takes his place. No one is indispensable.

When we live in God's will, there will be times when difficulties and problems confront us -- we experience a barren period in our lives, we do not prosper or progress -- what should we do? We can learn from the example of Isaac and Rebekah.

We make choices in our lives. Some must be considered soberly. What should be our value system? The episode over the *pottage of stew between Jacob and Esau* is most instructive.

Conflicts among siblings are not uncommon. The causes for such

conflicts are sometimes not easily discernible. Scriptures do contain passages in which parents can learn some valuable insights of minimising conflicts with children. This chapter does present some precious teachings on this.

OUTLINE

A. ABRAHAM DIED AND THE LORD BLESSED ISAAC (25:1-10).

1. *Abraham Took Another Wife Keturah (1-4).*
2. *Abraham Bequeathed All His Inheritance to Isaac (5-6).*
3. *The LORD Took Abraham Home to Glory (7-10).*
 - a. Abraham lived to a good old age of 175.
 - b. Abraham was buried by Isaac and Ishmael in Machpelah.

B. GOD BLESSED ABRAHAM'S SON ISAAC (25:11).

C. THE DESCENDENTS OF ISHMAEL (25:12-18).

1. *The Names of the Twelve Sons of Ishmael (12-16).*
2. *Ishmael Died at the age of 137 (17).*
3. *The Location of Their Settlement (18).*

D. THE DESCENDANTS OF ISAAC (25:19-28).

1. *Isaac Prayed to the LORD for Rebekah to Bear Children (19-21).*
2. *Rebekah Conceived Twins (22-28).*
 - a. The twins struggled in the womb.

- b. The twins were born—Esau first, then Jacob.
- c. The character of Esau and Jacob.
- d. Isaac's favouritism—loved Esau more than Jacob.

E. ESAU SOLD HIS BIRTH RIGHT TO JACOB (25:29-34).

1. *Jacob cooked pottage.*
2. *Esau despised his birthright.*
3. *Jacob made Esau to swear to His bargain.*

Life Full

After the death of Sarah, Abraham took another wife, Keturah. They had six healthy sons. Abraham was then about 140 years. It is commented in some quarters that he was too old and weak to produce children. There is no good reason to believe this is so. Scripture clearly reports that Abraham took Keturah to be his wife after the death of Sarah. There was no report that Abraham had another wife while Sarah was alive. The only concubine he had was Hagar and that was with the advice and approval of Sarah. God had enabled him to have Isaac even at the age of 100, and did the impossible in Sarah; there is no reason why God would not bless Abraham with vigour and strength even at the age of 140 to 150. God had promised him that he would be the father of many nations and would bless him with many children.

His loneliness on the death of Sarah might have prompted him to seek another companion. It seemed that Isaac and Rebekah did not live together with Abraham. They lived in Beer Lahai-roi, which was a little distance south of Beersheba where Abraham lived (21:33, 34).

In accordance with God's plan and purpose, Abraham gave all of his

inheritance to Isaac, who is the promised son, through whom covenant promises and blessings would be fulfilled. Abraham died at the age of 175. He is described as having lived to *a good old age, an old man, and full.*

We can affirm that his life had been both satisfying and abounding. Undauntingly he ventured out by faith in the LORD. He had gone through the most severe tests of his faith and had passed with flying colours. He had fought wars and won. He had the joy of having a son at an old age with Sarah, his beloved wife, who had been barren. He was blessed with many children and grandchildren. He had the blessing of knowing that the covenant blessings would be passed on to Jacob, his grandson. He was also blessed with great material wealth and many servants. Surely a full life is not measured by the number of years from cradle to grave. Rather it is how that life was lived, what had been done, what had been achieved and what had been experienced.

The expression that he was *gathered to his people* is a beautiful expression and is theologically significant. It teaches that death is not the end of our existence. We will resume our fellowship with those who had gone away first. All those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ in His redemptive work have this assurance.

God's Faithfulness

The genealogy of Ishmael testifies to the faithfulness of God. God had promised to Hagar and Ishmael that He would make of him a great nation (16:10; 21:18). Ishmael had twelve sons and he lived 137 years before he died. The precise location of where the families of Ishmael lived is difficult to

pinpoint. Generally *from Havilah unto Shur* is considered to be on the borders of Arabia and Egypt (Murphy, 365). They lived in these places, multiplied spreading east and north, and controlled the land, thus fulfilling God's promise to Abraham concerning Ishmael.

It is interesting that when Abraham died, Ishmael came to bury Abraham together with Isaac. Were the brothers still at odds? Or were they reconciled? Whatever, the death of an elder of the clan seems to have the effect of bringing brothers and relatives together which, under normal circumstances, they would not have done.

God's Blessings

Isaac married Rebekah three years after the death of his mother Sarah. All the inheritance of Abraham was bestowed on him. We see the experience of Abraham and Sarah repeated in the lives of Isaac and Rebekah. Rebekah was barren. What is instructive here is that, Isaac did not follow his parents' ungodly example and take matters into his own hands. He showed his particular quality of faith by patiently awaiting God's time and by prayer. It was possible that Abraham had taught him to have faith and to be patient and had shared his experiences with him. God rewarded him and Rebekah became pregnant. Rebekah had waited twenty years for this blessing (26b). The LORD sees, hears and provides. Although God has promised, it does not mean that things would go smoothly. In fact the reverse seems to be true. For Rebekah, the children of the promise were given after much earnest prayer and a long period of waiting. We must be willing to accept God's way and His timing in the fulfilling of His promises. This requires patience on our part (Baldwin, 104).

In her pregnancy Rebekah experienced violent movements in her body. The Hebrew word for 'struggled' (22a, *ratsats*) means 'to crush each other.' The threat of a miscarriage was real. Her faith led her to seek God in prayer. We see here that Rebekah had acknowledged the God of Abraham and Isaac. This intimates that she had been taught probably by Isaac or her father-in-law. The important thing is that she went directly to the LORD for an explanation. God gave Rebekah a most remarkable prophecy concerning the future of her two sons and she believed God's revealed word. She was told that she would have twins — two nations, separated, one stronger than the other, and the elder would serve the younger (23).

The day came for the birth of the two boys. The first boy to come out was red and his whole body was covered with hair.¹ They called him Esau. And the boy, who came out later grabbing Esau's heel, was named Jacob. Jacob means a 'heel holder' or 'supplanter (to take the place of another).

Making Your Choice

The personalities and talents of the two brothers were different. Esau loved the open space and fields. He became a skilful hunter. Jacob, on the other hand, was a *plain man, dwelling in tents* (27). Unlike Esau, Jacob preferred to stay indoors rather than outdoors. The word translated 'plain' from Hebrew (*tam*) means 'innocence or moral integrity.'

One day, as Esau returned from a hunting trip in the fields, he noticed that Jacob was preparing a stew (Hebrew, *zuwd*, which means 'to boil or stew'). Esau asked Jacob for some soup as he was starving.

¹ The medical terminology is 'hypertrichosis.'

Jacob was willing to give Esau some of the red stew in exchange for his birthright. Notice that Jacob's response was quick. Did Jacob know about the divine promise which was told to his mother while he was in his mother's womb? Had Rebekah told him about it? Or did Jacob do it out of ignorance? It was quite unusual for a younger brother to ask his elder brother for his birthright. The birthright of *primogeniture* in the old days was that the eldest got a double portion of the father's inheritance. His quick and spontaneous response intimated that he knew what he wanted and went for it in the most peaceful way. No birthright no stew.

Esau knew what his birthright meant. But he claimed to be starving to death. Obviously, his birthright could not fill his stomach or restore his physical strength. He despised his birthright and was willing to exchange it for some stew. Jacob seized the opportunity and asked Esau to swear that he would sell his birthright to him. Esau *capitulated* and Jacob *capitalised*. Esau then ate, drank, rose up, and went his way; thus spurning his birthright (34).

Jacob was cunning and shrewd. He should not have treated his brother in this manner. He should have freely given him some of the red stew. Siblings should not treat one another in this way. Thus many of us would judge Jacob unkindly and charge him for being a cheat. It is important that we realise that, at this time, the only solid land that Isaac legally possessed was the field in which Sarah was buried. Jacob, however, appreciated spiritual values. In particular, he has the spiritual ambition of carrying on the line of the Promised Seed. Although his eagerness was commendable, he did not seek God's will nor use God's methods for achieving

the goal. This was an attitude of mistrust, of confidence in human ingenuity rather than in God's faithfulness to fulfil His promises by spiritual godlike methods.

Actually Esau was under no obligation to accept Jacob's proposition. Esau showed that he thought nothing of his birthright. All he wanted was to satisfy his physical hunger and exhaustion. He could not see the great inheritance that was to come. He was short sighted. He *sacrificed his birthright for the desire of the moment*.

CONCLUSION

We must remind ourselves that God keeps His promises. He wants us to have faith in Him, faith that is followed by implicit obedience to His will. This faith and obedience is exemplified in the life of Abraham.

If we do not have faith, we will act like Esau. We become short sighted in the pursuits of the things on earth. We chase after the temporal things of the world instead of doing the things that counts for eternity. We exchange our eternal inheritance for earthly possessions. Someone has said, "He is no fool who gives away what he cannot keep in exchange for what he cannot lose."

END

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**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS**

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Genesis 25:1-10;
Ephesians 1:3-14.

TUESDAY: Genesis 25:11; Psalm
24:1-6. Romans 8:31-39.

WEDNESDAY: Genesis 25:12-18;
John 10:14-18; Ephesians 3:3-12.

THURSDAY: Genesis 25:19-28;
Philippians 4:6; Acts 7:7-8.

FRIDAY: Genesis 25:29-34; Heb
12:15-17; Luke 16:13-14.

Discussion Questions

1. One commentary suggests that Abraham was too old to produce six healthy sons with Keturah whom he married after Sarah's death. Do you agree and why?

2. Why did Abraham marry Keturah?

3. Why did Abraham send all the sons of his concubines away?

4. What is the most important lesson you have learned from studying the life of Abraham?

5. Recall three or four incidents in the life of Abraham which illustrated his strong faith in God?

6. How did God's promises to Hagar come true (see also 16:12; 21:17)?

7. What are the differences in the response of Isaac and Rebekah versus Abraham and Sarah with regard to their barren condition?

8. How was the faith of Isaac and Rebekah tested in connection with the birth of their twin sons?

9. What did the incident in verses 29-34 imply about the values and character of the two brothers?

10. To what extent can we blame or not blame Jacob for the part he played in the "birthright-stew" exchange with Esau?

11. How does the life of Abraham illustrate the relationship between faith and obedience?
