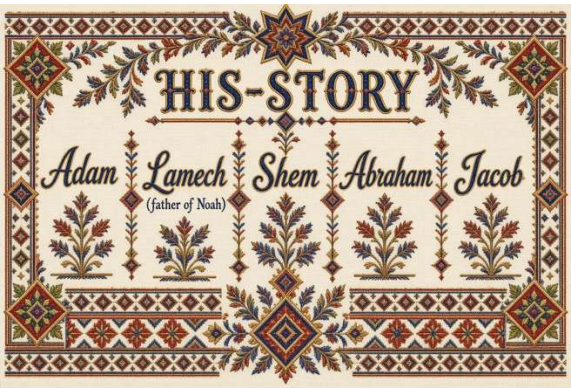
20261025 Genesis chapter 25 Abraham's Death – Choosing the Spiritual over the Physical



Last week, we saw Elizer, Abraham's faithful servant, praying, listening, and following God's instructions and play book. This chapter gives us an account of Abraham's death and the seeds of trouble taking root. We learn through this that God is working His purposes out. This week I was thinking about the Torah and how it is that we learn about creation and the patriarchs. I did the calculations and realized that Adam lived long enough to know Lamech (Noah's father). Lamech lived long enough to know his grandson, Shem, who was one of Noah's three sons. Shem lived long enough to know Abraham for 150 years. And Abraham lived long enough to communicate everything that had been passed down to him to his grandsons, Esau and Jacob. Adam's account of creation reached Jacob through only three people. So, it's easy to understand the logic of these accounts being passed down by Jacob's descendants to Moses who lived just 400 years after Jacob. Moses wrote them down in the Torah we are studying today. Let's read now about Abraham's death and the tension that arose between Esau and Jacob.

[1]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. (Genesis 25:1-6, ESV).

Notice that in this passage, Keturah is Abraham's wife, but then in verse 6, we see concubines mentioned. It makes us wonder whether she was a wife or a concubine (1 Chronicles 1:32 mentions her as Abraham's concubine). It seems that she was a wife, but she somehow didn't have all the full privileges of Abraham's first wife, Sarah. This makes some wonder whether polygamy is okay. We must remember that this is a narrative. It is not doctrine. I only mention this to emphasize that it's important that we see that all things we read in the Bible are not normative. That means they are not necessarily something we should do. We'll study later that Saul went to a medium to try to talk to the spirit of Samuel. God allowed it, but it is not telling us that we're supposed to be going to palm readers and having seances. Just because something is in this narrative doesn't mean that it is normative. It doesn't tell us that we should copy it and do it ourselves.

[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. (Genesis 25:7-11, ESV).

So, Abraham died and was "gathered to his people." Ancient rabbis said this meant they lived a full life that was completed going down in the history of man. In the exilic period, it came to be interpreted as being gathered into the place of the neutral unknown along with those who had predeceased them. In the 11th Century, Rabbi Rashi said it merely meant that they were gathered to the place where souls were gathered. It's definitely talking about something spiritual because Abraham's body was not taken back to be buried where his fathers were in Chaldea. Notice also that Isaac and Ishmael both came to bury their father. They had at least reconciled their differences long enough to bury their father. As so, as God had promised, he blessed both Ishmael and Isaac.



[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*** **[fulfillment of Genesis 17:20].** *[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* **[Arabia]**. *He settled over against all his kinsmen.* **[living in hostility with his people – he would be a "wild donkey" of a man – he was *'al-pani'* - geographically and adversarily against his kinsmen. I have superimposed a map of Texas to show how large the area was.]**

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. (Genesis 25:12-21, ESV with author's notes in parenthesis).*

This is an important verse because it tells us a lot about Isaac. Rebekah was barren, and Isaac interceded for her. This was a 'cursed' position (being barren) for a woman in that culture. Men are doers and there was nothing that Isaac could do physically to fix Rebekah's problem. Not being able to fix something is hard for a man. Men are fixers. We want to fix things. It is hardwired into men to fix, respond, and do. But in her predicament, Isaac could not do anything for her, BUT PRAY. Isaac understood that when his efforts were insufficient, he could bring his wife boldly to the throne of grace. Men, we must remember THAT WE MUST PRAY. We can bring anything and everything before the Lord. We can ask for his grace and power. When was the last time you prayed for your wife? And when you do pray, do you put a time limit on God's answer? Isaac had to wait 20 years to see God answer this prayer for her life. Our prayer lives tell us much about our spiritual health. How is your prayer life today? Don't lie to yourself. If you're deficient in this area, don't beat up on yourself, just START BEING A MAN OF PRAYER. Let's continue.

22The 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. 23And 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." (Genesis 25:22-23, ESV).

God showed Rebekah what His plan was for these two boys. God's sovereignty was saying that the first born wasn't the one that was to be blessed. In this culture, male primogeniture gave the first-born son a superior rank over all that would come after him. The birthright was a guarantee of a prominent place in the inheritance. God was telling Rebekah that God was choosing to override the natural order of things. God has a way of doing that, doesn't He? Sarah had a baby at 90 years of age. That was God working His purposes out, contrary to nature. And Jacob, the second born to Isaac and Rebekah, would be the stronger and more powerful son. It shows the sovereignty and the power of God. God does what God wants to do! GOD WAS WORKING HIS PURPOSES OUT IN THE WORLD then, and He is still doing it now. And, He often does things that seem out of order to us that defy the logic with which we observe what is going on in our own lives.

24When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb. 25The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak, so they called his name Esau **[*eh-saw* - This sounds like the Hebrew word "se-ar" for hair]**. *26Afterward his brother came out with his hand holding Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob* **[The name comes either from the Hebrew root עקב *ʿqb* meaning "to follow, to be behind" but also "to supplant, circumvent, assail, overreach", or from the word for "heel", עֲקֵב *ʿakeb*.][1]** *Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them* **[makes us wonder how long Isaac prayed for her to get pregnant]**. Has anyone in this room prayed for 20 years for anything? Some are brought in ministry to pray.

27When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter **[kind of guy that wore camo],** *a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. 28Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob* **[They were just very different in their personalities. The parents had their favorites. We shouldn't strive to treat our kids the same. We should treat them according to their personality. Ex: My granddaughter, Eden, had to learn it wasn't her turn to have Happy Birthday sung to her when we were singing to her older sister, Freya.]** *(Genesis 25:24-28, ESV with author's notes in brackets).*

Esau was ruled by the appetites of his flesh. Spiritual things meant nothing to him!

29Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. 30And Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!" (Therefore, his name was called Edom.) 31Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright now." 32Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" 33Jacob said, "Swear to me now." So he swore to him and

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob_(name)

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. (Genesis 25:29-34, ESV).

Thus, **Esau despised his birthright.** This is a HUGE statement. This reminds us that God sees into the heart. This birthright included not just riches and wealth, but the covenant promises that went along with being the firstborn as well. Esau showed in his attitude that spiritual things weren't important to him. Esau was a man controlled by his physical appetites. Without the operative power of the Holy Spirit, we too can all become an Esau. We get hungry and tired. We need love and affection. But when those needs dominate our soul, our spiritual appetite is disregarded, and we can easily get caught up doing things or partaking in things that are injurious to our souls. Those actions by Esau are important for us to see and understand. Remember the warning in Hebrews chapter 12.

> *[15]See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; [16]that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. (Hebrews 12:15-16, ESV).*

Jacob knew Esau's weaknesses, and he was there to take advantage of them. Was that right of Jacob? Absolutely not. But, I want to tell you that there is always someone out there who will see you when your flesh is controlling you. Satan will use them to step in to meet that sordid need, and they will feed it and fill it. Beware of what comes into your life when your flesh is screaming out for satisfaction. There is a lot in this simple story to take in. As I said, the Torah tells us how people are, but it also directs us into how we are to become. Let's take a moment no and look at a few truths that we might want to take away from this story.

1 There is Power in Persistent Prayer – Remember the parable of the persistent widow that Jesus told. Action question: How is your prayer life today? Is it where you want it to be? Or more importantly, is it where God wants it to be? For centuries, rabbis have looked to this narrative and explained that it shows the power of persistent prayer. They use a metaphor of taking a pitch fork and turning the hay over and over and over again. That's what persistent prayer looks like. As I wrote this sermon, I was made aware of how lazy I have become in my prayer life. I have spent this week praying for so many things. I have been praying for my family. I've been praying for this congregation. That's more of how we are to walk with the Lord.



Petition for Mercy: Isaac and Rebekah were childless for 20 years before Isaac prayed intensely for a child.

The Pitchfork Metaphor: The Talmud explains that the Hebrew word for Isaac's prayer (*atar*, **עָתַר**) shares a root with a pitchfork (*eter*). Just as a pitchfork turns grain over, sincere and persistent prayer can turn the heart of God to mercy.

2. Choose the Spirit over the Flesh – The rabbis make much of the statement that "Esau despised his birthright." This means he valued physical things over spiritual things. Temptation can easily cause us to value the physical over the spiritual. Esau valued the bowl of soup more than he did the birthright and all that it included.



- **Galatians 5:16** – But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. (ESV)
- **Romans 8:6** – For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. (ESV)
- **Galatians 5:17a-b** – For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other. (ESV)

Be deliberate about living in holiness. Guard your heart, and guard your life. The appetites of the flesh can sidetrack you in a moment of weakness. Pray for the strength to remain faithful. DON'T SACRIFICE HOLINESS ON THE ALTAR OF GRATIFICATION. **Q: What do you value most?**

3. Admonition to take physical, emotional, and spiritual rest



Jesus often withdrew from the crowd to have time with the Father. When we are worn out we are susceptible to succumbing to the flesh in our actions and attitudes. Take time to recharge your batteries. Are you taking time to rest and spend time in the Word? You can't make it on your own. YOU WON'T MAKE IT ON YOUR OWN. You need spiritual nourishment, and you need to rest in Jesus. Hebrews is clear that HE is our sabbath rest (Hebrews 4:9-10).

- Genesis 2:2–3: God finished His work and rested on the seventh day, blessing it and making it holy. (condensed from ESV)

- Mark 6:31: Jesus tells His disciples, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." (condensed from ESV)

When we don't take time to rest, we put ourselves in physical, emotional, and spiritual danger. It is amazing how weak we become when we are not rested up physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Get some rest! You need it! I need it!

Give your body, soul, and mind an opportunity to be rested and restored. Don't let your life become so filled with activities that you become worn out and vulnerable.

4. Individual parenting and sibling dynamics. – There is so much we can learn about healthy family dynamics by reading and inwardly digesting this Torah portion.

With regards to your children, don't show favoritism. It is perhaps natural to enjoy spending time with one child or grandchild over others. But be careful, you don't want to contribute to familial dysfunction. Not showing favoritism doesn't mean you must treat all of your children the same. Rather, handle your children differently depending on their strengths, weaknesses, and unique personalities. God made them, and He made them all different.



Esau was an outdoorsman, and Jacob was not. Both were okay, but Isaac and Rebekah failed by taking sides and by each favoring one child over the other. Work to understand ALL your kids or grandkids and have the discernment to distinguish rebellion and disobedience from differences in personality. God has put them ALL into your life. Invest in each of them.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Even as we see Abraham's death, God's purposes moved forward. Believers can trust that even when transitions come, God is working his purposes out in our lives. We must trust Him not only with the outcome, but with the process as well. It is easier to say this than to do it.

- God's purposes work out even through things happening that aren't the normal sequence of events. I will add that He is working ESPECIALLY when things don't seem to work out in a logical way that we would imagine. Esau and Jacob were born in the same family, but they had a completely different trajectory.

- YOUR INHERITANCE IN CHRIST MATTERS – DON'T MINIMIZE AND UNDERVALUE THE INHERITANCE THAT IS YOURS. What am I talking about? Don't trade a life of faithfulness for temporary pleasures. Don't sacrifice tomorrow on the altar of today. This of course works in the financial world, but it also carries through to spiritual matters.

The Big Idea this morning is to pray hard, stand fast, guard against your flesh, and trust God for the unfolding of events and the outcome of your life. He is faithful. He will mold you and make you into the image of Jesus If you allow Him to do so.

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.

WHAT WAS THE BIG DEAL ABOUT SELLING THE BIRTHRIGHT?

The birthright (*bekorah*) was the special status and privileges belonging to the firstborn son. It was far more than a symbolic title; it carried concrete legal, economic, leadership, and (in this family) covenantal significance.

Main elements of the birthright

- **Double portion of the inheritance**: The firstborn received twice the share of the father's estate that each other son received. This was later codified in Deuteronomy 21:17 ("he shall acknowledge the firstborn… by giving him a double portion of all that he has"). In practice, the estate was divided into shares equal to the number of sons plus one extra share for the firstborn.BiblehubGotquestions
- **Family leadership and headship**: After the father's death, the firstborn became the head of the household. He held authority, managed the family property, and was responsible for supporting the widow, unmarried sisters, and younger siblings.Internationalstandardbible
- **Covenant and spiritual privileges in the patriarchal line**: In the family of Abraham and Isaac, the birthright was tied to continuing the line through which God's promises would pass—land, numerous descendants, and the blessing of all nations (Genesis 12, 22, 26). Some traditions also associate the early firstborn with priestly or representative religious duties within the family (before the later Levitical priesthood).UasvbibleBiblehub

Birthright vs. blessing

These were related but distinct. The **birthright** concerned legal inheritance rights and status (transferable, as Esau showed by selling it). The **blessing** (*berakah*) was the father's formal, often prophetic, pronouncement of favor and future destiny. Jacob later obtained the blessing from Isaac by deception (Genesis 27), even after already holding the birthright.

Why it mattered so much in Esau's case

Esau treated his status as the firstborn as worth less than a single meal. By swearing it away and then showing no regret (he "despised" it), he demonstrated that he valued immediate physical satisfaction over long-term material security, family leadership, and a place in the covenantal line. Hebrews 12:16 later describes this as the act of a "profane" or godless person.

In short, the birthright was the firstborn's double share, leadership role, and—in this specific family—the privileged connection to God's ongoing promises. Esau's willingness to trade it so casually is what the text highlights as his fundamental failure of values.

POSSIBLE PATH OF ORAL ACCOUNTS OF THE SCRIPTURES FROM ADAM TO MOSES.

This graphic shows that Adam lived long enough to know Lamech (Noah's father). Lamech lived long enough to know his grandson Shem who was one of Noah's three sons who survived on the ark. Shem lived long enough to know Abraham for about 150 years.

Abraham knew his grandsons, Esau and Jacob for 15 years before he died. This sequence passed information down from Adam to Abraham through only two people. Abraham related this history to Jacob, who died in Egypt, from whence Moses delivered God's people and create the Hebrew Nation.

