

GENESIS

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Genesis 25:11-18

25:11 *After the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac his son. And Isaac settled at Beer-lahai-roi.*

The Lord Jehovah had blessed Abraham throughout his life. Now the Lord in turn blessed Isaac, Abraham's son of God's Promise through Whom all the nations of the world would be blessed. As surely as the Lord God had directed the events in Abraham's life, He would now direct the events of Isaac's life even as He would direct all the events of Israel's long history until the Son of God, Jesus Christ, would be born, live, and die as the sacrifice for the sins of the world (*John 1:29*).

When Abraham's servant had gone to Ur to find a wife for Isaac, the small caravan returned to Beer-lahai-roi, a region southwest of Hebron where Abraham and Sarah lived. This was the location where the Lord met Hagar when she fled Sarah's jealous wrath that was stirred up by Hagar's pregnancy. Hagar was the one who gave the region its name, *Beer-lahai-roi*, meaning "the LORD who sees me"

(Genesis 16:13–14). Isaac was now seventy-five years old and the father of twin sons, Jacob and Esau.

This verse provides context for the narrative that follows. It is here at Beer-lahai-roi that Isaac met Rebekah and the successors to Abraham and Sarah began their journey as the narrative of Genesis continues to unfold those early events that demonstrate the Lord's care for the lost human race.

25:12 *These are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's servant, bore to Abraham.*

Ishmael eventually settled in the region of Paran, a wilderness area in the Sinai Peninsula (Genesis 21:21). Paran was located further southwest from Beer-lahai-roi. Ishmael was Abraham's firstborn son through Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian servant (Genesis 16:1), born fourteen years before Isaac. Even though the chapter begins with a statement about Isaac, it would not be unusual for Hebrew genealogies to begin with the genealogy of the eldest son. As is customary in Genesis, the story of the non-elect line, here Ishmael, is discussed before the history of the chosen line, here Isaac.¹

When Sarah insisted that Abraham drive Hagar from their home, the Lord met Hagar at this well and promised her that her son would be the father of many nations (Genesis 16:9–12). Now, nearly seventeen years after Ishmael was born, Sarah demanded that both Hagar and Ishmael leave. The Lord sustained Hagar and Ishmael in the desert of Beersheba, and they eventually settled in the region of Paran (Genesis 21:14–21). There in the wilderness of Paran, Ishmael grew to manhood, became a renowned hunter, wedded a woman from Egypt, and raised a family that included twelve sons.

25:13-15 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, ¹⁴Mishma, Dumah, Massa, ¹⁵Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah.*

The text names the twelve sons of Ishmael. Since Ishmael was not the son of God's promise to Abraham, the scriptural narrative does not emphasize the stories of these twelve men. However, there are some gleanings that can be gathered for some of them.

Ishmael's firstborn son was named Nebaioth. He and his descendants are thought to be shepherds based on a statement found in the prophecy of Isaiah: "*All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you; the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you; they shall come up with acceptance on my altar, and I will beautify my beautiful house*" (Isaiah 60:7). Peloubet's Bible Dictionary states: "From the days of Jerome this people have been identified with the Nabathaeans of Greek and Roman history who took possession of Mount Seir in the fourth century BC and spread thence over the entire region east of Jordan. Petra was their capitol."²

Kedar became the father of one of the most prominent Arab tribes.³ Isaiah's prophecy again tells of their importance: "¹⁶*For thus the LORD said to me, 'Within a year, according to the years of a hired worker, all the glory of Kedar will come to an end. ¹⁷And the remainder of the archers of the mighty men of the sons of Kedar will be few, for the LORD, the God of Israel, has spoken'*" (Isaiah 21:16–17).

Little or nothing is known of Ishmael's remaining sons. Only the tenth son, Jetur, is mentioned. As in many cases, the sons of Ishmael became the adversaries of the sons of Isaac. When Israel left Egypt and they began to occupy the land of Canaan, the tiny nation had to drive out those sons of Ishmael that still remained in the land. "¹⁸*The descendants of Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh had 44,760 soldiers ready to go to war. They were skilled fighters who could carry shields and swords and shoot arrows. ¹⁹They went to*

war against Hagar's descendants (including Jetur, Naphish, and Nodab" (1 Chronicles 5:18–19 GW).

25:16 *These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names, by their villages and by their encampments, twelve princes according to their tribes.*

As the Lord had promised Hagar by the well at Beer-lahai-roi, Ishmael became the father of twelve princes who developed into significant nations in the early years of Israel's history (Genesis 17:20).

25:17 *(These are the years of the life of Ishmael: 137 years. He breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people.)*

Ishmael died at the age of 137. He was "gathered to his people," as was Abraham. This statement generally means that he "joined" those who had died before him.

25:18 *They settled from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria. He settled over against all his kinsmen.*

Ishmael's descendants inhabited a large portion of the region from Canaan to Egypt. They essentially lodged in much of the same region as the descendants of Isaac. Ishmael settled in Paran, located in the Sinai Peninsula. In that region, Ishmael's descendants would be surrounded by his kinsmen. Ishmael's mother was Egyptian, and Hagar found a wife for Ishmael from her homeland. Ishmael's maternal relatives were on his western border and paternal relatives were on his eastern border.

Notes/Applications

Hagar had a very difficult life. Twice forcibly removed from Abraham's home, she did not believe that she would survive. Nevertheless, the Lord came to her in her otherwise hopeless con-

dition and gave her reason to hope that all was not lost. She would survive despite her treatment by Abraham's wife. God guaranteed that she would not only survive, but also that her son, Ishmael, would be the father of many nations (*Genesis 16:7–12*).

Ishmael, too, had every reason to hate his father and his father's wife. At the age of seventeen, he and his mother were abandoned by the family that had formerly taken care of them, providing a home and protection. Then, because he laughed at his half-brother, Isaac, a cute three-year old, they were forced to wander the deserts of Beersheba and nearly perished from thirst. Again, the Lord appeared to Ishmael and his mother, affirming His previous promises to Hagar. The Lord told them that Ishmael would become a hunter. He would become the father of a great nation (*Genesis 21:17–19*).

What makes the story of Hagar and Ishmael's plight so interesting is the way in which God protected them, even as He had protected and guided Abraham. Surely, Ishmael was not the son of God's promise to Abraham. That was reserved for Isaac. However, God spoke to Hagar in her distress on two different occasions just as He had spoken to Abraham. God made promises to Hagar just as He had made promises to Abraham. God guided the events of Hagar and Ishmael's lives just as He had guided the events of Abraham and Sarah's lives. God fulfilled the promises that He made to Hagar just as He had kept His promises to Abraham.

Yet one family was the line of God's promises and the other family was not. Sometimes people wonder whether Hagar and Ishmael were saved by the hand of the Lord. In a physical sense, that answer is clear. In a spiritual sense, there is no real answer. Hagar and Ishmael never appear in the New Testament as examples of faith. Abraham believed God and the Lord considered him to be righteous because of that faith. Nowhere does the Bible say that Ishmael or his mother, Hagar, believed God. Of course, we understand that God talked to Hagar, but that does not mean that she believed or trusted God as Abraham did. Nevertheless, the Lord God guided and protected this family as surely as He guided and

protected Abraham's family. On the surface, it seems unjust that the family of God's promise should be so harsh and cruel to this family by completely rejecting them and kicking them out of their household. On the surface, Hagar and Ishmael were the unwitting victims of Sarah's scheming and Abraham's willing union with Hagar. What is more startling is the fact that the Lord God Himself directed the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael from Abraham's home even as He guaranteed them His protection by His promises to Hagar (*Genesis 21:11–13*).

This is not just the story of Isaac and Ishmael. This is the story of every person born on the face of the earth. There are those who are children of God's promise. There are those who are not. Yet the Lord, by His own sovereign authority, directs the paths of both.

Sometimes the way God operates confuses us. We wonder why God does the things He does. Why does He do those things the way He does? In the end, there are no answers for those who wonder about what God is doing. He does not operate the same way the creatures of His design operate.

In the end, those of us who are the children of God's promise, those of us who have been redeemed through the blood of Jesus Christ can only bow ourselves to the earth with unending thankfulness, praising His mighty Name. The Lord has said it! The Lord has done it! Blessed be the Lord, the Maker of Heaven and Earth, and Jesus Christ, His Son, our Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit Who opens our eyes to behold the glory of the Lord!

³³*Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!* ³⁴*“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”* (*Romans 11:33–34*)

Genesis 25:19-26

25:19-20 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.*

Having finished with the generations of Ishmael, Moses moves forward with the narrative of Isaac and his descendants. He recounts the history of Isaac's parentage, his age, and his marriage to Rebekah. He also provides a short synopsis of Rebekah's heritage. These two married and became the forbears of Abraham's descendants through whom all the nations of the earth would be blest (*Genesis 12:3*).

Three years after Sarah's death, Abraham sent his servant back to his homeland to find a wife for Isaac. Abraham demanded that his son marry someone from the same family line. He was not to marry a woman from the Canaanite people. The servant traveled northward to Ur of the Chaldees, the location where Abraham's father, Terah, raised his family. There, the servant met Bethuel, the son of Nahor, Abraham's brother. Bethuel was Laban and Rebekah's father. Through a remarkable sequence of events, the Lord led the servant to identify Rebekah as the woman God chose to be Isaac's wife.

25:21 *And Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren. And the LORD granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived.*

It is impossible to tell how long Isaac and Rebekah were married before Isaac appealed to the Lord for children. However, it was long enough that the couple feared that they, like Abraham and Sarah, would also be childless. Isaac prayed, and the Lord granted his request. As a result, Rebekah became pregnant.

The similarity between the lives of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac's parents, and Isaac and his wife is quite remarkable. Both men

appealed to the Lord for children, particularly a son to carry the lineage to the next generation. Yet the Lord answered their prayers in remarkably different ways. Abraham and Sarah had to wait until they were so old that it was impossible to have children. Then the Lord caused Sarah to conceive and Isaac was born when Sarah was ninety and Abraham was one hundred years old. The Lord likewise answered Isaac's prayer and Rebekah conceived. However, Rebekah was still young enough to bear children. Even though the circumstances were different, it is clear that the Lord intervened in both situations. The Lord God had promised Abraham innumerable descendants, and He was the One Who had to make that happen, first in giving Sarah the capacity to conceive in her old age, and then giving Rebekah a pregnancy that would guarantee the continuation of Abraham's line.

25:22 *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.*

Even though the Lord granted Isaac's prayer and Rebekah became pregnant, the pregnancy was a difficult one. She did not know that there were two children in her womb. Even though this was Rebekah's first pregnancy, she expected to feel activity as the pregnancy developed. However, there was so much movement in her belly that she began to fear that something was wrong. So, she prayed and asked the Lord, "What is happening to me?"

25:23 *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."*

The Lord answered Rebekah, telling her something she could not have imagined. There were two nations growing in her womb. Even

before they were born, there was strife between the two. That strife would mark their relationship all the days of their lives.

Remarkably, the older son would serve the younger son. Again, what the Lord has decreed cannot be undone. Nevertheless, the Lord chooses the younger son just as Isaac, Abraham's second son, received the Lord's blessing over the older son, Ishmael. In a culture where the oldest son was preferred over all other sons, the Lord operated outside the boundaries of that culture. Surely the Lord transcends the boundaries of time and space, as well as the cultures of the nations that rise and then fall through the unfolding history of the world.

25:24 *When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb.*

A few months later, Rebekah delivered two healthy boys—twins. These were not identical twins coming from a single female egg, but fraternal twins from two different eggs.

25:25 *The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak, so they called his name Esau.*

The first boy born had red hair. Strangely, this hair was not just on his head, but covered his entire body as though he was wearing a red coat. Because of this hair, they named him Esau, meaning “hairy.”

25:26 *Afterward 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.*

The second boy came out of Rebekah's womb holding onto the older boy's heel. They named him Jacob, meaning “heel.” This personal name is built on the Hebrew noun for “heel” meaning “he grasps the heel” or “he cheats, supplants” (*Genesis 25:26*).⁴ These twin boys were probably born less than two minutes apart. They shared their mother's womb, arrived into the world one right after the other, and

that was the closest these two boys ever were. The strife that began in Rebekah's womb continued for the rest of their lives.

The writer now says that Isaac was sixty years old. Isaac and Rebekah were married when Isaac was forty years old. We now know that the couple did not have any children for the first twenty years of their married lives. How long Isaac prayed for a son is unknown. He may have been praying for a long time before the Lord answered his prayer.

Notes/Applications

At times the study of God's Word leads us to perplexing ideas about God and the way He works among the creatures He has made. This is one of those passages that has troubled believers—both great and small—for literally thousands of years. Abraham, although obedient to the directives of the Lord, many times did not really understand what the Lord was doing. Rebekah likewise found no easy answer when she asked the Lord what was going on in her womb. The answer was both puzzling and unhelpful.

In these ancient cultures, the eldest son always held the most important place in the succession of one generation to the other. In the lives of the first two patriarchs, the Lord chose the second son to occupy the place of importance. The older son simply had to deal with this "injustice" on the part of the father. What they did not realize from their human perspective was the Lord's supervision and direction in the events of their lives. Thus, to rebel against their parents was to rebel against God.

What is even more puzzling to our human way of thinking is the language that the Scriptures use to express the Lord's perspective on the His choice of Jacob to rule over his older brother, Esau. The language is not pretty. It is not kind. It may seem to be harsh, insensitive, perhaps cruel.

As Paul the Apostle describes the Lord's sovereign oversight over Israel, His chosen people, he makes this startling statement: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (*Romans 9:13*). God loved Jacob

and He hated Esau? Today's church culture says that God loves everybody! One or the other is true, but both cannot be true! When we research what Paul said, we find that he was quoting from the prophet Malachi. There we find just how much the Lord hated Esau and his descendants.

¹The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi. ²"I have loved you," says the LORD. But you say, "How have you loved us?" "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD. "Yet I have loved Jacob ³but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert." ⁴If Edom says, "We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins," the LORD of hosts says, "They may build, but I will tear down, and they will be called 'the wicked country,' and 'the people with whom the LORD is angry forever.'" ⁵Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, "Great is the LORD beyond the border of Israel!" (Malachi 1:1–5)

Why not say that the Lord chose Jacob over Esau? Why not say that Isaac would be chosen over Ishmael? Why does the Scripture say that the Lord *hated* Esau? There is no way that any human can explain satisfactorily the mind of the Creator of the heavens and the earth. God's ways are incomprehensible and inscrutable to the human mind. It is best to let the Scripture explain the incomprehensible sovereignty of God in the affairs of men—choosing one over the other and hating the one whom He has rejected.

¹⁰. . .Rebekah became pregnant by our ancestor Isaac. ¹¹Before the children had been born or had done anything good or bad, Rebekah was told that the older child would serve the younger one. This was said to Rebekah so that God's plan would remain a matter of his choice, ¹²a choice based on God's call and not on anything people do. ¹³The Scriptures say, "I loved Jacob, but I hated Esau."

¹⁴What can we say—that God is unfair? That's unthinkable! ¹⁵For example, God said to Moses, "I will be kind to anyone I want to.

I will be merciful to anyone I want to.” ¹⁶Therefore, God’s choice does not depend on a person’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.

¹⁷For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” ¹⁸So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.
(Romans 9:17–18)

Although we understand Paul’s words, the actions of the Lord are foreign to our human ability to grasp and comprehend. However, those of us who are the called and chosen of God give no answer, but instead fall on our knees and lift hands, hearts, and voices toward heaven and sing: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” (Revelation 5:12)