

## DHW

### *BOOK OF GENESIS*

#### LESSON 18

#### 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 (Gen.12:1-3; 15:3-19; 17:1-22). People may come and go. One leaves and another takes his place. That is with life. But God carries on with the fulfilment of His eternal plan and purpose until all men bow down and worship Him as the LORD God Almighty and that is none else but Him!

As we live in God's will, there will be times when difficulties and problems confront us. We experience a period of barrenness in our lives. We do not prosper or make any progress. Oftentimes we do not know what to do. We can learn from the example of Isaac and Rebekah in this lesson. There are times when we have to make important choices in life. Some of these choices have to be considered soberly and sensibly. What value system should we apply in making these choices? In such case, 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 or understood. Scriptures contain passages in which we, as parents, can learn some valuable insights to minimise such conflicts between their children. This chapter presents some valuable guidance on these things.

The chapter can be divided into the following sections:

- (1) Abraham married again but bequeathed all his inheritance to Isaac (vv.1-6);
- (2) The LORD took Abraham to glory and blessed his son Isaac (vv.7-11);
- (3) God kept His promise to Ishmael (vv.12-18);
- (4) Isaac prayed that Rebekah, his wife, would bear children (vv.19-28);
- (5) Esau despised his birthright (vv.29-34).

#### *STUDY THE WORD*

##### **Abraham Marries Again**

After the death of Sarah (Gen. 23:1, 2), Abraham took another wife, whose name was *Keturah*, which means "incense" or "the perfumed one." They had six healthy sons, whose names are given. The names of seven grand children were also mentioned through two of their sons, namely, Jokshan and Midian. In addition, the names of three great-grand-children from Jokshan's son Dedan are listed.

Abraham was then about 140 years.<sup>1</sup> Some comment that he was too old and weak to produce children. There is no good reason to believe this is so. One must not impose knowledge, beliefs, and norms of the modern man to apply to people who lived in biblical times and ancient culture. Abraham lived about 4,000 years ago! The Divine Author of Scripture clearly recorded that Abraham took Keturah to be his wife after the death of Sarah. Any explanation that Abraham, when he was younger, had another wife, while Sarah was alive, is purely ludicrous. 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 one hundred, and Sarah was ninety. God did the impossible in Abraham and Sarah. There is no reason why God could not bless Abraham with vigour and strength even at the age of 140 and beyond. God had promised him that he would be the father of many nations and would bless him with many children. So, God kept His word and promise to Abraham. Another reason is that Abraham's loneliness after the death of Sarah might have motivated him to seek for another companion and help-mate in the evening years of his life. 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 (Genesis 21:33, 34). In accordance with God's plan and purpose, Abraham gave all of his

inheritance to Isaac, who was the promised son and firstborn, through whom the covenant promises and blessings would be fulfilled.

### **The LORD Takes Abraham to Glory and Blesses Isaac**

Abraham went home to be with the LORD at the age of 175 (v.7). He is described as having lived to *a good old age, an old man, and full* (v.8). We can affirm that his life had been both satisfying and abounding. He had ventured out by faith in the LORD, when he left his country, kindred and his father's house to a land he had not been told yet (Gen. 12:1). He had gone through the most severe tests of his faith and had passed with flying colours. He believed God who promised him that he would have a son in his old age (Gen. 15:4-6). He had the joy of having a son at an old age with Sarah, his beloved wife, who had been barren. When God told him to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, he faithfully obeyed (Gen. 22). He had fought wars and won. He was blessed with many children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren. He had the blessing of knowing that the covenant blessings would be passed on to his grandson, who would be Jacob (Gen. 17:19). He was also blessed with great material wealth and many servants. Surely a full life was not only measured by the number of years from cradle to grave. Rather it was how that life was lived, what had been done, what had been achieved, and what had been experienced, particularly in the LORD.

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah died at the age of 127 years old (Genesis 23:1, 2). Abraham was ten years older than Sarah. (Genesis 17:17) .

The expression that he was *gathered to his people* is a beautiful one and is theologically significant (v.8). It teaches that death is not the end of our existence. As children of God, we continue to have our fellowship with those, who have been taken home to glory first before us. All those, who will believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and in His redemptive work, will have this wonderful and blessed experience and assurance.

Interestingly, when Abraham died, his two sons, Isaac and Ishmael came to bury him (v.9). Not that the Divine Author mentioned Isaac first before Ishmael, although the latter was fourteen years older. This means the covenant promise originally given to Abraham would fall on Isaac and not Ishmael. Isaac was the firstborn of Abraham by promise whereas Ishmael was the firstborn of a bondwoman by human ingenuity. Were the brothers still at odds? Or had they been amicably reconciled? Scripture is silent. We do not know. Whatever, the death of an elder of the clan seemed to have the effect of bringing the siblings and relatives together. Under normal circumstances, this kind of behaviour would hardly happen. Abraham's two sons buried their father in the cave of Machpelah. That cave was bought by Abraham in the first place to bury Sarah (Gen. 23:9, 16, 19). And it was quite natural for them to bury Abraham there next and near to his beloved wife, Sarah.

The LORD blessed Abraham's son, Isaac (v.11). This blessing would mean that Isaac was linked with the initial covenant blessing, which God

had made with Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, and subsequently in Genesis 15:18-21, and Genesis 17:1-8. Hence the blessing was passed on to Isaac. The God of Abraham was also to be the God of Isaac. In verse 11, it is stated that Isaac dwelt by the well of Lahai-roi. This was the very place where God had heard Hagar's plight and affliction (Genesis 16:11-14). Now, Isaac had come to this place to await the return of Abraham's servant with his wife-to-be, Rebekah. He had gone there to meditate in the field in the evening. It was a place, where effectual prayers were offered to God, and where God could be found.

### **God Keeps His Promise to Ishmael**

The genealogy of Ishmael testifies to God's faithfulness. God had promised to Hagar and Ishmael that He would make of him a great nation (Gen. 16:10; 21:18). Ishmael had twelve sons. His sons became princes of nations in the region stretching *from Havilah unto Shur*. However, 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 controlling the land, thus fulfilling God's promise to Abraham and also to Ishmael, his son who was born of a bondwoman. Ishmael died at the age of 137 years old (v.17).

### God Blesses Isaac

Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, three years after the death of his mother, Sarah.<sup>2</sup> All the inheritance of Abraham was bestowed on him (v. 5). We see the experience of Abraham and Sarah repeated in the lives of Isaac and Rebekah, who was barren. What is instructive here is that, Isaac did not follow his parent's ungodly example by taking matters into his own hands and by trying to help God. He showed his particular quality of faith in God by praying to Him and patiently awaiting God's timing. It was possible that Abraham had taught him to have faith and to be patient with God. If that was so, he had learned well in this regard. However, God heard his prayer, and in accordance with His will, He rewarded him; and Rebekah conceived. They waited twenty years for this blessing (26b). Although God had promised them, it did not mean that things would happen instantly. In fact the reverse seemed to be true. The children that were promised to Rebekah were given after much earnest prayer and a relatively long period of waiting. They had to wait for God's timing. This required patience on their part.

In her pregnancy, Rebekah experienced violent movements in her womb. The Hebrew word for *struggled* (v.22a, *ratsats*) means "to crush each other." It was not a natural experience. The threat of a miscarriage was real.

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<sup>2</sup> When Isaac was born, Sarah was 90 years old (Genesis 17:17). Sarah died at the age of 127. Isaac was then 37 years old but 40 years old when he married Rebekah – three years later.

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 personally went directly to the LORD for an explanation (v.22b). God gave Rebekah a most remarkable answer. She had twins and both were boys. God also gave her a prophecy concerning the future of her two sons – two nations, they would be separated, one would be stronger than the other, but the elder would serve the younger (v.23). Strange but she believed or accepted God's prophetic revelation.

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.<sup>3</sup> They called him *Esau* (meaning "hairy", v.25). And the boy, who came out later grabbing Esau's heel, was named *Jacob*. Jacob means a "heel holder" or "supplanter", meaning "to take the place of another."

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

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<sup>3</sup> The medical terminology is 'hypertrichosis.'

### Esau Despises His Birthright

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 hungry and starving.

Jacob was willing to give Esau some of the red stew which his brother had asked for but only 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? Or had Rebekah told him about it? Or did Jacob do it out of innocence and shrewdness? The birthright of *primogeniture* in those days was that the eldest would get a double portion of the father’s inheritance. Jacob’s quick and spontaneous response intimates 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 was famished and starving to death. Obviously, his birthright could not meet his dire need at that moment to fill his stomach or to refresh his physical strength. He despised his birthright and was willing to exchange it for a bowl of 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 (v.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 had 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. It was an attitude of mistrust. It was also an attitude of putting confidence in human ingenuity rather than in God’s faithfulness to fulfil His promises by spiritual and godly ways.

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 his to be realized later. He was short sighted. He *sacrificed his birthright for the desire of the moment*.

### *PRACTICAL VALUE*

This chapter unmistakably sends the message to us that God keeps His word and promises. He proved this in His dealings with Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael. As promised, God multiplied the children of Abraham, both through Isaac and Ishmael. Today, we have the Divine special revelation of God in His inspired Word – the Bible – and His promises and prophecies of His plan and purpose for us are given. Every word and promises will be fulfilled, yea even some have already been fulfilled, and this is a further proof that the others will also come to pass. This truth should cause us to trust and have faith in God implicitly and to obey Him willingly and gladly. We should order our short life on earth accordingly doing the things that delight and glorify Him. We are further strengthened by the truth that after we die we shall be gathered to be with our loved ones who had gone before us.

Abraham was active even in his old age. He remarried and had many children through Keturah. He provided for the purity and peace of the chosen family, that is, Isaac, by sending away the sons of Keturah with much gifts. He did this to prevent confusion of any claim to be the chosen race (the Jews), and to avoid disturbances and quarrels. It is wise on the part of Abraham to settle his family matter while he was still alive. Life that is lived by trusting

God will be full and satisfying throughout our earthly sojourn.

When we have problems in life which we do not have the ability and strength to realize, we ought to learn from Isaac who pleaded with God for his wife Rebekah to bear children. As His children, God hears and grants our petition when they are in His will, and nothing is impossible with Him. Christians are therefore the most blessed people on earth, whether in good or bad times for God is good. So, we should develop this habit of praying to God daily in our life. One thing that we should always do is to set apart the time to pray corporately with our fellow Christians in the church.

A lack of faith in God will lead to the kind of thinking and behaviour like that of Esau. He despised his future inheritance and opted for momentary and temporal benefits. We should not be short sighted in life by pursuing only the things on earth, and by discounting the spiritual blessings which God has bestowed on us. Seek the righteousness of God first by doing His will instead of chasing after the temporal things of the world at the expense of forfeiting long-term spiritual benefits that count for eternity. Jim Eliot, the missionary, said, “He is no fool, who gives away what he cannot keep in exchange for what he cannot lose.” So, let us be wise. AMEN