

# Genesis – Lesson 20

## Jacob and the Birthright

### Read Genesis 25:1-18

- (a) What was the name of Abraham's *second* wife? How does she *differ* from Sarah in Abraham's mind (see v. 6)? Who is she *associated* with in the story (see v. 12)?

Abraham's second wife was **Keturah**. She differs from Sarah in that 1) she bears Abraham six (6) male children and 2) she is treated by Abraham more as a *concubine* than as a wife (note v. 6) Therefore, Abraham sees her more like **Hagar** than as his wife; a concubine (or servant) who bears him children. His first *and last* love is Sarah and the child Isaac, born to her.

(b) How did Abraham treat Isaac *differently* from his other children? Why do you think that Abraham sent all of his other children *away* from Isaac (see v. 6)?

Abraham made Isaac his *sole heir*; he gave all that he had to Isaac, and only gave gifts to the other children. He probably sent these other children away from Isaac to protect his eldest natural son from them; they were not included (in any way) in the promises of God made to Isaac, so it seemed reasonable to Abraham to make sure that they could not *affect* Isaac in what God was going to do through him (just as God had ordered Abraham to do with Ishmael).

- (a) What do you discover about the *relationship* between Isaac and Ishmael in Abraham's burial?

It would appear, given that the two sons came together to bury their father, that they were not enemies. They had enough common ground between them (in their mutual love of Abraham) to come together for his burial. Only *later* (over time) would there become an enmity between their offspring; as God prospered the descendants of Isaac as his own people, the descendants of Ishmael grew jealous and became their enemies.

(b) What *promise* of God is fulfilled in v. 16 (see 17:20)?

God had promised Hagar in Genesis 16 (and Abraham in Genesis 21) that Ishmael would be blessed, that his offspring would become a great nation of people. Specifically, God had promised that Ishmael's offspring would produce twelve (12) princes (or tribes of people), which is now fulfilled.

(c) *Where* did the sons of Ishmael settle? *Who* are the descendants of these people today?

These people settled E of Egypt, in the Sinai and Arabian peninsulas, the descendants of which are the Arabs of modern times.

### Read Genesis 25:19-34

- (a) List the *problems* that arose with Rebekah and pregnancy. What *responses* do you see?

First, Rebekah (like Isaac's mother) was *barren* (v. 21); Isaac prayed to the Lord for children through her. Second, after becoming pregnant, Rebekah struggled with the pregnancy, having twins that jostled about within her. In *both* cases, Isaac and Rebekah prayed to the Lord for help, and the Lord answered their prayers: for Isaac, God opened the womb of Rebekah so that she could become pregnant and, for Rebekah, God comforted her by telling her what was happening to her (i.e. twins) and what would become of the two boys.

(b) List the four *prophecies* concerning Jacob and Esau found in v. 23. How were they *fulfilled*?

God gives four (4) prophecies regarding Rebekah's children: 1) that there were two boys in her womb that represented two separate nations; 2) the two nations would be divided from one another; 3) one of the two nations would be stronger (i.e. more blessed) than the other, and 4) the nation that came from the older boy would serve the nation of the younger (i.e. in contrast to the normal course of inheritance law). The prophecies were fulfilled in the nation of Israel coming from Jacob (the younger), the Edomites from Esau (the older); the two nations struggling with one another as enemies, but the nation of Jacob (the younger) eventually dominating the Edomites (the older), receiving the greater blessing from God as his chosen people.

(c) From Romans 9:6-13, what *doctrine* does Paul highlight from the story of Jacob and Esau? What is Paul's *point* from these brothers in regards to who is blessed by God and who is rejected?

Paul uses this event to highlight the doctrine of *election*: the choice of God regarding the destiny of individuals (and nations) in accordance with his purposes and plans. Paul recognizes that (in God's economy) it is *entirely* up to God as to who is blessed by him with his grace and who is rejected from receiving that grace; God decides fates. Although, by human reckoning, Esau should have received the blessing and been treated as the most favored (by virtue of being born first), God's choice was to *pass by* Esau and select Jacob as the one on whom his grace would fall. The *essence* of grace requires this kind of understanding: grace is *only* grace if it is freely given by the choice of God and *not* by an entitlement of human position or achievement.

4. Why did Isaac love Esau *more* than Jacob? How do you think God viewed Isaac's love for Esau?

Isaac loved Esau more 1) because he was the firstborn son, and it was normal to place the firstborn in a position of favor and 2) because he had a personality that (appears) to be much more in tune with what Isaac thought was important (i.e. Esau was a hunter while Jacob appeared to be more of a "momma's boy"). Undoubtedly, God was *pleased* that Isaac loved Esau (from a purely relational point of view), but was displeased that Isaac *seems* to have ignored the prophecy given to Rebekah regarding these two sons. Just as Abraham was *forced* to expel Ishmael after Isaac was born, so Isaac was forced to decide between his two sons. Unfortunately, Isaac's love for Esau got in the way of the unfolding of God's promise to these sons, leading to the (unfortunate) situation where Jacob had to *steal* the birthright from Jacob.

5. (a) What three things were part of the birthright that Isaac was to give to Jacob (see Genesis 27:29, Deuteronomy 21:17, and Romans 9:4-5)?

This (specific) birthright included: 1) a double-portion of the father's inheritance (Deut. 21:17), 2) the authority of the father to lead the family upon his death (Genesis 27:29), and 3) the title to the land of promise made through Abraham and Isaac (this element being *specific* to this birthright; Romans 9:4-5).

(b) Why did Esau "*despise*" his birthright after having sold it? From Hebrews 12:11-17, what is the *lesson* for those who come to faith in Christ?

Verse 34 could indicate one of two possibilities: 1) that the *act* of selling his birthright was an act of despising it; treating it with such casualness as to be willing to sell it for a bowl of soup, and/or 2) recognizing *later* the loss of the value of that birthright after having sold it to Jacob; despising the fact that he had been duped into selling it and now suffering without any position before his father to be blessed by him. The writer of Hebrews uses Esau as an *example* of someone who possesses something great, gives it away in a moment of foolish, selfish, and sinful rebellion, and then comes to realize the impossibility of getting it back. In this context, the writer is warning *believers* not to turn back from the struggle of living as a Christian (i.e. under discipline) because, once we turn back and abandon the faith, there is no amount of repentance that can restore it. It is a warning based on *hyperbole*; genuine followers of Jesus *cannot* fall away permanently, since it is Christ's work to save and hold his own to the end. But the *power* of the warning is for us to remain diligent as we follow Christ and to *never even consider* turning back in sin or rebellion.

(c) What is the birthright of the *Christian*? According to Ephesians 1:13-14, what is the *guarantee* of our inheritance as believers?

**The birthright of the Christian is similar to that given to Jacob: a portion of the promised blessings of God to all of those who are drawn into the family of Christ (with Jesus, the elder brother, receiving the double-portion), the authority of the Father to act as his children in the world, executing the plans of the Father and carrying his judgment to others, and title to all of the “holdings” of God in creation to be enjoyed as our own personal possessions. In essence, this birthright is *our personal relationship with God through Jesus in the eternal kingdom of God*. This personal relationship with God is *guaranteed* by the presence of the Holy Spirit residing within those who God has granted this inheritance; the Spirit becomes a “down payment” or “earnest money” on the promise of God to draw the believer to himself and give him or her all things.**