

Genesis 25:1-18  
Psalm 83/87  
Galatians 4

“Abraham’s Seed”

August 30, 2009

Our emphasis today is on the “other” Abrahamic peoples.

The centerpiece of our passage today is Isaac:

“Abraham gave all he had to Isaac” (25:5)

“God blessed Isaac” (25:11)

But the passage spends most of its time on Isaac’s brothers.

We hear about some of these brothers in Psalm 83,  
especially the Ishmaelites and Midianites,  
along with several cousins (especially the “sons of Lot” – Ammon and Moab)

How should we sing a war-Psalm like this?

Remember that Jesus sang the Psalms all throughout his life.

Jesus is the singer of the Psalms!

As the one who fulfilled all that Israel was supposed to do and to be,  
he is the one who sings Psalm 83.

Indeed, it would be easy to think of our Lord Jesus singing Psalm 83  
in Gethsemane as he prayed,

knowing full well the conspiracy of Judas with the chief priests –  
and for that matter with Herod the Edomite and the Gentiles.

As the nations rise up against him,  
our Lord Jesus prays that the Divine Warrior might go forth into battle  
and overthrow his enemies.

And that is why our Lord Jesus was in such agony.

Because he knew that the terrifying hurricane of God’s wrath would come first upon himself.  
He would perish in disgrace!

But as we sing Psalm 83

let us sing it as those who are united to Christ –

as those who pray for the coming of the Kingdom of God,

that the Divine Warrior, our Lord Jesus would bring judgment on the earth.

But understand what you are doing when you pray for judgment!

You are praying that God would make right all that is wrong.

And that includes you!

As Peter says in 1 Peter 4:17

“It is time for judgment to begin at the household of God;

and if it begins with us,

what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?”

Sing Psalm 83  
Read Galatians 4

It is easy to hear these words in Galatians  
and come to the conclusion that Ishmael was damned.  
But that is not the conclusion that Genesis tends towards.

Certainly Ishmael is not the Promised Seed.  
He is the son born according to the flesh –  
not the son born according to the Spirit.

But think of all that we have seen about Ishmael:  
his name means “God hears” (16:11)  
God had mercy on his mother twice in the wilderness (16:7 and 21:19)  
The well of Beer-lahai-roi was named by his mother, Hagar,  
as the “well of the living one who sees me.”  
And the clincher must be 21:20 where we are told that *God was with the boy*.

Ishmael is *not* a heathen reprobate!  
He is certainly a wild donkey of a man (16:12),  
and his descendants will be a mixed bag –  
but the way that Genesis tells the story,  
the legacy of Ishmael calls us to a view him somewhat kindly.

The geography of Ishmael also should make us think.

When last we heard of Ishmael he was living in the wilderness of Paran,  
to the south of the Promised Land, with an Egyptian wife (21:21).

The wilderness of Paran is a *very* important place in Israel’s history.  
It was here that Israel encamped when they sent the 12 spies into the land.  
The greatest rebellion in Israel’s history took place at Paran,  
when Israel refused to listen to Joshua and Caleb  
and refused to enter the Promised Land.

When Israel hears the story of Ishmael,  
they would hear that Ishmael dwelt in that place of decision.  
So while Ishmael may not live in the Promised Land,  
he lives close to it.

And throughout the Scriptures  
the Ishmaelites generally come across rather well.  
(Psalm 83 is the only negative reference to them).

Ishmael is rejected – as far as being the Promised Seed –  
but Paul’s point in Galatians 4 is that *Israel* has now been rejected as the Promised Seed.

In other words Ishmael is to Isaac  
what Israel is to Jesus.

Compared to Isaac, Ishmael was born according to the flesh.

Compared to Jesus, Israel was born according to the flesh.

In its own day, Israel was good and Jerusalem was a picture of the heavenly Zion.

In the same way, in his own day, Ishmael was good and Hagar was a picture of Sarah.

But in order to see this more clearly,

we need to compare Ishmael to the *other* sons of Abraham!

### **1. Keturah and Her Sons (25:1-6)**

*Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah.*

Only now do we discover that Abraham has other sons.

When were they born?

Many have assumed that they were born after the death of Sarah,

but if Abraham was unlikely to beget children at the age of 100 (17:1, 17),

how much less likely is it when he is old and feeble (24:1).

Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born.

He was 137 when Sarah died (23:1).

He was 140 when Isaac got married (cf. 25:20),

and is described in 24:1 as “advanced in years.”

Abraham was 175 when he died.

If all these children of Keturah were born after Abraham was 140 and feeble,  
then they are even more remarkable than Isaac!

So it is likely that Abraham had taken Keturah as his concubine many years before  
(perhaps even before Hagar).

The reason why Keturah has not been mentioned before,

is because the sons of a concubine are not considered legal heirs

unless the father declares them to be such.

Her existence (and theirs) has been irrelevant to the narrative.

But now, as we are preparing to move on to the narrative of Isaac and his sons,

we need to be told that there are other Abrahamic peoples around them.

Ishmael is the most important, but there are others.

The reason why Ishmael is different –

the reason why he receives such an important place in the narrative –

is because Sarah initially wanted the children of Hagar to be “her” children.

Technically Hagar was not a concubine.

She was Sarah’s maidservant.

In one way of saying it, Abraham had three wives – three “women.”

But each had a distinct relationship.

Sarah was Abraham's wife.

She was his social equal and therefore her son would have inheritance rights.

Keturah was Abraham's concubine (v6).

A concubine came from a lower social class.

Her children are separate from the children of Sarah.

They do not have inheritance rights.

Hagar was Sarah's maidservant.

While she can be called a "wife" or a "concubine"

she actually occupies a different place than either Sarah or Keturah.

She and her children are *not* separate from the children of Sarah –

they are part of Sarah's tent.

Ishmael only has inheritance rights so long as Sarah is barren.

So in one sense Keturah is higher up in the social order –

her children are part of her own tent –

but because the line of promise is founded in the promise of the Seed of the Woman,

the fact that her children are *not* part of Sarah's tent,

means that Ishmael is far more important to the story than the sons of 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.*

The sons of Keturah settle in Arabia.

Zimran is the name of a town west of Mecca.

Medan and Midian are connected with the Ishmaelites in Gen 37.

Sheba is a region and people in the southern part of the Arabian peninsula.

Dedan is the name of a city in Arabia.

Many of these peoples are associated with the spice and incense trade  
in the ancient world.

Indeed, when it says that the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim

it is possible that these are not proper names at all –

since if you translate these words it read,

“the sons of Dedan were peasants, craftsmen, and seminomads.”

*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.*

Abraham was not obligated to give them anything,

but in order to secure their goodwill toward Isaac,

he gives them gifts and sends them away.

The emphasis here is that Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac.

Isaac is the promised heir –

the one who returned from the dead is the one who inherits all!

In chapter 22 Isaac was not literally raised from the dead,

but he was figuratively raised,

and thus he becomes a picture of our Lord Jesus.

## **2. The Death of Abraham (25:7-11)**

*7 These are the days of the years of Abraham's life, 175 years.*

If Abraham was 140 and Isaac was 40 when Isaac got married,

then since Isaac was 60 when Esau and Jacob were born,

Abraham must have been 160 when his grandsons were born.

Esau and Jacob were 15 years old when their grandfather Abraham died.

But the story of Esau and Jacob belongs to the story of Isaac,

and so the narrator does not follow strict chronological order.

Abraham had been 75 when God called him to leave the land of his fathers.

For 100 years he lived as sojourner – a pilgrim in the Promised Land.

*8 Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years,*

Most human societies have prized the idea of “dying well.”

What does it mean for Abraham to die well?

Certainly he is old – long life is a good thing.

But for Abraham a “good death” is a death in the land,

with his sons around him to bury him with his wife.

Notice that when it came to finding a wife for his son,

the text emphasized that Abraham had a lot of stuff.

But when it comes to his death,

there is nothing about his “stuff.”

Possessions can be useful in this life,

but when you approach death they are irrelevant!

The narrative of the death of Abraham emphasizes not stuff,

but people.

*and was gathered to his people.*

This is an interesting way of putting it.

“He was gathered to his people.”

Plainly this is not a reference to where he was buried –

since his ancestors were buried far away.

Rather, it testifies to an early understanding that there is something beyond death.  
And while Abraham is not buried with his fathers,  
neither is he buried with the Hittites.

*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.*

When we watched the burial of Sarah,  
we saw that Abraham would not bury her with the Hittites.  
They had offered him the use of any of their tombs,  
but Abraham had refused.

Abraham would not mingle her bones with the bones of the Hittites.  
A tomb would be a cave or a pit with the body of the deceased laid on a shelf of rock.  
Later after the body had decomposed and the shelf was needed for another body,  
the bones would be pushed into a deep trench that ran through the tomb.  
So when they spoke of being “gathered to their people”  
that was usually a literal description!

In the case of Abraham and Sarah, they begin a new tomb.  
The bones of Abraham and Sarah will be mingled together until the resurrection!

How we treat the body after death says something about how we view death and resurrection.

Augustine points out that  
“Bodies are not for ornament or for aid, as something that is applied externally,  
but pertain to the very nature of man.” (p142)  
Your body is an integral part of *you*.  
Therefore we should take proper care of the body after death.

We live in a culture that is obsessed with the body.  
And yet we live in mortal fear of the corpse.  
We don't want to have anything to do with dead bodies.  
When a person dies we trundle them off to a funeral home  
where we let the “experts” prepare the body for burial.  
Our entire experience with dead bodies usually is limited to the funeral.

We keep corpses at a distance.

This is not healthy.  
Isaac and Ishmael buried their father.  
Isaac and Ishmael carted Abraham across the miles to his tomb.

I would like to point out one phrase in particular:

*There Abraham was buried, with Sarah his wife.*

What was buried?

Abraham's body.

And yet the "corpse" is called Abraham.

*Abraham* was buried.

What is more, he is buried "with Sarah his wife."

Her corpse has been rotting for the last 40 years,  
but Abraham is buried with Sarah.

How often have you heard someone say at an open casket,

"Oh, that's not Aunt Margaret, Aunt Margaret is with Jesus!"

It is certainly true that Aunt Margaret is with Jesus,

but it is *not* true that what you see in the casket is "not Aunt Margaret."

That corpse in the coffin is just as much Aunt Margaret as her soul is Aunt Margaret.

It was Abraham whom they laid in the tomb – and it was Sarah who was lying next to him.

We must remember that the resurrection of the body  
means that your body is as much "you" as your soul.

And also we must remember that we belong with body and soul,  
both in life and in death to our faithful savior Jesus Christ.

Even in death, your body will remain united to Christ!

It may decay into dust,

and yet your body still belongs to Jesus!

He will not forget you!

And on that day when he raises Abraham and Sarah from the grave,  
he will also raise you!

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

Beer-lahai-roi – the well of him who sees –

– the place where God had promised Hagar a son.

God had seen Hagar and Ishmael and showed mercy.

But Isaac has displaced Ishmael.

Isaac now dwells at the well of him who sees.

But what happens to Ishmael?

He is displaced from his temporary status as the seed of Abraham,  
but what will happen to him?

### 3. The Generations of Ishmael (25:12-18)

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

This formula “these are the generations of” indicates that this is book 7 of Genesis.

2:4-4:26	“These are the generations of the heavens and the earth”	(1)
5:1-6:8	“This is the book of the generations of Adam”	(2)
6:9-9:28	“These are the generations of Noah”	(3)
10:1-11:9	“These are the generations of the sons of Noah”	(4)
11:10-26	“These are the generations of Shem”	(5)
11:27-25:11	“These are the generations of Terah”	(6)
25:12-18	“These are the generations of Ishmael”	(7)
25:19-35:29	“These are the generations of Isaac, the son of Abraham”	(8)
36:1-37:1	“These are the generations of Esau”	(9)
37:2-50:26	“These are the generations of Jacob”	(10)

Why does Ishmael receive a whole “book” of his own?

One reason is because Hagar is a part of Sarah’s house.

Ishmael is part of Sarah’s tent – even though he is not the promised Seed.

Also, Ishmael is beloved of Abraham –

and therefore God promised Hagar that her son would become nations.

The narrator wishes to demonstrate that God has done this.

And the names of the tribes listed in verses 13-15

include many tribes that were well-known throughout the near east.

Like the descendents of Keturah,

they settled in Arabia and were involved in the spice trade.

*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.*

Ishmael has twelve sons – twelve princes.

As such he participates in the promise to Abraham.

He is fruitful and multiplies.

There are four sets of twelves in Genesis:

the twelve tribes of Nahor (22:20-24)

the twelve tribes of Ishmael (here)

the twelve tribes of Edom/Esau (36:10-14)

the twelve tribes of Israel/Jacob (35:23-26)

The point is that if God has given a future to Nahor, Ishmael, and Esau,

how much more will God bless the Promised Seed.



Isaiah 60:1-9 reflects on this.

Isaiah speaks of how the nations will come streaming to Jerusalem –  
the wealth of the nations will pour into the city of God.

Look at the list of Ishmael's tribes,  
and listen:

“A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah;  
all those from Sheba shall come.

They shall bring gold and frankincense,  
and shall bring good news, the praises of the LORD.

[Midian, Ephah and Sheba are all sons of Keturah]

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.”

[Kedar and Nebaioth are sons of Ishmael]

In other words, Isaiah says that the sons of Abraham will return.

Later in Isaiah 60 he extends it out to all nations,  
but he starts with Ishmaelites and the Midianites.

God had promised Hagar that he would bless Ishmael.

Ishmael will not be the chosen Seed,

but the flocks and rams of Ishmael will be acceptable on God's altar!

God will bring Ishmael home!

*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.*

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

It is rare for scripture to give the age of a non-Israelite,  
but Ishmael is as close to the promise as you can get and still be outside it.

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

Most translations and commentators seem to take this final statement in a negative sense.

But that is because most commentators see Ishmael in a negative light!

The last phrase, “He settled over against all his kinsmen”  
would be literally translated, “he fell before the face of his brethren.”

In Genesis 16:12 God told Hagar that her son would

“dwell before the face of his brothers.”

(This is translated “over against” by those who think that it is negative)

But in fulfillment of 16:12 we now hear that at the end of his life Ishmael  
“fell before the face of his brothers.”

This would seem to indicate that Ishmael died in the presence of his brothers.

And while this is somewhat vague

(does “brothers” mean Isaac and his sons, or does it mean the sons of Keturah?)  
the conclusion is clear:

God has been faithful to his promise to Hagar and Ishmael.

And therefore, if God is faithful to the son born according to the flesh,

how much more will God be faithful to the son born according to the Spirit?

And that is the point that Paul makes:

*Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.*

You are the children of the free woman – “the Jerusalem above is free,  
and she is our mother.”

Sing “Holy City”