

# Genesis 25-26 Brothers in Conflict

## An Outline

- I. Death of Abraham (25:1-11)
  - A. After Sarah's death, Abraham marries Keturah and has six more boys (25:1-4).
  - B. Abraham gives full inheritance to Isaac but sends the sons of his concubines away with gifts (25:5-6).
  - C. Abraham lived to a good old age of 175 and is buried with his wife by Isaac and Ishmael (25:7-11).
- II. Ishmael's Sons (25:12-18)
  - A. Ishmael has 12 sons who become tribal rulers (25:12-16).
  - B. Ishmael lives to 137 and his descendants live south/west of Canaan in hostility to his relatives (25:17-18).
- III. Jacob and Esau (25:19-34)
  - A. Isaac prays and Rebekah bears twins, where a prophecy is given that the older will serve the younger (25:19-23).
  - B. Esau is older and an outdoorsman and favored by Isaac while Jacob is younger and a homebody and favored by Rebekah (25:24-28).
  - C. Esau gives up his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew (25:29-34).
- IV. Isaac and Abimelek (26:1-33)
  - A. God commands Isaac to remain in Canaan during famine and reaffirms His covenant with him (26:1-6).
  - B. Isaac tries unsuccessfully to hide his marriage to Rebekah from Abimelek, but is rebuked rather than killed (26:7-11).
  - C. God makes Isaac wealthy causing envious reprisals and fearful overtures of peace from the Philistines (26:12-33).

## Questions for Study

1. **A Lesson on God's Overwhelming Miracles:** If it was impossible for Abraham to conceive with Sarah when he was 100 years old and she was ninety years old (cf. Genesis 17:17; Romans 4:19), how much more absurd would it be for him to conceive when he was over 137 years old with Keturah to bear not one but six more sons (25:1-4)?
2. **A Lesson on God's Faithfulness to Keep His Promises:** Since Ishmael is not the son of promise, why does Moses take precious space in Scripture to list the sons of Ishmael in Genesis 25:12-28? Clue: See Genesis 17:20.  
  
\* **A note about the Ishmaelites and the Midianites:** Ishmael's descendants live in the region between Canaan and Egypt (25:18). This becomes relevant when Jacob's sons sell their youngest brother Joseph to a caravan of Ishmaelites (Genesis 37:25). These Ishmaelites inhabited the land of Midian, who was also their brother through Abraham's third wife, Keturah (Genesis 25:1-2). Even later on, when Moses flees from Pharaoh as a fugitive for killing an

Egyptian, he flees to this land of Midian and marries a Midianite woman, Zipporah (Exodus 2:15-16,21). Interesting how all these things happen within the family of Abraham guided by the sovereign hand of God.

\* **A note about Genesis 25:18:** Ishmael's descendants "lived in open hostility toward all their relatives." This is the NIV translation, which is consistent with the prophecy of Genesis 16:12, "his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him." But there are some problems with the translation of this verse because the verb translated "in the presence of" (KJV) can also be translated "in hostility toward" (NIV).

3. **A Lesson on Casting Blame and Trusting Human Effort:** Since the LORD told Rebekah that the older (Esau) would serve the younger (Jacob), why does Isaac favor the older and later determine to bless him over his younger brother (Genesis 27:1-4; cf. Deut. 21:15-17).
4. **A Lesson on the Dangers of Presumption and Irresponsibility:** The birthright conferred the following benefits: (1) Precedence over the other children, (2) A double share of the inheritance, (3) Headship over the clan at the father's death and responsibility over the family (Gen 43:33; Deut 21:15-17). Why in the world would Esau "despise" his birthright and give it up for a bowl of soup? Esau may have had something else in mind, namely, the future blessing by Isaac, who favored him over his brother (Genesis 25:28). Isaac's blessing could have made the birthright null and void. In addition, since the birthright conferred the responsibility over the family, perhaps Esau thought he could avoid the responsibility and just get the benefits.
5. **A Lesson on Prayer and Patience and Faith:** Isaac was 40 when he married Rebekah, and he wasted no time in baby-making, which is suggested by Genesis 24:67; however, Rebekah was barren (Genesis 24:21). Isaac prayed and God heard his prayer and Rebekah became pregnant (Genesis 25:21). Yet, we learn that Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:26). Now it is possible that Isaac waited nineteen years before praying for Rebekah to be pregnant, but it is also possible and more likely that he was praying the greater part of that time.
6. **A Lesson on Truth, Deception, Silence, and Ends and Means. Is it always right to tell the truth? Is it always good to share everything?** Abraham resorted to deception to save his skin before Pharaoh (Genesis 12:10-20) and then did the same before Abimelek (Genesis 20:1-18). Even though Sarah was sixty and ninety respectively, she must have been quite the looker even in her old age. Both kings grabbed her for their harem. Now God rescued Abraham and Sarah from both situations, even though they received a muted rebuke from the kings who were deceived. Rather than punishment, Abraham received riches from both situations. What is more, Abraham likely lied again when he said Sarah was his half-sister, daughter of his father and not his mother, since Genesis 11:31 clearly tells us that Sarah was Terah (Abraham's father)'s daughter-in-law. Cf. Midwives (Exod. 1:15-21), Rahab (Joshua 2; James 2:25; Heb. 11:31).  
  
So Isaac decides to do the same thing in Genesis 26:1-11 before Abimelek, who was likely the son of the Abimelek Abraham deceived many years before. "Abimelek" (lit. "my father is king") may not be a name but a title for the Philistine king. Again, Isaac suffers no repercussions for his ruse.
7. **A Lesson in Patient Faith:** Isaac does not fight with the Philistines over the wells Abraham dug up, which the Philistines filled. He reopens these wells, and when the Philistine herders complain, he moves on. Why? After this God comes to him and tells him not to be afraid and reaffirms His covenant with him (Genesis 26:24). Did Isaac live to see the promises of God? (cf. Heb. 11:13-16, 39).

## Question for Discussion

Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Jacob - all believed in the LORD, but they sought to manipulate their circumstances and each other to achieve the purposes of God rather than simply trusting in God and waiting on Him to fulfill what He promised. Compromises were made. None of their efforts thwarted God's promises or sovereign will, but their actions may have delayed blessings and created unnecessary heartache along the way. Their actions, recorded in painful detail, remind us of the many chances for potential disaster and that only God's grace and providence ultimately sustained and carried forward the promises of God.

Take a moment in your groups to discuss how you try to control or manipulate your circumstances, your spouse, your children, your co-workers, etc. rather than praying, trusting, and waiting on God. Be sensitive in how you share, and exercise grace. Remember, our goal is to help, benefit and bless one another and draw each other closer to God.



