

Genesis 25: Times of Transition

I. Descendants -

- A. *25:1 Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. 2 She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. 3 Jokshan was the father of 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. 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.*
- B. When Sarah died Abraham was about 137 years old. He would live to be 175. This gives him another 38 years to live. We see he did remain a widower but took another wife and had six children.
- C. The Mention of Keturah is very perfunctory. She is mentioned only once and Abraham when he is buried is buried alongside Sarah who remains the true matriarch.
- D. Only two of the sons have their offspring detailed. This could mean that the others had no children but it is more likely that the text merely remains silent of their progeny preferring to emphasize those who had the most direct impact on the history of Israel. In particular the genealogy listed here focuses on the origins of the Semitic peoples of Arabia with whom Israel interacted.
- E. Despite these other children, Isaac remains the child of the promise through whom the covenant with God is and shall be realized. Abraham gave them gifts etc. but the inheritance goes to Isaac. Further Abraham “sent them away” from Isaac to live in the surrounding regions of Arabia

II. Death -

- A. *7 These are the days of the years of Abraham's life, a hundred and seventy-five years. 8 Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people. 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 which Abraham purchased from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried, with Sarah his wife.*
- B. After so many Chapters with Abraham we bid him a fond and rather sudden farewell.
- C. A fascinating note is that both Isaac and Ishmael bury Abraham. He had been expelled but now he is here for the burial. Had there been some sort of reconciliation? It is uncertain but these early texts do not deny but factually report

that all the Semitic peoples are joined in Abraham. Sadly, this true kinship would later suffer and be set aside, but the reminder is important. It is equally important for all of us to remember that whatever conflicts emerge in the human family, it is ultimately a family dispute for we, in Adam and Eve are all brethren.

- D. The reference to being gathered to his people is probably a reference to Sheol which we can discuss in class.

III. Domicile -

- A. ***11 After the death of Abraham God blessed Isaac his son. And Isaac dwelt at Beerlahairoi.***
- B. Beerlahairoi. - literally, the well of a living Seer. This location was the same place where Hagar had her vision and she had named it. Here is yet another link with Ishmael.

IV. Descendants II -

- A. ***12 These are the descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's maid, bore to Abraham. 13 These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, named in the order of their birth: Nebaioth, the first-born of Ishmael; and Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, 14 Mishma, Dumah, Massa, 15 Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. 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, a hundred and thirty-seven years; he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his kindred.) 18 They dwelt from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria; he settled over against all his people.***

The Jacob Saga Conflict and Conquest

I. Basics -

- A. We have closed the Abraham Saga and now open the Jacob saga. Little has been said of Isaac. He serves more as a bridge to Jacob who will be our focus.
- B. Jacob will become the father of the 12 tribes of Israel. The portrait of him is not a flattering one. He is crafty, cunning and a wheeler-dealer! His life seems one of unremitting conflict.
- C. Conflict all round. Here in miniature in its first brief episode is the constituent plot of the whole Jacob cycle. Let us attempt a short summary.
 1. There is the conflict, just underlined, between Isaac and Rebekah.
 2. There is the central conflict between Jacob and Esau which breaks out openly in chapter 27.
 3. There is the festering conflict between Jacob and his uncle Laban which takes up the bulk of chapters 29-31, with within it a conflict of jealousy between Jacob's wives Rachel and Leah. We have to wait till the end of chapter 31 before a hopeful note is sounded with the rather grudging treaty between Jacob and Laban, to be followed in chapter 33 by the more generous reconciliation between Jacob and Esau, though it should be noted that the generosity was mainly on Esau's side.
 4. But even after that the family was anything but united. Chapter 34 (The crime against Joseph) contains a horrible story of lust and revenge which shows Jacob's sons unrepentantly vindictive and greatly distresses their father.
 5. And almost the last recorded incident in the lengthy epic is a report (35:22) of Reuben, Jacob's oldest son, lying with Bilhah, his father's concubine.
 6. The last is the departure of Esau (36:6) as "he went into a land away from his brother". None one could pretend that we have in all this a story with a happy ending.
 7. But there is more to it than that. Perhaps the most perturbing events of all in the epic are the intermittent appearance of God to Jacob. Each of them—at Bethel (28:10–22), at Mahanaim (32:1), at Peniel (32:24—32) and again at Bethel (35:9–15)—takes place at a moment of crisis in his life, and each of them seems—at least on the surface—to have as its purpose to comfort and strengthen him and assure him that God was on his side. It is even suggested at Peniel—where Jacob was renamed Israel—that, having won his contest with Laban and being on the point of winning is contest with Esau, Jacob was able to wrestle with God and "defeat" him too. So to the human conflicts which fill this pulsating epic we have to add a conflict between Jacob and God. And he wins them all!

II. Bridge

A. ***19 These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham was the father of Isaac, 20 and Isaac was forty years old when he took to wife Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean.***

B. This is a review (by a different editor, P) of the material covered in chapter 24 in some detail.

III. Barrenness

A. ***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.***

B. Barrenness seems to be a problem in Abraham's family tree! But Rebekah does finally conceive after 20 years of marriage to Isaac. At 60 years of age Isaac becomes the father of twins

IV. Battle

A. ***22 The children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is thus, why do I live?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. 23 And the LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples, born of you, shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger."***

B. Here is the first sign of trouble, a great struggle is within her. So much so that she would prefer death to it.

C. Yet God explains to her that the struggle is an international one! Ultimately two nations are within her. What would later be Israel and Edom.

D. The prophecy is that one of her two sons will overpower the other and that the ordinary will be reversed: the older will serve the younger. Normally the oldest son received the inheritance and the leadership mantle of the family.

V. Birth

A. *24 When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. 25 The first came forth red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they called his name Esau. 26 Afterward his brother came forth, and his hand had taken hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.*

B. As always with Hebrew names, there is significance.

1. **Esau** - he came out of the womb red and hairy. The Hebrew word for hairy is se'ar from which Esau is derived. He might as easily have been called Edom because of his redness. The nation which later descended from him was in fact called Edom. (It is interesting that he later desires red pottage). The land of Edom also had another name rooted in Esau's name: Se'ir.
2. **Jacob** - the verb in Jacob's name means to follow at the heel. His grasping on the way out of the womb would also later be his modus vivendi wherein he grasped at life and seized opportunity.

VI. Bination

A. *27 When the boys grew up, Esau was a skilful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. 28 Isaac loved Esau, because he ate of his game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.*

B. The two boys have different personalities and skills

1. Esau is a hunter who moves about.
2. Jacob a farmer or possibly a shepherd who dwells close to home

C. The divisions between Jacob and Esau actually originate with his parents who each favor a different child.

1. Isaac favors Esau since he provides him with meat and possibly since he is the firstborn. But the text emphasizes the fact that Jacob liked the meat Esau provided.
2. Rebekah favors Jacob. The reason is not stated but perhaps she has the oracle from God in mind.

VII. Birthright

A. *29 Once when Jacob was boiling pottage, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. 30 And Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red pottage, for I am famished!" (Therefore his name was called Edom.) 31 Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." 32 Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" 33 Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. 34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.*

- B. The Image of both brothers is sad indeed.
1. Jacob takes advantage of his brother's famished state. He was probably quite hungry after an unsuccessful hunting mission. He may not have eaten for days. In this needy state Jacob makes him swear away his birthright for a meal which he should have charitably provided for free.
 2. Esau, according to the text "despised his birthright." The Letter to the Hebrews comments further on Esau:
 - a. Heb 12:14 *Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.*
 - b. Hence the story of Esau is an allegory that reminds us never to despise our inheritance (heaven) for any worldly gain. Even if we have to starve, or forfeit our life, never sell heaven for the world or any worldly pleasure!
- C. Both brothers were wrong. One sinned against charity, the other against faith.