

## Genesis 25 — Good Ending, Tough Beginning

**April 17, 2016**

If you are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. It is great to have you! As a church, we are studying the book of Genesis. Today we continue our study in Genesis 25. This is a unique chapter. It is not one story but two. It is the story of the good ending to Abraham's life and the story of the tough beginning to the married life of Isaac and Rebekah.

It is a chapter that teaches us three main things. It teaches us about God's faithfulness to his promises. It also teaches us about God's completely undeserved sovereign grace. It lastly teaches us about our responsibility in the midst of it all.

We will begin our study with the ending of Abraham's life.

### Abraham

Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. Jokshan fathered Sheba and Dedan. The sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah. Abraham gave all he had to Isaac. 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. Genesis 25:1–6 (ESV)

**When did Abraham marry Keturah?** After the death of Sarah, Abraham lived another 38 years. He had enough time to get remarried to a wife named Keturah and raise another family. Some scholars think he married Keturah while Sarah was still alive; others think he married her after Sarah died. We don't know for sure either way. One thing we do know is while Abraham had a hard

time bearing children with Sarah, he didn't have a hard time with Keturah. They had six children together.

**Why did Moses detail the lineage of some of Keturah's sons to the second and third generation?** I will not

spend time going through all of Keturah's kids but these kids became different tribal



groups and nations that the Israelites ran into as they returned to the Promised Land from Egypt. This helps people realize some of the folks they run into are their relatives!

One of reasons Moses wrote about the Midianites was because Moses married a Midianite woman (Exodus 3:1; 18:1-2). The Midianites are also descendants of Abraham, but through Keturah.

**Was Keturah a wife or a concubine?** Verse 1 says she was a wife but verse 6 says Abraham gave gifts to his concubines and sent them away. There is a lot of discussion on this by the scholars. Here is my take. Keturah was also mentioned in 1 Chronicles 1:32. In that text, she is called a concubine. A concubine is a second-class wife, a.k.a., girlfriend. She was a type of wife without the rights of a wife. Hagar would have been a concubine. Keturah would have been a concubine. Abraham's children through Hagar and Keturah were sent away so Isaac was the undisputed heir to Abraham's house. In addition, the Hebrew word for *wife* in verse 1 can mean wife, woman or female. Keturah was another woman in Abraham's life but she was not on the status of Sarah. This raises another question many of you are asking.

**Why did Abraham and many people in the Old Testament have multiple women?** Some of you guys think that would be a great idea but you wouldn't say it out loud or your wife would kill you. Why wasn't one woman enough? Genesis 3 tells us God's plan is one man and one woman. When polygamy first came on the scene it was in Genesis 4:19 with Lamech, a super-wicked dude. Polygamy was not the way God designed things, and it is not a good thing. It began with a very depraved dude. In addition, whenever we see polygamy in the Old Testament, it always ends up in disaster. Solomon's heart was led away from God by his many foreign wives. The New Testament tells us Christian men are to be one-woman men, especially the church leaders. That is God's desire. That is God's plan. A one-woman man is not a man who was only married once. It is a man who reserves his heart and his passions for only one woman, his wife. Today, the great temptation for men is not to be polygamists by marrying multiple women but through the Internet to imagine intimacy with multiple women. That is not God's plan. God's plan for his men is that we are one-woman men.

If polygamy is not part of God's plan, why did God tolerate it with Abraham? Remember that God took Abraham out of paganism. Abraham didn't have a Bible. Abraham didn't have many details about God and his plan. Abraham was just figuring things out. Polygamy and concubines were common in his day. God didn't dump everything on Abraham like an avalanche from a dump truck in one day. God slowly revealed his will and ironed things out in Abraham and his descendant's lives.

Why are the details about Keturah and her kids included? God promised Abraham in Genesis 17:4 that he would be the father of many nations, not just one nation.

Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. Genesis 17:4 (ESV)

God kept his promise for Abraham to father a multitude of nations through Keturah. Abraham's kids through Keturah became different nations and peoples in the ancient world.

These are the days of the years of Abraham's life, 175 years. Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people. 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, the field that Abraham purchased from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried, with Sarah his wife. After the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac his son. And Isaac settled at Beer-lahai-roi. Genesis 25:7–11 (ESV)

God promised Abraham in Genesis 15:15 that he would live to an old age.

As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. Genesis 15:15 (ESV)

Did God keep his promise to Abraham? Yes! Abraham lived to a ripe old age of 175, just as God promised. God kept another promise.

After he died, it says he was *gathered to his people* before he was buried. Gathered to his people does not mean Abraham was buried in the same tomb as Sarah. *Gathered to his people* means his spirit went home to be with the rest of his ancestors that had a relationship with God. This is the first time we see this phrase in the Bible, but it is not the last. Abraham's body died. He continued to live after death. Jesus reinforced this point.

And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?" He is not God of the dead, but of the living. Matthew 22:31–32 (ESV)

Jesus said, “The Bible speaks in the present tense about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob even though they are dead because they are still living after their deaths. Each one of us will live after our deaths.”

In the Old Testament the place where the dead go after death is called Sheol. In the New Testament, it is called Hades. Sheol and Hades are the same. One is Hebrew; the other is Greek. The rabbis pictured Hades as having two compartments separated by a great chasm. In Luke 16, Jesus affirmed this two compartment view of life after death. One compartment was a place of torment for those who died apart from God, the other a place of bliss — also called Abraham’s bosom, a place of peace. Those who die knowing and following God were able to hang out with Abraham.

The Bible implies when Christ rose from the dead he emptied the place of peace in Hades for those who know God — called Abraham’s bosom — and brought the Old Testament saints home to heaven to be with God. This is why Paul said that when Christians die they are absent from the body but present with the Lord. We die and go to heaven to be with Jesus. We don’t go to the compartment of peace — called Abraham’s bosom — in Hades. We go to heaven.

Abraham continued living after his death and he was eventually brought home to be with God through Christ’s resurrection. In the same way, we will go on living after death, either with God because of our faith in Christ or apart from him for all of eternity.

The ultimate final resting place for Christians is the new creation which is heaven and earth combined and completely free from sin. The final resting place of those who die apart from Christ is known as hell or the Lake of Fire.

The main point is God was faithful to keep his promise to Abraham. He died as an old man, full of years, just as God promised and even though his body died, he was gathered to his people and kept on living.

These are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's servant, bore to Abraham. 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, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names, by their villages and by their encampments, twelve princes according to their tribes. (These are the years of the life of Ishmael: 137 years. He breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people.) They settled from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria. He settled over against all his kinsmen. Genesis 25:12–18 (ESV)

We saw that God kept his promises to Abraham and made him the father of many nations through Keturah. God kept his promise to Abraham to live to a ripe old age. God also made promises to Abraham when he sent Hagar and Ishmael away. God promised to make Ishmael into a great nation even though Abraham sent him and his mother, Hagar, into the desert with just a container of water in Genesis 21:13.

Did God keep his promise? Yes! Ishmael married and had 12 sons who fathered 12 tribes. These tribes eventually became known as the Arabs. Just like God promised, Ishmael was a wild donkey of a man who lived in opposition to his brother. As Genesis 25:18 says, Ishmael's descendants kept the same character and were rebellious, always fighting everyone. Not much has changed. All we need to do is turn on the news.

God faithfully kept all the promises he made to Abraham. He made him the father of many nations through Keturah. He made Ishmael into the father of 12 tribes and into the Arab people we know of today. God let Abraham live until a ripe old age, just as he said. God kept his promises to Abraham no matter how impossible they seemed to keep.

The only promise it looked like God failed to keep was giving Abraham the Promised Land. Lest we miss it, God promised in Genesis 15:15 that he would give the Promised Land to Abraham's descendants in the fourth generation, after his descendants were mistreated in a land that was not their own.

Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." Genesis 15:13–16 (ESV)

The one message we get from Abraham's death we can apply to our lives is God kept every single promise he made to Abraham no matter how impossible they seemed to fulfill.

In the same way, every promise God makes to us in his Word we can have absolute confidence that God will keep, no matter how impossible the odds.

This was a great set-up for Isaac's life. God was faithful and gave children to the descendants of Hagar and Keturah. If God was faithful to Abraham and gave him children through Keturah and Hagar — who did not bear God's chosen son — how much more will he be faithful to Isaac, the son of the promise?

## Isaac

Last week we saw Isaac was a little slow getting a wife. He didn't marry until he was 40 because he refused to marry a Canaanite woman. He was willing to wait to meet and marry Rebekah. She was probably 20 years his junior. She was strong, drop-dead gorgeous, energetic, athletic and godly. Through God's providential ordering of life, she answered every part of the prayer of Abraham's servant. Since God's providence is God's guidance, she was without question the right wife for Isaac.

Last week, when she left home, she left home with a prayer from her relatives that she would be blessed and become the mother of many children.

Everything looks like it was set for her to start popping out the kids, but everything came to a screeching halt.

These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham fathered Isaac, and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife. And Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren. And the Lord granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived. Genesis 25:19–21 (ESV)

We don't see it in these verses but in a moment we will see that Rebekah remained childless until Isaac was 60, that is 20 years of infertility. Can you imagine the pressure? All of the other sons of Abraham's concubines were sent away. They had no trouble conceiving. They were giving birth to entire nations. All of God's providence pointed to Rebekah as the right wife. She was beautiful, healthy, energetic and just oozing with femininity, but she couldn't get pregnant.

This is the same situation his father faced with his mother. Thankfully Isaac learned. He did not go out and get a girlfriend — a concubine, a rival wife.

Instead he gave himself to prayer. He prayed for a long time, 20 years. The word for prayer in the Hebrew means he prayed earnestly for 20 years.

I take my hat off to Isaac. That is a long time to consistently pray about something that felt hopeless. When you face hard times, do you continue to pray about something that looks hopeless or do you just give up?

Why did God make Isaac and Rebekah wait for 20 years before they conceived? Why did God put them through the long trial of infertility?

God puts struggles into our lives to build our faith and love in him. For Abraham, Isaac's father, it was the struggle of waiting a long time for Sarah to conceive that built his faith. Next, it was the struggle of God calling Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, the only son he loved, on Mt. Moriah. God put trials and struggles into Abraham's life to teach him to rely on God. Those trials were used by God to build Abraham's faith and trust in God. God was now using the trial of infertility, to get Isaac on his knees so he would call out in faith and trust in God for 20 years. Isaac has all the possessions he wanted. He was filthy rich from Abraham's estate. God allowed him to struggle with something money couldn't fix — infertility. The infertility of Rebekah built Rebekah's faith and trust in God. It built Isaac's trust in God. Thankfully, Isaac didn't take a girlfriend on the side, like his father did, to solve the problem.

What happened in the Bible is still happening. God, out of his love for us, will put us in situations where we need to rely on him instead of ourselves. He will put us in situations where money can't solve the problem, only God can solve the problem. God will put you in situations where wealth can't help, only God can

help. That may be infertility. That may be sickness. That may be depression. We hate those things but those are the things God uses to build our faith because they teach us to rely on God and we see God come to the rescue in ways we never expect. God loves us too much to let us live in perpetual ease and comfort.

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:2–4 (ESV)

Trials are allowed by God to bring about spiritual maturity. They grow us in our faith and trust in God. That is why Isaac and Rebekah faced the trial of infertility. That is why we face our trials.

The children struggled together within her, and she said, “If it is thus, why is this happening to me?” So she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger.” When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak, so they called his name Esau. Afterward his brother came out with his hand holding Esau’s heel, so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them. When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob. Genesis 25:22–28 (ESV)

Rebekah finally became pregnant, but she wasn’t happy to be pregnant. A professional wrestling match took place in her belly. It was MMA fight club. It was a battle in her belly.

Moms know what I am talking about. This is what it was like for Sarah. The difference is she was pregnant with twins, and it wasn’t an occasional punch. It was like a war in her belly.

One guy inside her was trying to choke out the other guy with the umbilical cord. The other guy was giving his brother upper cut punches to the chin. Can you imagine the violence of her pregnancy when she waited 20 years to get pregnant but then couldn't stand pregnancy because of the fighting in her belly? You know this was fierce.

She was so concerned about the belly battle that she went to inquire of God. The Bible doesn't tell us how she did this. My guess is she made this a matter of prayer. "God, what is going on in my gut?" God did the ultrasound and told her she was pregnant with fraternal twins. They were not just two boys but they were two nations. Here is the key, the older would serve the younger.

When it came time for her to give birth, the first little guy that came out was a red hairy dude. He looked like Chewbacca from Star Wars. They named him Esau, which means hairy one. The second guy to come out was holding Esau's heel as if to pull him back in and say, "I am going first." They named him Jacob which means to grasp. While Esau was a fuzzy guy, Jacob was a smooth guy. These boys were not just opposites in temperament, they were opposite in appearance.

These boys could not have grown up to be any more different. Esau became an outdoorsman, a hunter, a guy that couldn't sit still. He looked like Willie Robertson. He had decoys, camouflage, and jars of deer urine in his bedroom. Jacob became a quiet guy who loved to stay at home and help his mother in the kitchen. Esau was the country boy. Jacob was the refined domestic boy.

To make matters worse, Isaac and Rebekah played favorites. Isaac favored Esau, because he was a hunter and he liked his wild game. Rebekah favored Jacob, who hung out with her in the kitchen and helped her make sure dinner was ready.

Note to self on this one: Don't play favorites with your kids. Treat your kids equally. Treating your kids with favoritism will not go well. It will only lead to problems and resentment. That is exactly what happened in this house.

I want to pause and take a few minutes to look outside of Genesis. Before Jacob and Esau were even born, God said, the older would serve the younger. Things would switch after birth. Even though Esau was born first, Jacob would rule over him. Even though Isaac favored Esau, things would turn around and Jacob would be in charge. Look what Paul said about this in Romans.

And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— she was told, "The older will serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." Romans 9:10–15 (ESV)

Paul taught us about something in the Bible called the doctrine of election. When we think about election, we think of Clinton, Sanders, Trump and Cruz, where we get to vote. When the Bible talks about election, it means something different. It is about our future but there is only one vote and God gets it. God chooses to show mercy on whoever he wants and to restrain his mercy from whoever he wants. Even before Jacob and Esau were born or had done anything good or bad, God decided to favor one over the other. Paul used the

example of Jacob and Esau to make his point that God decided to extend his saving grace through Jesus to some people and not to others just like he chose to give special love to Jacob to rule over Esau even before they were born.

Are we still responsible for our choices? Yes. When we hear the good news of Jesus, do we have to choose to follow Jesus? No!

In another ultimate sense, we can't choose to respond to the good news of Jesus unless God, in his mercy and grace, has chosen to soften our hearts to understand the good news of Jesus. If God draws us to himself, he draws us to himself not because of anything good we have done or anything we do or don't deserve, it is only because of his undeserved mercy to us, just like his undeserved mercy to Jacob over Esau.

The gospel message is offered to all, but it is only affective for some. It is only affective towards those that God in his undeserved mercy chooses to draw to himself, just like he chose Jacob over Esau.

While God can choose to show his mercy to whomever he wants, if you were to try to find a pattern, it seems God usually shows his mercy to the underdogs and the undeserving.

Esau was Isaac's first-born son, but as we will see in a moment, God flipped it around and made Jacob, the underdog, the favored son instead of Esau. It is not because Jacob is a better guy than Esau. Jacob may even have been a worse guy than Esau. Jacob was a trickster, a schemer and deceiver and even lied to his own father as he died. Both Esau and Jacob had major

character flaws. Neither of them deserved God's grace but God chose to be gracious to one and not the other, but neither of them deserved any grace.

Look what Paul said about God's heart for the underdog.

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 1 Corinthians 1:27–29 (ESV)

God chooses to show mercy to whomever he wants. Nobody is deserving. If there is a pattern, he usually shows mercy to the undeserving underdogs, which is good news for us, because that is what most of us are here this morning.

How did things flip around? How did the younger son take the place of the older son? This is a two-part story. Here is the first part. The second part we will get to in two weeks.

Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. And Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!" (Therefore his name was called Edom.) Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright now." Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" Jacob said, "Swear to me now." So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright. Genesis 25:29–34 (ESV)

Jacob was cooking in the kitchen. He was doing his Betty Crocker special recipe when Esau came in from hunting. Esau was famished and exhausted. He saw Jacob making some red stew in the kitchen. Red in Hebrew is *edom*. Esau also had red hair so between his red hair and his famous bad choice with red stew, his descendants were called the Edomites, the red guys.

Esau said, "Give me some stew. I am dying of hunger." Jacob said, "I will give you some stew if you will sell me your birthright."

What was the birthright? The first-born son in that culture had the birthright. That meant Esau, as the firstborn, would get double the inheritance, that is two-thirds of his father's multi-million dollar estate, plus Esau would get control of the family plus he would be the one through whom God's promises would come. The birthright was a big deal. In two weeks we will see about something called the blessing. That was the formal bestowal of the birthright at the death of the father. Having the birthright is like holding a million dollar check. Having the blessing is cashing that check.

Esau said, "I am dying of hunger, what use is the birthright to me?" And he gave away his birthright for a bowl of stew! That is crazy!

All Esau could think of was short-term satisfaction — a bowl of soup — not the long-term value of his birthright.

Esau saw little value in being the son of the promise. He saw little value in God's future blessings. He saw little value in his future inheritance of millions of dollars. He saw little value in heading the family in his elderly years. All he could think of was living for the satisfaction of the moment.

This is the way many young adults think and the way many mature adults live. Live for the weekend. Don't save for the future. Don't prepare for retirement. If Esau had a credit card, he would have maxed it out the first weekend.

Hebrews also talks about Esau.

...that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. Hebrews 12:16 (ESV)

The idea is don't be like Esau and just live for the satisfaction of moment. Keep a long-term perspective about what you do and how it will affect tomorrow. The book of Hebrews says just as Esau gave away something of immense value — something worth millions of dollars for a bowl of soup to satisfy his physical hunger — don't let your sexual appetite, which burns like hunger, lead you to give away something of immense value, like your virginity or the intimacy that should be saved for your spouse on the wedding night.

Esau lived for the moment. God knew that would destroy him. Jacob was no better. He was a trickster and a cheat who didn't look out for his brother but stole from his brother and later his father. It was not that one brother was more deserving than the other. Both were totally messed up. God chose to be gracious to one and not the other because God is God and he can choose to extend his undeserved grace to whomever he wants.

*“I have loved you,” says the Lord. But you say, “How have you loved us?” “Is not Esau Jacob’s brother?” declares the Lord. “Yet I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated...” Malachi 1:2–3 (ESV)*

Paul's point in Romans 10 was the only reason anybody has any good thing from God is his undeserved grace. The only way any of us are saved is by undeserved grace. All of us are like Jacob. We are tricksters and cheats. The only thing we have going for us is God's undeserved love through Jesus Christ.

If your heart is soft to God today, it is not because you are smarter than others. It is not because you deserve God's love more than others. The only reason your heart is soft toward God and you trust in Jesus Christ is because God loved you when you didn't deserve it. Today, let that drive you to worship. The only reason we know God and love God is because when we didn't deserve

it he loved us. Even now we still don't deserve it but he still loves us. All glory to God for his undeserved grace.

### Applications:

What can we take home from these verse for our week?

1. **God always keeps his promises.** God kept his promises to Abraham. He lived to a ripe old age. He fathered many nations. Ishmael also fathered many nations, just as God promised. No matter how impossible it appears for God to keep his promises, he will be true to his word.
2. **God will put trials in our life to grow our faith.** God loves us too much to let us live a perfect, care-free life. God let Isaac and Rebekah struggle with barrenness for 20 years to grow their faith and keep Isaac on his knees as he desperately prayed for his wife. He will do the same in each of our lives.
3. **God can choose to show mercy to some and not others.** As God said in Malachi 1:2-3, "Jacob I loved but Esau I hated." Why? It was God's choice. The softness of your heart toward God and his son, Jesus Christ, is a gift from God. It is not something we deserve. Thank God that he was kind to cause us to see him and love him.
4. **Don't be an Esau and live for the pleasure of the moment.** Live for the blessing of the future.



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