



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 descendants of Dedan were the Asshurites, the Letushites and the Leummites. ⁴ The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida and Eldaah. All these were descendants of Keturah.

⁵ Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac. ⁶ But while he was still living, he gave gifts to the sons of his concubines and sent them away from his son Isaac to the land of the east.

⁷ Altogether, Abraham lived a hundred and seventy-five years. ⁸ Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people. ⁹ His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, ¹⁰ the field Abraham had bought from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried with his wife Sarah. ¹¹ After Abraham's death, God blessed his son Isaac, who then lived near Beer Lahai Roi.

¹² This is the account of Abraham's son Ishmael, whom Sarah's maidservant, Hagar the Egyptian, bore to Abraham.

¹³ These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, listed in the order of their birth: Nebaioth the firstborn of Ishmael, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, ¹⁴ Mishma, Dumah, Massa, ¹⁵ Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah. ¹⁶ These were the sons of Ishmael, and these are the names of the twelve tribal rulers according to their settlements and camps. ¹⁷ Altogether, Ishmael lived a hundred and thirty-seven years. He breathed his last and died, and he was gathered to his people. ¹⁸ His descendants settled in the area from Havilah to Shur, near the border of Egypt, as you go toward Asshur. And they lived in hostility toward all their brothers.

¹⁹ This is the account of Abraham's son Isaac.

Abraham became the father of Isaac, ²⁰ and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram and sister of Laban the Aramean.

²¹ Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. ²² The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD.

²³ The LORD said to her,

"Two nations are in your womb,

*and two peoples from within you will be separated;
one people will be stronger than the other,
and the older will serve the younger.”*

²⁴ *When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. ²⁵ The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau ²⁶ After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau’s heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them.*

²⁷ *The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents. ²⁸ Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.*

²⁹ *Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. ³⁰ He said to Jacob, “Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I’m famished!” (That is why he was also called Edom.)*

³¹ *Jacob replied, “First sell me your birthright.”*

³² *“Look, I am about to die,” Esau said. “What good is the birthright to me?”*

³³ *But Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob.*

³⁴ *Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left.*

So Esau despised his birthright.

It’s hard to believe, but we have been studying Genesis for 13 months. It took us five months to cover 100 years of Abraham’s life. This morning the pace will pick up significantly as we will cover 40 years of Isaac’s life. First, let’s review how many chapters there are in the book of Genesis. Does anyone remember? I am not referring to the chapter divisions put in almost 3,000 years later, but the chapter divisions that Moses used. There are ten of these chapters and are as follows.

Ch. 1—2:4 This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

Ch. 2—5:1 This is the written account of Adam’s line

Ch. 3—6:9 This is the account of Noah

Ch. 4—10:1 This is the account of Shem, Ham and Japheth, Noah’s sons

Ch. 5—11:10 This is the account of Shem

Ch. 6—11:27 This is the account of Terah

Ch. 7—25:12 This is the account of Abraham’s son Ishmael

Ch. 8—25:19 This is the account of Abraham’s son Isaac

Ch. 9—36:1 This is the account of Esau

Ch. 10—37:2 This is the account of Jacob

We will be completing “chapter six,” breezing past chapter seven and then jumping into chapter eight. Chapter six comes to an end in the first eleven verses. We learn that Abraham took a second wife and bore him six more sons. All of these sons were given a share in the inheritance and were sent away, just as Ishmael and his mother were sent away. Interestingly, the text indicates not just that they were sent away, but that they were sent “away from his son Isaac.” Before Isaac was born, Abraham looked forward to the promise of a son and after his birth he protected the promised son.

For a great summary of Abraham's life, we once again return to the famous chapter of Hebrews 11.

¹³ All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

I love this passage because it makes explicit what is implicit in Genesis. Moses does not clearly say that Abraham was living by faith when he died, but if you carefully consider the whole picture in Genesis you can see that this is precisely what he was doing. When he died he only owned a small piece of land within the Promised Land. When he died he had Isaac and two grandsons, which was hardly descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and grains of sand on the seashore. The great promises of God were not his possession when he died. He barely had a down payment of the promises. On his deathbed, Abraham could say, "This place where Sarah is buried will one day spread out to include the whole land of Canaan. My two grandsons will grow to become a large nation who will live in this expansive land. He knew those things would happen. He had the vision to be able to see them in his mind's eye—the countless thousands of people stretched out over pieces of land that he had visited and even beyond the borders of what he had seen. But here is the amazing thing. Abraham was not just looking for the fulfillment of land and people and blessings. The land and the grandsons were downpayments on the greater land and greater generations, but even the complete literal fulfillment was not Abraham's final anticipation. He was longing for a heavenly country. Look at verse thirteen again. Abraham was not merely an alien and stranger in the land of Canaan, which he was, but he considered himself an alien and stranger *on the earth!* He was not longing for the earthly promises but understood that the earthly promises were also looking forward to heavenly promises.

Just as was Abraham, you and I are living in the shadowlands. We are living between two worlds. We are living between the promise and fulfillment. We are longing for a better country—a heavenly one. There's an old saying—"he's so heavenly minded he's no earthly good." It is possible to dream of heaven and not care how you live right now, but that is not the right way to think of our heavenly country. A person that is heavenly minded continually has an eternal perspective. They realize that they can let go of earthly treasures because the heavenly treasure is infinitely greater. Abraham let go of his home and followed the Lord to the new land. Abraham let go of his family and left them behind in his father's country. Abraham let go of Ishmael. Abraham let go of Isaac because he knew that God could raise him from the dead. Everything we let go of in this life will be rewarded many times over in the next. In Mark 10:29 Jesus said, *No one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life.*

Part of what it means to have an eternal perspective is that we must let go of earthly treasures and relationships, but sometimes it is harder to have an eternal perspective while we still have these things. Abraham was exceedingly wealthy. He had flocks and servants beyond number. He had all that the world had to offer but it did not satisfy. He was thankful for it and acknowledged that it all came from the hand of God, but these treasures did not satisfy his longing for heaven. Because of sin and death we will always be giving up things in this life. We will have loss and pain, but our greater challenge is not just letting go of things, but to live in prosperity and not hold onto these things.

Before we leave the chapter on Abraham, we need to remember how far he had come in his lifetime. A great summary is given in Joshua 24.

Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods. But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the River and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. (Joshua 24:2-3)

Abraham grew up in a pagan land in a pagan family. They worshipped the ancient gods of the Mesopotamian region. Notice how Joshua described Abraham's rescue from paganism. "But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the river." Abraham obeyed the Lord when he was asked to leave but at the same time it can be said that the Lord took him from the land. Abraham was lifted out of paganism like a man is lifted by a helicopter from certain drowning in a raging sea. Abraham was rescued but his brother Nahor was not. Have you ever thought about that before? Why was Abraham chosen but not Nahor? Here is the principle which summarizes Abraham's life: Abraham and Nahor had the same father; one lived under the promise and the other did not. We will see this pattern repeated.

"Chapter seven" is only seven verses long and describes the descendants of Ishmael. Though Ishmael did not live under the promise either, he seems to have a more prominent place than Abraham's other six sons because he made the journey back to help Isaac bury their father Abraham. Nevertheless, there was no love lost between Isaac and the descendants of Ishmael. Verse eighteen tells us that Ishmael and *his descendants...lived in hostility toward all their brothers*. This should not be surprising because the Lord predicted this in Ge 16:12, *...and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers*. Ishmael's life can be summarized by comparison to his brother Isaac. Isaac and Ishmael had the same father; one lived under the promise and the other did not. Do you see the pattern that is forming? Why would God choose Abraham but not Nahor? Why would God choose Isaac but not Ishmael? Hang on to that thought for a while.

"Chapter eight" begins at verse 19—*This is the account of Abraham's son Isaac*. Chapter six ends when Isaac was 75 years old and buried his father, but chapter eight looks backward and picks up when he was still 40 years old. Though they had just met when Rebekah stepped off of the camel in the last chapter, we are told at the end of chapter 24 that Isaac loved Rebekah. Did they fall in love at first sight? There is no such thing as love at first sight. There is such a thing as infatuation at first sight and there is most definitely lust at first sight, but love cannot happen in an instant. He could not have instantly loved her so it must have developed over time. Isaac inherited all of Abraham's possessions so we know that he was wealthy. Isaac has a gorgeous

new bride because Genesis tells us that she was very beautiful. Isaac and Rebekah had the world at their feet—except for one thing—Rebekah was unable to conceive children.

Rebekah's first problem was trying to get pregnant. She was barren for twenty years until Isaac prayed to the Lord on her behalf. Rebekah's first problem was solved by the graciousness of the Lord and she became pregnant, but her second problem was trying to live with her pregnancy. Verse 22 says that *the babies jostled each other within her*. When you read this description, don't think about the gentle kicks that mom's feel at times. Those are "love taps" and although they may be uncomfortable at times, they are minor inconvenience. What was happening within Rebekah's womb was anything but ordinary. The word that is translated as "jostled" in the NIV in all other versions is translated as *struggled*. But even this word does not capture the true meaning. The word used to describe the babies struggle is usually translated as abuse or crush. It is sometimes used to describe skulls being crushed.¹ These were no love taps. The babies fought furiously in Rebekah's womb. This was such a struggle that she may have recognized as some kind of sign from the Lord. She asked, "Why is this happening to me?" It was so unusual that she went to inquire of the Lord.

The Lord answered her,
*"Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you will be separated;
one people will be stronger than the other,
and the older will serve the younger."*

This prophecy would be fulfilled throughout the centuries. The two nations symbolized in her womb were the nations of Israel who came through Jacob and the nation of Edom who arose through the line of Esau. The Edomites would be oppressors of Israel for centuries but would eventually come under the heel of Israel and would serve her. The struggle in the womb between the two boys continued until the moment of birth. Esau, the hairy one, was born first with Jacob so close behind that he grasped his brother's heel on the way out of the womb. Any obstetrician or for that matter, any mother who has ever given birth will tell you that such a scene seems almost impossible, for several reasons. First, as a newborn, Isaac would not have had the strength to actually hold onto his brother's heel while being squeezed out of the birth canal. Second, the head of a newborn is approximately one-third the size of the baby, therefore a newborn's arm can barely reach past its own head let alone grasp something above its head. Could Isaac's arm have emerged before his head? Was he born feet first holding onto the heel between his own legs? Like so many stories in the Bible, the precise details are not recorded for us. We are left to assume that it happened and the unusualness of the event reminds us that this was not an ordinary happening. God intended it to happen this way, just as the struggle, abuse and head banging in the womb was part of the sovereign plan as laid out in the prophecy given to Rebekah.

The boys grew up and quickly revealed their vastly different personalities. *Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents.* Let me show you a [short video clip of a modern day Esau](#). Brothers often follow after one another and the younger will try to copy what the older boy is doing. Twins tend to be more similar than they are different so the two extremely different personalities of the twins is indeed a

surprise. Parents, have you had two of your children be so different that you wonder how they could be from the same family? Not that one is necessarily the “black sheep” of the family in a bad way—they are just so different from the rest of the kids. You hear the occasional story of two babies being switched at the hospital and you begin to wonder if somebody did a switcheroo on you.

Jacob and Esau were as different as they come and their parents quickly fell into one of the chief sins of parenting—playing favorites. Isaac loved Esau more because he was a good hunter and could bring him some of that tasty game. Esau seemed to have the personality of a man’s man and was probably more like his father’s personality. Rebekah played the favorite with Jacob, but we are not told why. He was quiet and preferred to stay among the tents so his personality probably matched his mother’s. In his day, cooking was a domestic duty chiefly reserved for women so the very fact that Isaac was cooking a stew when his brother returned from the hunt may shed light on his preference for quiet domestic activities.

On a side note, it is all the more interesting that Jacob would have lived out in the open fields as a shepherd for twenty years, living in the scorching sun and freezing nights so that he could earn Rachel as his wife. He loved her so much that he was willing to do something that was so unlike his basic personality.

Parents, we need to fight our tendency to show the slightest hint of favoritism toward our children. As adults, we tend to naturally gravitate toward other adults who share our interests and even our personalities. A good fisherman can not only sniff out the best fishing hole, he can smell a fellow fisherman a mile away. Quilters love to compare stories and techniques with other quilters. A Packers fan and a Vikings fan may be mortal enemies on the field, but at least they can share together their love for football. This sharing of interests and personalities is a natural tendency for all of us. That is why we need to fight against this natural tendency when it comes to our own children. Some of your kids will be more like you and some will not. Esau was more like Isaac so he loved this son more than his brother. Jacob was more like Rebekah so she loved this son more than his brother. Isaac and Rebekah may have had a genuine love for one another but the way they treated their children was wrought with selfishness and favoritism.

It is quite likely that they were not even aware of this favoritism. It is the author Moses telling us that Rebekah favored Jacob and that Isaac favored Esau. Such confessions were not coming from their own mouth but are given through the pen of Moses. Rebekah may have silently justified her favoritism in light of the prophecy given during her pregnancy—*the older will serve the younger*. Jacob will rule over Esau. This prophecy was confirmed by their birth—Jacob entered this world grasping the heel of his brother. We have already established that this was extremely unusual, possibly bordering on the miraculous. Isaac may have silently justified his favoritism by thinking that a real man goes out into the wild and hunts his food. A real man does not stay among the tents and cook lentil stew. Parents, is it possible that you have a silent, even unknown favoritism among your children? Is it possible that your selfish desires have entered into your mind and in small ways you have a preference for one or another? Do you recall that your parents had a pecking order with you and your brothers and sisters? We must be on guard against this natural tendency.

Interestingly, we are not given any details about the childhood of Jacob and Esau. They seem to go from skull crushing behavior in the womb to selfish struggle as adults. We are familiar with this last scene of the chapter where Jacob tricks Esau into selling his birthright. Jacob acted in deception and Esau acted out of impetuosity. Even in the episode we can see their personalities working themselves out. As a hunter, Esau would have been used to making quick decisions and using his might before his brains. He acted first and thought out the plan later. Jacob was just the opposite. He was a quiet thinker. He may have attempted this ruse more than once. But the point is that he probably planned it out down to the letter. Eventually, he reasoned, Esau would return from one of his game hunts empty-handed and nearly starving to death. We all know how good food smells when we are very hungry. If you get up after eating a heavy meal, you can barely stand the smell of food wafting through the air, but if you are famished, the smell immediately accentuates your hunger.

Jacob acted with careful deception and Esau acted with a careless lack of discernment. We see the sinful side of their personalities and the sinful side of their parents' favoritism all working together to fulfill the prophecy about them—*the older will serve the younger*. Jacob and Esau both had the same father; one lived under the promise and the other did not. Let's review the patterns seen in this chapter.

- Abraham & Nahor had the same father; one lived under the promise and the other did not.
- Isaac & Ishmael had the same father; one lived under the promise and the other did not.
- Jacob & Esau had the same father; one lived under the promise and the other did not.

Why did this happen? Was it fair to consistently choose one and not the other? We will answer these questions more fully next week, but let me draw a comparison to the fact that today is the fourth of July, Independence Day. We rightly celebrate our independence from foreign powers. We rightly celebrate the independent spirit that had made the nation great. But this independence and self reliance has crept into our theology and Christian living. When we become the final arbiter of God's mercy, we put ourselves on the throne as sovereign and mercy becomes a right to be demanded. However, when we recognize that all of God's mercy is his alone to give, that one person can be given grace and the other not, then it causes us to be humble and realize that mercy is not a right, but a gift, else it ceases to be mercy.

This reminds me of a passage I read this week in my personal Bible reading. Near the end of his life, King Jehoshaphat faced an army of three powerful kings coming to destroy Judah. Instead of defaulting to the independence and self reliance of most kings, he recognized his utter dependency of God's sovereign mercy and prayed, *O our God...we do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you* (1 Chron 20:12). Rebekah asked a good question, "Why is this happening to me?" This is a good prayer for dependency—*O our God...we do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you*.

Rich Maurer
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¹ *The verb used here for fetal movements is a strong one and means “to abuse, crush.”* Hamilton, Victor, *The Book of Genesis: Chapter 18-50*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, © 1995, p. 176. Also, *Literally, it is used to describe skulls being smashed or reeds being broken.* Wenham, Gordon, *Word Biblical Commentary, Genesis 16-50*, Thomas Nelson, ©1994, p. 175.