

Comments on Genesis 25

This chapter draws a close to Abraham's life, and also closes the door on all of Abraham's children except for Isaac. The chapter then introduces Isaac's children, Esau and Jacob and begins tracing the history of Abraham's birthright.

1 THEN again Abraham took a wife, and her name [was] Keturah. 2 And she bare him Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah. 3 And Jokshan begat Sheba, and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, and Letushim, and Leummim. 4 And the sons of Midian; Ephah, and Epher, and Hanoch, and Abida, and Eldaah. All these [were] the children of Keturah. 5 And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac. 6 But unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country.

v1-6 After Sarah's death Abraham takes an additional wife and has some more sons, but note he always sends them away from home just as Ishmael was sent away. Obviously this was to avoid disputes over inheritance, as Abraham had willed everything to Isaac (v. 5).

7 And these [are] the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, an hundred threescore and fifteen years. 8 Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full [of years]; and was gathered to his people. 9 And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which [is] before Mamre; 10 The field which Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife. 11 And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac; and Isaac dwelt by the well Lahairoi.

v7-11 Abraham's death is noted, and interestingly enough Ishmael returns to assist Isaac in burying him. It seems likely Isaac had little or no memory of Ishmael from his childhood since he and Hagar were sent away when Isaac was quite young. While it is possible they interacted some afterwards the does not suggest that at all. The reader would have to presume Isaac contacted Ishmael and let him know concerning their father's demise. They were at the very least amiable towards one another.

Note Abraham is buried at the same site as Sarai, something Ishmael might not have been favorable disposed towards. Also note that in v. 11 it is Isaac whom the Lord blesses and not Ishmael, according the events preceding wherein Isaac is chosen over Ishmael.

v8 "and was gathered to his people", the Jewish Publication Society renders this phrase "he was gathered to his kin" and their Torah Commentary on Genesis states:

This phrase, peculiar to the Torah, is also used of Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Aaron, and Moses. An analysis of the contexts in which it is found reveals that it is to be distinguished from death itself because it is employed of Abraham, Aaron and, Moses, none of whom was buried with his forefathers. It is also not identical with interment in general because the report of burial follows this phrase, and the difference between the two is especially blatant in the case of Jacob, who was interred quite a while after being "gathered to his kin". It would seem, therefore, that the existence of this idiom, as of the corresponding figure "to lie down with one's fathers", testifies to a belief that, despite his mortality and perishability, man possesses an immortal element that survives the loss of life. Death is looked upon as a transition to an afterlife where one is united with one's ancestors. This interpretation contradicts the widespread, but apparently erroneous, view that such a notion is unknown in Israel until later times.

12 Now these [are] the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's handmaid, bare unto Abraham: 13 And these [are] the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to their generations: the firstborn of Ishmael, Nebajoth; and Kedar, and Adbeel, and Mibsam, 14 And Mishma, and Dumah, and Massa, 15 Hadar, and Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah: 16 These [are] the sons of Ishmael, and these [are] their names, by their towns, and by their castles; twelve princes according to their nations. 17 And these [are] the years of the life of Ishmael, an hundred and thirty and seven years: and he gave up the ghost and died; and was gathered unto his people. 18 And they dwelt from Havilah unto Shur, that [is] before Egypt, as thou goest toward Assyria: [and] he died in the presence of all his brethren.

v12-18 Ishmael's genealogy is reviewed. This text is apparently located here with Abraham's demise because it is the last time the reader encounters Ishmael alive. As such, his lineage and demise is traced.

The text also serves to effectively terminate the discussion of the other branches of Abraham's lineage. The covenant is to continue through Isaac, so all of Abraham's other children are largely ignored from this point on.

19 And these [are] the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham begat Isaac: 20 And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padanaram, the sister to Laban the Syrian. 21 And Isaac intreated the LORD for his wife, because she [was] barren: and the LORD was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

22 And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If [it be] so, why [am] I thus? And she went to enquire of the LORD. 23 And the LORD said unto her, Two nations [are] in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and [the one] people shall be stronger than [the other] people; and the elder shall serve the younger.

24 And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, [there were] twins in her womb. 25 And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau. 26 And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac [was] threescore years old when she bare them.

v19-34 Abraham's son Isaac (v. 19) is forty years old when he marries Rebecca (v. 20). She is having difficulty conceiving, so Isaac petitions the Lord on her behalf and she conceives (v. 21). However, after she conceives the pregnancy is a difficult one and she wonders if it is worth it, so she prays to the Lord (v. 22). The Lord informs her the struggle in her womb prefigures the struggle her two sons will have throughout their lives and their children's lives (v. 23). When she delivers the two boys (v. 24) the first comes out covered with red hair so he is named "Esau" (v. 25) and the second son comes out grasping the first one's heel so he is called "Jacob" (v. 26).

v19 From this point on through the rest of the Hebrew Bible the history is of Abraham's lineage through Isaac.

v25 "they called his name Esau", The Hebrew "esau" is a synonym of the Seir, which is a play on the Hebrew "se`ar" which translates to the English "hair".

v26 "his name was called Jacob", the name is a play on the Hebrew "ageb" which translates to the English "heel".

27 And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob [was] a plain man, dwelling in tents. 28 And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of [his] venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.

29 And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he [was] faint: 30 And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red [pottage]; for I [am] faint: therefore was his name called Edom. 31 And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. 32 And Esau said, Behold, I [am] at the point to die:

and what profit shall this birthright do to me? 33 And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he swore unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. 34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised [his] birthright.

v27-34. Esau grows up to be a skilled hunter and is Isaac's favored son. Jacob grows up to be a mild-mannered man who tends to stay in the camp and is Rebecca's favorite son (v. 27-28). Jacob stirs up some trouble for his brother Esau the next time he comes back from the hunt empty-handed (v. 29). Esau sees some reddish stew and asks Jacob for some (v. 30). Jacob asks for the birthright in exchange (v. 31). Esau rationalizes that the birthright is useless to him if he dead anyway so, why not? (v. 32) Jacob insists Esau formally swear the birthright to him, and Esau does so (v. 33). Jacob then feeds Esau and after eating he goes off, and this is how Esau spurned his birthright (v. 34).

v29 "Jacob sod pottage", Everett Fox in The Five Books of Moses renders this phrase "boiling boiled-stew" and states, "This phrase may connote plotting, as in our English 'cook up,' 'brew,' 'concoct,' or 'stir up' trouble. Other forms of the Hebrew denote 'insolence' or 'intentional evil.'" Thus, Jacob is intentionally planning and plotting to get the birthright from Esau.

v30 "Feed me", the Jewish Publication Society (JPS) translation renders this "Give me some of that red stuff to gulp down, for I am famished". The JPS Torah Commentary on Genesis states, "In rabbinic Hebrew the stem l-`-t is employed for the feeding of animals. Its use here, unique in the Bible, is suggestive of Esau's boorish manners." The intent of the Hebrew is to show that Esau is not just a man of the wild, he is pretty much an animal himself.

"red pottage", the JPS renders it "red stuff" and the Torah Commentary on Genesis states:

Hebrew ha-`adom ha-`adom. The repetition may indicate "deep red". The description provides another etiology, this time explicit, for Esau being called Edom. At the same time `adom is close in sound to dam, "blood". Word play involving "Edom" and dam occurs in several texts. Blood was considered to constitute the life-essence and was widely believed to contain magical properties. It was a symbol of strength and vitality. A suggestion that Esau thought the "red stuff" to be blood broth is most plausible. His primitive instincts

were aroused by the sight. He expected his vitality to be renewed by drinking it."

Thus, Esau is expressing his willingness and desire to eat blood, something explicitly prohibited under the Noachide covenant, cf. 9:4. Jacob's plan is to tempt Esau with what he will think is blood stew. This would be especially tempting on an occasion when Esau came back from an unsuccessful hunting expedition.

v32 "I am at the point to die", the JPS renders this "I am at the point of death". The JPS Torah Commentary on Genesis then states, "Literally, 'I am going to die'. This statement either refers to the generally perilous life he led as a hunter or is an exaggerated description of his present condition." It is probably the former over the latter as if Jacob was in camp then Esau could have easily obtained food from anyone else there as well.

v34 "lentils", either Jacob made use of an Egyptian lentils which are red or he added something to the stew to make it look red, because the typical middle eastern lentil is yellowish or light brown in color when cooked. Thus, Jacob was setting a trap for Esau knowing he liked to eat blood. Returning from an unsuccessful hunt would have his appetite whetted for such a dish. So it is quite probable Jacob set Esau up planning all along to get the birthright from him, rather than relying on some happenstance situation.

"thus Esau despised his birthright", as Esau was a wild man who spent more time hunting than tending to the things around camp, it is no surprise he doesn't value a greater share of his father's domestic life. What use does a hunter have for such sedentary things? However, Jacob was quite the opposite. He was in camp pretty much all of the time. For Jacob, obtaining the larger share of his father's camp was essential for the camp's long term well-being. Under Esau's majority control his father's camp would languish, but under Jacob's control the camp would flourish (cf. ch. 30-31 where Jacob exhibits his skill at livestock).

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