

Genesis: *In Remembrance of Abraham*

Genesis 25:1-18

Today will mark my 23rd and final message on the life of Abraham! We began our work back in early February when we came to Genesis 12, and we will conclude our journey with Abraham today as we look at Genesis 25:1-18. Please stand for the reading of God's Word:

Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. ² She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. ³ Jokshan fathered Sheba and Dedan. The sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. ⁴ The sons of Midian were Ephah, Ephraim, Hanoth, 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.

⁷ These are the days of the years of Abraham's life, 175 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 that Abraham purchased from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried, with Sarah his wife. ¹¹ After the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac his son. And Isaac settled at Beer-lahai-roi.

¹² These are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's servant, bore to Abraham. ¹³ 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, 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: 137 years. He breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people.) ¹⁸ They settled from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria. He settled over against all his kinsmen.

My message will fall under three subheadings: 1) Abraham's Final Years; 2) The Passing of the Blessing; and 3) In Remembrance of Abraham.

I. Abraham's Final Years

I know it's been several weeks since we were last in the book of Genesis, so let me remind you of a few things. First of all, we learned in Genesis 23 that Abraham's bride of 60+ years, Sarah, passed away at the age of 127. Abraham was ten years older than Sarah, so Abraham was 137 years old when his wife died. A few years following the death of Sarah, Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for their son, Isaac, and that was the story we read in Genesis 24. We will learn in Genesis 25:20 that Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebecca, so that makes Abraham 140 years old when his son gets married. We'll learn next week that Rebecca struggled to get pregnant, so it will be another twenty years after marriage before Jacob and Esau are born, which means that Abraham was 160 years old when the twins were born. Finally, we read in 25:7 that Abraham passes at the age of 175. Isaac would have been 75 and his sons were 15 years old when Abraham went to be with the LORD.

Now, we might be tempted to think that once widowed at the age of 137, the days of marriage and childrearing are behind us! But not so with Abraham. We learn in 25:1-4 that in the final 38 years of his life, Abraham took another wife named Keturah who bore Abraham six

more children (Zimran, Joksan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah). We also learn that Abraham had grandchildren and even great grandchildren by some of Keturah's children.

The fact that Abraham had six more children after Isaac is not insignificant. We will hear some of these names mentioned again throughout the Old Testament. For example, Midian will become a nation where Moses finds a wife. Sadly, Midian will eventually turn against Israel (Judges 6-8). Shuah is also thought to be a nation (Job 2:11), and it is believed that Joksan's sons (Sheba and Dedan) become nations (Isaiah 21:13; Ezekiel 27:15, 20). We know that several of Ishmael's twelve sons will also be associated with nations among the people group known today as the "Arab" nations.

This history proves the faithfulness of God's promise to Abraham that he would become the father of nations in Genesis 17:4-5 when God states, "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations." God made that promise when Abraham was 99 years old and his wife was yet to bear a single child, yet 76 years later, we already see that God has been faithful to His promises!

Abraham's death is then recorded in vss. 7-10: ⁷These are the days of the years of Abraham's life, 175 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 that Abraham purchased from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried, with Sarah his wife.

The death of the patriarch was a solemn occasion in the ancient world, but the language used here reflects honor. Abraham lived to "a good old age, an old man and full of years." Everything about this description leads us to conclude that Abraham died in peace, according to God's providence, and that he finished well. Though we have not heard or seen of Ishmael for 60 years, the 89 year-old son of Hagar returns to join Isaac in burying their father in the cave of Machpelah, east of Mamre, where Abraham is laid to rest with his beloved Sarah. I'll finish with some concluding thoughts about Abraham's passing in a minute, but let us now look at our second subheading...

II. The Passing of the Blessing

Woven into the account of Abraham's final years and his consequent death, we find several statements that reveal the transfer of blessing to Abraham's son, Isaac. Note that following the genealogy of Keturah's children that she bore to Abraham, we read in vs. 5, "Abraham gave all he had to Isaac."

This statement feels awkward but intentional: Lest we be confused about the six children born to Keturah in the final years of Abraham's life, we should keep in mind that Abraham gave

all he had to Isaac. Nothing about God's promise and blessing has changed now that Abraham remarried and fathered six more children. Isaac is still the son of God's covenantal promises. So, what about the other children? We read in vs. 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."

Note the plural "concubines." Abraham had one son, Ishmael, by his concubine named Hagar. He then had six children by his concubine, Keturah. Now, when we think of concubines, we tend to think of a sexual partner who is not a wife; but Abraham was said to have taken both Hagar and Keturah as wives. So why refer to these women as "concubines?" The only explanation is that when God chose to bless Abraham, Sarah was his wife, and the blessing of Abraham would be passed on to the one and only son born to Abraham and his original wife, Sarah. That son is Isaac; such is why we read in vs. 11, "After the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac his son."

We also learn that the other children from the other wives/concubines were sent away. We saw Abraham send Ishmael away in Genesis 21, and now we learn that Abraham did the same with his six children born to Keturah. Note, however, that he did not send the children away empty-handed. In every instance, Abraham blessed his children with gifts, and we don't sense that he was harsh or heavy handed in sending them away. The practical matter was that Isaac was the sole heir of God's promises, and there could be no confusion about that fact by having other children of Abraham around who might one day challenge Isaac's unique role. That said, we know God promised to make Ishmael into a great nation, and we can assume God showed similar favor to Abraham's other children simply because they were Abraham's children, and God promised to bless all those who blessed Abraham, right?

Speaking of Ishmael, our passage ends with a segmented genealogy of Ishmael's twelve sons along with a record of Ishmael's passing. Once again, we see God's faithfulness to His promises. In Genesis 17:19-21, after Abraham suggested that the covenant promises of God should go through Ishmael, God replies:

No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. ²⁰ As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. ²¹ But I will establish my covenant with Isaac.

Again, we should not think poorly of Ishmael. Ishmael was a product of Abraham's unfaithfulness through no fault of his own. God will bless Ishmael. Like Isaac's son Jacob, Ishmael will have twelve sons and become a great nation; but the covenantal promise will extend through Isaac and Jacob because in the end, it will be through this line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that the world will come to know Jesus, the Savior of the world. God will bless the other sons of Abraham, and Abraham will be called the father of many nations, but there is only one son through whom the covenant promise will extend, and that is Isaac.

Now, I won't get into all the details regarding the sons of Ishmael, but I will tell you that several of the sons of Ishmael and the sons of Keturah have names that are attested to in the scriptures as well as other ancient literature both as tribes and places. For example, in Genesis 37, Joseph is sold by the Midianites (Midian was the son of Keturah) to the Ishmaelites who then carry Joseph into slavery in Egypt. Two thousand years later, the first century Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, noted that the "Arabs" circumcised their sons in their thirteenth year because Ishmael was circumcised when he was 13 years old—which revealed the assumption in the first century that the Arabs were Ishmaelites. Records of the Roman Empire reveal that the Nabataeans (named after Ishmael's firstborn son Nebaioth) were well known and traded regularly with the Romans through AD 103 when they were finally annexed as part of the Roman Empire. The third century historian Eusebius of Caesarea writes of the Kedarites (named after Ishmael's son Kedar) and equates them with the Ishmaelites that occupied Arabia Petraea in the third century AD.

Clearly God fulfilled His promises, but we also see that God's prediction comes true as well. Look at the end of vs. 18, "He [Ishmael] settled over against all his kinsmen."

You might recall that when Hagar was pregnant with Ishmael in Genesis 16, she had an encounter with the angel of the LORD who prophesied, saying (vss. 11-12):
Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has listened to your affliction. He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen.

We know now in Genesis 25 that Ishmael's life and legacy fulfilled this prophecy. For the rest of the scriptures, the Ishmaelites are presented as those who stand against the children of Isaac. Sadly, the descendants of Ishmael continue to be a people who are over against their kinsmen. Today we call the Ishmaelites "Muslims". They are indeed a "great nation," but they remain a people set over and against the children of Isaac.

If you were to study the Qu'ran, you would find that the history of the Old Testament has been rewritten to elevate Ishmael as the son of God's promise instead of Isaac. There's a lot more that could be said here, but hopefully this biblical history helps you to better understand the tension that continues to exist between Israel and her Ishmaelite neighbors.

I pray and hope that God will one day reconcile Ishmael and Isaac through God's only Son, the descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob... Jesus of Nazareth, who the scriptures refer to as the "Light to the nations." OK, let us now conclude with our final subheading...

III. In Remembrance of Abraham

Aside from Jesus Himself, Abraham is the most central figure in all of scripture. Even after his death, Abraham will be mentioned 100 times in the Old Testament and 73 times in the

New Testament. But why? What makes Abraham so significant? What have we learned about this man? I will close with some observations and then a bit of reflection on what it means to our lives today.

From my perspective, the first and primary reason that Abraham is remarkable is God's unmerited election. We never get the sense that Abraham was particularly moral or courageous or talented. If anything, Abraham's most notable attribute was that he was available. When God called Abraham to leave his nation, his kinsmen, and his father's home, Abraham believed God and he went. From that moment on, Abraham was in God's school of obedience, and we know that Abraham had times of wonderful obedience to the Lord, and Abraham had times of blatant disobedience and failure. Nevertheless, God remained steadfast in His election of Abraham, and Abraham became the father of many nations and the father of the faithful. Abraham's parentage of "many nations" is significant, but it will be Abraham's faith in God's promises, as simple and as inconsistent as his faith was, that will lead the patriarch to be revered for all eternity.

Now, is the significance of Abraham overblown or exaggerated? No, because Jesus speaks of Abraham. Jesus doesn't speak of many people by name, but Jesus speaks of Abraham on more than one occasion.

For example, in Luke 16, Jesus tells the story of a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus who both die and enter into the afterlife. The rich man goes to hell, but poor Lazarus finds comfort in the bosom of Abraham amongst the righteous. According to Jesus, even after his bodily death, Abraham lives on as the father of the faithful in the presence of God, and those who hope in the LORD can look forward to being reunited with Father Abraham.

Again, when Jesus speaks of the end of the age Matthew 8:11, He predicts that people will come from all over the world to recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God's chosen patriarchs continue to live on in the life to come, and those who have been made righteous will join them at table.

In John 8, Jesus speaks of Abraham as though they had met and had conversations. In 8:56 Jesus says to some of the Jews, "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." The men were outraged and they asked, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" Jesus replied in John 8:58, "Truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."

Jesus helps us to understand that Abraham's election was part of God's ultimate plan to redeem the world through the Lamb of God, God's only son, who was with God and was God at the beginning. Abraham served his role in history, but upon his death, when Abraham crossed into the unfettered presence of God, Abraham was privileged to see how God's plan would come to pass. He was given the opportunity to meet Jesus and to see how Jesus would one day redeem

the world by being born into the world, as one descended through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and through His death on the cross the world would find forgiveness of sins. And seeing these things, Jesus states that “Abraham saw it and was glad.”

Peter, in his sermon in Acts 3, connects Jesus Christ to the Covenant promises made to Abraham (Acts 3:13,25,26). Stephen does likewise, tracing the history of the Covenant people from Abraham through to his current audience (Acts 7:2-53), who had rejected and killed the promised seed of Abraham.

In Galatians 3 Paul emphasizes that Jesus is the promised ‘seed’ (singular) through whom the Covenant promises made to Abraham are fulfilled. He writes:

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ. (Galatians 3:16).

‘[The law] was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.’ (3:19).

Because the Jews regularly put their confidence in their circumcision and their possession of the Law, Paul stressed that the covenant with Abraham is not superseded by either circumcision or the Law. Both circumcision and the Law came *after* the declaration of the Covenant with Abraham. Of particular significance was the promise/blessing of righteousness credited by faith (Genesis 15:6). Paul’s point is that the Covenant of faith which came first cannot be annulled or put aside by that which came later. The Covenant with Abraham stands, because it came first. The Sinai Covenant (the Law) was never intended to replace but rather to serve the Abrahamic Covenant.

Paul writes about the primacy of Abraham’s faith in Romans 4 and Galatians 3-4. He uses Sarah and Hagar and their sons in an allegorical fashion to contrast the Covenant with Abraham with its focus on faith, promise, miracle and freedom, as opposed to the Sinai Covenant with its focus on law, human works, natural ability and bondage.

The Covenant with Abraham, says Paul, proclaimed justification by faith long before Abraham was circumcised, and even before the Law was given. Therefore, justification (righteousness) always was and always will be by faith, not by works. In Romans 9:30 – 10:4 Paul points out that the reason Israel missed out on ‘righteousness’ is that they pursued it by works, not by faith (9:32): Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness (10:3). Because they were intent on establishing their own righteousness they would not, could not, accept Jesus Christ; rather, they ‘stumbled over’ him.

The bookend of this argument comes from the Apostle James. James acknowledges the significance of faith but points to Abraham as the example of faith revealed by righteous works.

Faith apart from works is dead and no real faith at all...and that is demonstrated through the life and witness of Abraham. James writes:

Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “And Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God.

That sums Abraham up in a nutshell—Abraham was a friend of God. Although he was far from perfect, Abraham understood that God chose him, God had a purpose for his life, and that when God said go, it was Abraham’s job to go. He believed God as demonstrated by his willingness to go, to do as he was instructed, to trust God even when he could not anticipate the outcome, and this is why Abraham was a friend of God.

So, how do we apply this testimony of faith to our lives? It’s not complicated. If you would care to be called “a friend of God,” here is the simple recipe:

- 1) Understand that God chose you...you could never choose God.
- 2) Understand and accept that God chose you for a reason. You are not your own, you belong to God and He has a plan for your life.
- 3) Understand that God has called you to go and to trust Him by being obedient even when you can’t anticipate or predict the outcomes.
- 4) Understand that you are not always going to get things right. You will make mistakes, you will sin, you will fail—but God will never give up on you, and God can redeem even your worst mistakes and use those times for your learning and His glory.
- 5) Understand that, in the end, what matters most is believing God because God is worthy of your trust. How do we know? Because God did not spare His son. God gave His son as a sacrifice to atone for our sin, so we can trust God, no matter what. Amen?

Church, no matter who you are, no matter where you are, no matter what you’ve done, you will never know where you fit in this world apart from this history found here in Genesis. Because God chose Abraham, Isaac and Jacob...because God chose to call faith righteousness...because God became a man who was a descendant of Abraham, and because Jesus fulfilled the promises made to Abraham that through his line, every nation of the earth will be blessed, we who place our faith in Christ are now the true children of Abraham. Even more importantly, we have been adopted as the children of God! This is who you are...this is who we are...so let us be grateful, and let us believe God!

Will you pray with me?