

Land that Ishmael and his relatives might lay claim to, because of its connections with Ishmael's mother, Hagar. At least, a hostile band of men could easily block up the well as an act of defiance against Isaac and his household (an activity we shall soon discover was commonplace – see 26:15 etc). It was in Isaac's interests to live there and protect the southernmost borders of the Promised Land from the relatives of his wayward brother Ishmael.

From Isaac's point of view, however, he was now free to follow the Lord's will and play his part in the Covenant promises of God. We do learn a great deal about Isaac in Genesis, and it seems as if the Covenant promises take a very long time to come to fruition, but the record of Genesis is the proof that over time, they did. Although it is a very long time ago, we cannot underestimate the importance of Isaac's faithfulness in accepting the call of God and following in the footsteps of his father; something we shall learn much more about in the coming days.

### Application of Text

Sometimes we read quickly over a passage of Scripture such as this because we see little in it of immediate and obvious interest. Of course it is interesting to learn about how family life worked out in the nomadic cultures of ancient Biblical times; but there are one or two important issues raised even in this text.

Firstly, it is in my opinion worth noting that the death of Abraham is written about as if the man had some kind of life beyond death, even in the midst of an ancient story coming from a time when there is little evidence of a belief in any kind of afterlife. Later on in Scriptures, Jesus taught that Abraham was alive in heaven (Luke 16:19), and also made an issue about Abraham being 'alive', when speaking to the Pharisees (Matt 22:32), and in so doing pointed towards His own resurrection. All this leads us to believe that the Old Testament does indeed speak of the possibility of the resurrection, even though many scholars today would prefer to say that it does not, because the hints (such as this text) are not strong enough. It is important for us to know that the resurrection has always been a part of God's plan for His people, and for us.

The other important teaching mentioned above is about breaking ties with the past. Even though the exact chronological order of things in the story of Abraham is difficult to follow (when did Keturah marry Abraham, etc.), and the hand over of the Covenant from Abraham to Isaac and Rebekah clearly took place much earlier than Abraham's death, it was important that the proper division of Abraham's descendants was established. It is also important for us that we allow the Lord to help us break the ties we have with what is not 'of His will', and with a single mind, pursue what is.

## Discipleship Challenges

Please use the programme of lifestyle challenges which can be found by following the link 'lifestyle challenge'. The downloadable 'worksheet' will help you follow through any challenge which you feel is right for you to take up.

### Suggestions about discipleship and Christian lifestyle

How much does the resurrection mean to you? An important doctrine of the church such as this is one which we would all do well to think about carefully. There are several ways to do this; you could look up some references in the Bible to 'resurrection'; you could read over and meditate on a famous text about it, such as 1 Corinthians 15. A good way would also be to spend time in prayer asking the Lord to help you gain as true a Biblical perspective on this great mystery of grace, as possible.

## Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You for Your ancestors; for Abraham and for Isaac. May their example of faithfulness and endurance help us even today, and may we be worthy bearers of the same Covenant promises you have given to Your people. Thank You, Lord Jesus, that this Covenant is Your eternal promise of love; AMEN

## Questions (for use in groups)

1. Discuss the life of Abraham in our group. In your opinion, what are the main features of his life from which we can learn?
2. Is it right for us to make a connection between Arab people and Ishmael today, or does this play too much with what Scripture actually says?
3. Does it matter to you whether Keturah was married to Abraham before or after Sarah die, and do you think Scripture attempts to say one or the other?

## Prayer

Lord God of truth and love, as we go about our daily work, inspire us to see within each task something we must do well, not for our employer, or ourselves, but for You. Then, as each task is completed, give us the grace to offer it and all its consequences to You; and so find peace. All praise to You, Lord God of truth and love; AMEN

## Further Suggestions for Prayer

### Weekly Theme: Those who are ill

*Pray today for those who are chronically ill. Most people have the occasional illness and get over it; but for some, their condition is a permanent fact of life. It is quite different.*

*Pray that God's people might use the privilege of the gift of healing to minister God's healing touch especially to those with difficult, long term illnesses.*

## Meditation

What is possible? Everything, it seems.

The most remarkable things are done each day

By amazing people right across the world;

And what is more, even greater things are possible.

However great the achievements of humanity,

The fact remains that there is always so much more to come,

For God has made an incredible, unfathomable world

Which always offers more for us to find and put to use.

The great achievements of science and technology

Are gifts of God; their inspiration is the One who made it all:

So let us honour God for all the wonders of His world

Which we encounter each and every day.

And may we choose to use the amazing gifts we have

For good, for right, for truth and justice; and for love.

## Bible Study - Genesis 25:1-18

<sup>1</sup> Abraham married another wife, named as Keturah. <sup>2</sup> She gave birth to these sons of Abraham; Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. <sup>3</sup> Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan. The sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. <sup>4</sup> The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the descendants of Keturah.

<sup>5</sup> Abraham gave everything he had to Isaac. <sup>6</sup> But Abraham gave gifts, while he was still living, to his concubine's sons, and he sent them away from his son Isaac, in the direction of countries to the East.

<sup>7</sup> The length of Abraham's life was 175 years. <sup>8</sup> Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man full of years; he was gathered to his people. <sup>9</sup> His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, east of Mamre, <sup>10</sup> the field Abraham had purchased from the Hittites. Abraham was buried there with his wife Sarah. <sup>11</sup> After Abraham's death God blessed His son Isaac, who then settled at Beer-lahai-roi.

<sup>12</sup> These are the descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's son, who was the son of Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's servant-girl. <sup>13</sup> These are their names in the order of their birth: Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael; and Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, <sup>14</sup> Mishma, Dumah, Massa, <sup>15</sup> Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. <sup>16</sup> These were the sons of Ishmael, named by their villages and encampments, twelve princes according to their tribes. <sup>17</sup> (The length of Ishmael's life was 137 years; when he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his own people.) <sup>18</sup> They settled between Havilah and Shur, on the borders of Egypt near Asshur, and they were at odds with his relatives.

## Review of text

This passage of scripture completes the life of Abraham, and includes a formal account of his death at the age of 175! Abraham's wife, Sarah, had died aged 127 and their earlier inability to bear children was certainly nothing to do with Abraham, for he had other children by his second wife, Keturah. These sons are listed here (25:2-4). Earlier in Abraham's story, we learned of the birth of Ishmael, his first son, born to Hagar (16, 25:12f.); and for completeness, his sons are listed (25:13-16).

Abraham certainly had many children, indicating the blessings of God. This fulfilled God's promise that he would make of him 'many nations' (17:4). Nevertheless, although Abraham had descendants through Ishmael, Isaac and Keturah, Scripture is very careful to tell us that it was Isaac alone who was the sole heir, and God had chosen him as the forefather of the one nation through which He chose to work (chapters 22 & 24). Isaac was the formal heir of 'everything' Abraham had (25:5), and although our eyes ride quickly over the names of Abraham's other descendants, they are listed because of the honour of being his children, but most are never heard of again.

To reinforce this message, this passage makes clear distinctions between Isaac and Abraham's other children. Ishmael, received no inheritance from his father, even though Abraham had once prayed that he would inherit all his wealth as well as the Covenant promise (17:18, 21:11). Because of that erroneous judgement and emotional attachment, and because Ishmael was both a product of his sin and a constant reminder of it, Abraham had to break his ties with his son completely. Ishmael did receive a blessing, but it was not from Abraham. It was a special word from the Lord (21:13,20-21) by which his descendants also became a 'nation'. Abraham's later sons by Keturah did receive the proper 'gifts' that would have been expected of sons who were not 'firstborn', but they had no formal inheritance and they had nothing to do with Isaac. All of the other 'sons of Abraham' settled in places that were some distance from the Promised Land. The sons of Keturah settled to the East (probably southern Mesopotamia) and the sons of Ishmael to the south, 'on the borders of Egypt' (25:18).

At the end of our passage, scripture draws a defining line in the generations. Abraham passed on the Covenant to Isaac (and Rebekah), and his other sons all settled far away from Canaan. Isaac could now follow the Lord's Covenant way in Canaan, free and unhindered.

From time to time, it is important for us to accept a complete break from the past in order that the Lord's will is done in our lives. There are no defining rules for this, except to follow the Lord closely, especially when His will takes time to unfold. It is also vital to keep close to the Lord in the important things of life such as marriage and family relationships. This passage teaches that although we cannot make the past disappear, we can break our 'ties' with the people and places of the past; especially where sin is involved. The Lord hates sin, but because of His Covenant, he deals graciously with us when we seek His help and follow His ways.

## Going deeper:

The description of the death of Abraham is an important testimony to his life, and contains the glimmer of a hope for resurrection! Amongst the sons of Keturah is at least one significant name which will crop up later in the story of Israel, and prophecy is fulfilled in the life of Ishmael. Finally, Isaac protects the Promised Land.

### ***The death of Abraham***

This passage of scripture is a general description of what happened to Abraham's descendants, and it all relates to the time when Abraham died. When Abraham was 175, Isaac was 75, and married to Rebekah for 35 years (21:5 & 25:20), and Sarah had been dead for 38 years. It is possible that Abraham saw his grandchildren Jacob and Esau, though the dates in Scripture are unclear and we should be cautious in making assumptions about things we do not know.

The death of Abraham is described in a conventional, but grandiose manner. Genesis gives him a royal accolade which is far more extensive than those of others (see Adam – 5:5, and Noah – 9:29). In those days, there was no such thing as a written 'last will and testament'; for what happened to someone's wealth when they died was determined by what they had said during their life in the presence of others. This is what happened in the case of Abraham. He gave verbal instructions about his inheritance before he died, and probably saw that they were carried out. His 'last will and testament' was therefore written down later, after his death and not before, so that we might know what the great man said! Abraham was forbidden by God

from passing anything on to Ishmael, but it was common practice for a wealthy man to make a distinction between his foremost inheritor and other children, as Abraham did. While he was 'still living', the other sons, children of Keturah, were given gifts. They were however told to leave the land (25:6). In this way, Abraham formally told his offspring that they were not entitled to any more of his wealth or inheritance.

Abraham does not, however, make mention of the Covenant. We should remember not just that this had been handed over to Isaac and Rebekah according to their blessings (22:17, 24:60), but the Covenant is represented in this text by the land of Canaan; the Promised Land. When Keturah's sons were sent away, Isaac, alone of Abraham's sons was allowed to remain (Ishmael had previously been banished – 21:8f.) in a land symbolically possessed through Abraham's purchase of the 'field of Machpelah' in which Sarah was buried (23:19), and in which he would also be buried.

In verse 8 the text tells us that when Abraham died, he was 'gathered to his people'. This phrase occurs ten times in Scripture, and only in the first five books of the Bible. It is generally thought to mean that the one who died went to be with their past relatives when they died, avoiding the common belief that the dead were abandoned in Hades, away from God. This tells us that there was an elementary belief amongst the Lord's people that there was a hope of something beyond death, but this is very unspecific. Later Old Testament texts talk of this more fully (e.g. Psalms 22:29-31 and 23 etc), and we only know about life beyond death with any degree of certainty through Jesus' teaching and his own resurrection, in the New Testament.

### ***The 'other' sons***

It is nevertheless important that Abraham was buried by his two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, despite the divisions that lay behind them and before them (25:9). The Bible records a long history of quarrels between Isaac's descendants and the Arab ancestors of Ishmael which go back to the divisions of their early days, yet they were united in their father's death.

The names of Ishmael's twelve sons and 'princes' (25:13-15) are difficult to trace. The names refer to clan or tribal leaders, and are common to place names found in the Bible, in southern Egypt or Sinai, and they have long been identified with Arab nomadic tribes. Ishmael's descendants appear to have settled in the desert regions of Sinai, opposite Egypt (25:18), the land from which Hagar had come, and God's promise that Ishmael would become the father of twelve 'princes' (21:13), had therefore been fulfilled. The strange sentence 'and they were at odds with his relatives' (25:18) was also a fulfilment of a prophecy. This time, the word was spoken to his mother by an angel, before he was born, saying there would be 'strife' between Ishmael and his relatives. With these prophecies fulfilled, God had now completed his work with Ishmael and his descendants.

The other sons of Abraham by Keturah are listed in verses 2-4. The names of these are also obscure, though some are similar to place names to the north and East of Canaan, where Abraham had commanded them to go (25:6). The most significant name is that of Midian, who is also listed as the father of five sons (25:4). Midian became a tribal people of some significance, being one of the nations that sought to curse Israel through the prophet Balaam, when God's people were travelling towards the Promised Land (Num 22:4f.). It was also the nation which oppressed Israel at the time of Gideon, as in the book of Judges (6,7,8).

It is not certain from this text exactly when Keturah 'married' Abraham. Some assume that this happened after Sarah died, but that is not what scripture says, and the word that it uses for her is the one for a concubine rather than a wife. It could be that she became Abraham's 'principle wife' after the death of Sarah, but it is pointless making guesses about this when Scripture does not tell us what we want to know about this. Despite the lists in this passage, it is not focussed on family details but on the 'end of an era' that had come with the death of Abraham.

### ***Isaac, the defence of the Promised Land, and 'faithfulness'***

'After Abraham's death God blessed His son Isaac, who then settled at Beer-lahai-roi' (25:11). We noticed in the previous study that Isaac was journeying from Beer-lahai-roi when he was met by the camel train from Mesopotamia bearing his bride to be, Rebekah. This was the well, far in the south of Canaan which was named by Ishmael's mother, Hagar, when she was in dire straits having been cast out of Abraham's household. It seems very strange that Isaac should have set up his home there. However, whilst the text says that God blessed Isaac, his settling at this place probably reflected Isaac's concern to protect the Promised Land. It is not something we would quickly pick up on today, but this well was the one part of the Promised