

“Then Jesus answered and said to them,... ‘You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life;

And These Are They Which Testify of Me

Sermons on Genesis

Genesis 25

The Older Will Serve The Younger

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
4/29/2001*

The Older Will Serve The Younger

Genesis 25

Review

God created the world and it was very good. We then saw the fall of man followed by the promise of God to redeem man. Through a man sin entered the world, God would redeem the world through a man. Genesis reveals through whom this man would come. It would be through Seth (Adam and Eve's third son), Noah, Shem, and as we have seen thus far in our study through Genesis, Abraham.

Preview

In chapter twenty-five of Genesis Abraham takes another wife, Keturah. She bore Abraham six children, including Midian, through whom comes the Midianites, including Moses' father-in-law. Abraham settles his estate then dies. We also see the genealogy of Ishmael and his death. The chapter then focuses on Isaac, Jacob and Esau. Isaac's wife, Rebekah was barren. Isaac prays for his wife to bear children. After twenty years she gives birth to twins, Jacob and Esau. The boys are quite different from each other, and God declares, contrary to normal custom, that the older will serve the younger. The chapter ends with Esau, the older, selling his birthright to Jacob.

I. Points of Difficulty

Primary and Secondary Causes

We'll start with a point of difficulty we see through all of Scripture, but most clearly in this story. It has to do with God's election, or choosing.

Yesterday I did two weddings. In both cases the couples met, decided they liked each other, decided they loved each other and decided to get married. They organized the wedding, went through all the necessary procedures, stood before man and God and made public vows of commitment to one another for as long as they both shall live. These are all things they did and decisions they made. Yet Jesus makes an interesting comment regarding marriage. He says, **"What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mark 10:9).**

So the question is, who joined these couples together? Was it their own decision making process or was it God? The answer is 'both'. But it was not as if God played a fifty or seventy percent role in the matter and they played a thirty percent role. The two couples fully made all these decisions, decisions for which they will be held accountable in fullness. But God also fully joined these

couples together as well. A high-falootin' term for this is 'primary and secondary causes'. There is no denying human responsibility for human actions. The Bible clearly declares it to be the case and we all know it to be true. Yet there is also no denying what is so clearly put forth in Proverbs.

The king's heart *is* in the hand of the LORD, *Like* the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes (Proverbs 21:1).

We saw this with Abimelech as well (Genesis 20:6). This concept, though seemingly incomprehensible, is clearly biblical. The embracing of this concept makes the entire Scriptures read more reasonably. The denial of this concept inevitably leads to the embracing of contradictions and an impotent view of the sovereignty of God.

In the chapters to come we will read of Esau making ungodly and profane decisions. We will also read that his destiny was spelled out for him before he was born (Genesis 25:23; Malachi 1:3; Romans 9:10-13).

Other Options

Some have suggested other theological options, e.g., autonomous will, middle knowledge, etc., but the Apostle Paul anticipates a question you and I will have regarding this teaching. In the ninth chapter of Romans the Apostle Paul teaches of God choosing of Jacob over Esau and Isaac over Ishmael. He instructs us on how God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Paul teaches us of God's declaration that He will have mercy on whomever He will have mercy, and He will have compassion on whomever He will have compassion—So then *it is* not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. Paul then anticipates this question: **"You will say to me then, Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will? (Romans 9:19)"** We must ask ourselves, Why would he assume that would be my question? Onto the text.

II. Points of Emphasis

Provision for all children

Abraham again took a wife, and her name was Keturah. ² And she bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. ³ Jokshan begot Sheba and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. ⁴ And the sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abidah, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah. ⁵ And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. ⁶ But Abraham gave gifts to the sons of the concubines which Abraham had (Genesis 25:1-5).

When my father died I was twenty-three. I became conservator of my mother's estate because of her mental condition. The probate attorney who handled my situation made a sobering comment regarding the settling of estates. He said that in all his years as a probate attorney, he had yet to see the settling of an estate not, in one way or another, dismantle the family. Wills, living trusts, etc. are designed to help parents properly handle their assets before they die. If this isn't done properly, you can count on difficulty among your children. Abraham handles all this prior to his death. This is a godly and responsible action.

Separation from Isaac

...and while he was still living he sent them eastward, away from Isaac his son, to the country of the east (Genesis 25:6b).

In the same way Ishmael was banished, Abraham's other children are sent away from Isaac. There was to be no confusion as to whom the covenant promise was to go through. Isaac was the child of promise.

Good old age

This is the sum of the years of Abraham's life which he lived: one hundred and seventy-five years. ⁸ Then 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 And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, ¹⁰ the field which Abraham purchased from the sons of Heth. There Abraham was 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 at Beer Lahai Roi (Genesis 25:7-11).

Eva May Clark, an elderly saint at a Bible study I teach at a retirement home, said, on a regular basis, "When the Lord is ready to take me, I am ready to go." The Lord finally took her. Pondering the curse of death, there is not much more than we can ask than to be ready to go. As Matthew Henry states of Abraham, "**He did not live till the world was weary of him, but till he was weary of the world.**"¹

The love of his life was gone, the promised child was now a father himself (Jacob and Esau would have been fifteen) and he had spent a hundred years as a sojourner. Full of years, Abraham breathed his last and was gathered to his people.

¹ Matthew Henry, *The Matthew Henry Commentary* (Zondervan, republished 1960), p. 44.

Promise to Ishmael

Now this is the genealogy of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's maidservant, bore to Abraham. ¹³ And these were the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to their generations: The firstborn of Ishmael, Nebajoth; then Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, ¹⁴ Mishma, Dumah, Massa, ¹⁵ Hadar, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. ¹⁶ These were the sons of Ishmael and these were their names, by their towns and their settlements, twelve princes according to their nations. ¹⁷ These were the years of the life of Ishmael: one hundred and thirty-seven years; and he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people. ¹⁸ (They dwelt from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt as you go toward Assyria.) He died in the presence of all his brethren (Genesis 25:12-18).

Abraham had prayed for Ishmael and here we see God keeping his promise. He became the father of twelve princes and a great nation (Genesis 17:20).

Barren wife

This is the genealogy of Isaac, Abraham's son. Abraham begot Isaac. ²⁰ Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah as wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan Aram, the sister of Laban the Syrian. ²¹ Now Isaac pleaded with the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived (Genesis 25:19-21).

Similar to Sarah, and as we shall see with Rachel and Hannah, Rebekah has difficulty in bearing children. This is difficult on at least two accounts. One, there is the general heartache of the closing of the womb. This should never be taken lightly or sluffed off as if it is not a matter of great trial and testing. Those in this situation, more than most know, are required to trust God with the difficulty of their trial. There is a wrestling with God, who shuts or opens the womb (1 Samuel 1:5).

Secondly, there is the struggle regarding faith in God's covenant promise. There is always a temptation to take matters in our own hands (as with Hagar, Zilpah, Bilhah, etc.). Today's church is not exempt from this temptation when they abandon the power of the law and the gospel for methods which seem more expeditious.

Once again, God establishes His plan by bringing forth the promised seed through a barren or dead womb. There would, or should, be no mistaking who is providing salvation for man.

Two nations

But the children struggled together within her; and she said, “If all is well, why am I like this?” So she went to inquire of the LORD. ²³ And the LORD said to her: “Two nations are in your womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, And the older shall serve the younger (Genesis 25:22,23).

Not only does God bring life from a barren womb, He establishes His election of who shall serve whom. Rebekah, confused as to what is happening in her womb, inquires of the Lord. Contrary to the normal custom, the older shall serve the younger. Esau, the father of the Edomites, a nation which is a catchphrase for ungodliness (Obadiah), will serve Jacob, the father of Israel. The struggle in Rebekah’s womb represented a struggle between nations and ultimately between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness.

National and Personal

God’s election is not merely of individuals but of whole nations. Esau’s progeny would be ungodly and without hope. Jacob’s progeny would have, and give, hope to the world. Paul, in the ninth chapter of Romans, pushes this even further to a personal distinction within the nation of Israel itself. Even though God elected Israel (Jacob), Paul teaches us, “**For they are not all Israel who are of Israel**” (Romans 9:6). In short, we learn in Genesis that God chose national Israel, we learn by the Apostle Paul (and many other places) that God also chose individuals within that nation. Those who came to faith in Christ were the true Israel of God (Galatians 6:16).

Two personalities

So when her days were fulfilled for her to give birth, indeed there were twins in her womb. ²⁵ And the first came out red. He was like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau. ²⁶ Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau’s heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them. ²⁷ So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents. ²⁸ And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob (Genesis 25:24-28).

him because of the good food he brought in. Jacob was a mild, mama's boy. are here introduced to real people with real personalities. The decisions they made will have eternal significance for them and their descendants. However if men are not moral agents w

Birthright

Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and was weary. And Esau said to Jacob, "Please feed me with that same red for I am called Edom." ³¹ day." ³² am about to die; so what this birthright to me?" Then Jacob said, "Swear to me as of this day." So he swore to him ³⁴ And

arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his (Genesis 25:29-

The story seems so simple. Jacob cooks a meal. Esau comes in weary from the field and asks for the meal. Jacob barter with Esau agrees and swears over his birthright, eats the meal and just goes his way. The story ends with the somber words,

The long and the short of it is, Esau simply had very little regard for his birthright. It is a fear have for my children and the children of the church, that the covenant of God. My prayer in virtually every infant baptism I do is that the child would continue in the faith of their fathers and not , as did Esau. I " is Esau's comment. Listening to the head of Planned

said, she already had three children and Margaret Sanger I fail to see how a fourth or fifth child would actually kill you. Esau feeble excuse and demonstrate contempt for something he should have

In an epistle dedicated to keep the church from apostas author of Hebrews uses the example of Esau,

Pursue peace with all and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause ¹⁶ lest there any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of

food sold his birthright. ¹⁷ For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears (Hebrews 12:14-17).

We will discuss the tears of Esau when the time comes. Suffice it to say for now, the act of despising the promises and gifts of God are a profane act. We must teach our children to value the things of God.

III. Primary Emphasis

Value the Covenant

The two New Testament accounts of Esau form, what I believe, to be the primary emphasis of this portion of Scripture. The one from Hebrews we just examined. That is to value inclusion among the covenant people of God and to teach that to our children.

Gracious Inclusion

The other lies in understanding the gratuitous nature of our inclusion in God's plan of redemption. Peppered throughout Romans is the addressing of an attitude of superiority among the Jewish members of the church. Paul seeks to demolish this attitude through instruction on God's election. Jacob and Esau serve as the most perfect example of God's election. They serve as the perfect dismissal of any notion we have of being saved as a result of anything in or of ourselves. Before they were born, before they had done good or evil, God loved Jacob and hated Esau.

This is not doctrine for the sake of shock value or argumentation. It is a doctrine designed to humble and comfort. If I believe I am a citizen in God's kingdom due to anything found in myself—call it what you will: autonomous decision maker power, awareness of my own sin, a desperate plea, etc.—I have cause to boast in the cooperation of my salvation. With this sort of thinking, what separated me, in eternity, from my lost neighbor was something about me. And though one may avoid openly boasting, they certainly have room to boast. But the true nature of our salvation leaves no room for boasting in any respect. Calvin wrote of Jacob and Esau,

If we seek the cause of this distinction, it will not be found in nature; for the origin of both nations was the same. It will not be found in merit; because the heads of both nations were yet enclosed in their mother's womb when the contention began. Moreover God, in order to humble the pride of the flesh,

and of boasting.²

the
rather than God, what about those days when, whatever that particular action
was, you up to snuff. It is no wonder
ati d presentation of those doctrines which refute the

They must operate as slaves and not sons.

A proper understanding of God's election delivers us both from pride and
's election, His choosing, is His first act in our salvation. His final
act is our glory.

²

Calvin

. (Baker Book House, reprint 1993), p. 44.

Questions for Study

1. Explain primary and secondary causes. Why is this an important doctrine to understand (pages 2,3)?
2. Why would Paul anticipate the question in Roman 9:19 (page 3)?
3. What does Abraham do prior to his death for his children (pages 3,4)?
4. Why was it important to separate the other children from Isaac (page 4)?
5. Discuss the death of Abraham (page 4).
6. Discuss the difficulty of not being able to have children (page 5).
7. What two nations to Jacob and Esau represent (page 6)?
8. The Apostle Paul brings this to a personal level, explain (page 6).
9. Why do you suppose the personalities of Jacob and Esau are discussed (pages 6,7)?
10. Why do you suppose Esau sold his birthright (pages 7,8)?
11. Why did God choose Jacob over Esau (page 8)?
12. Discuss what you think might be the primary emphasis of this story (pages 8,9).