

GENESIS 25

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 25.

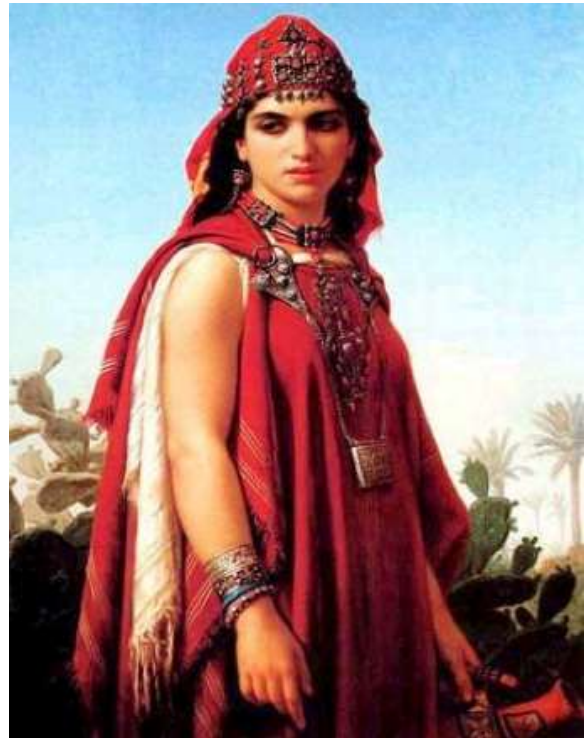
Chapter 25 is more or less divided into three parts: The first third consists of the final important details of Abraham's life, the second third consists of calling out the descendants of Ishmael and giving some information about where they settled, and the final third charts the end of Isaac's story and the beginning of his son Jacob's.

THE FINAL DETAILS OF ABRAHAM'S LIFE

Prior to 1948 and the absolutely unthinkable fulfillment of the prophecy that Israel would be reborn as a nation of Jews, this listing of tribes coming from Abraham would have been relatively unimportant except to librarians and historians. But now that Israel has returned to their homeland and with the happenings in the Middle East that are shaking the whole earth like never before, these genealogical listings and the birth of Isaac's twin sons, Jacob and Esau, take on a more important tone for the church.

ABRAHAM AND KETURAH

We are coming to the end of the story of Abraham and Ishmael. We are given some final information about Abraham that we should make mental note of. First, Abraham took another wife, a woman named Keturah, of whom we know next to nothing. Bible scholars are not even totally clear whether or not Abraham was married to Sarah at the same time as Keturah. That said, after further



An artist's interpretation of what Keturah would have looked like

study and research, it is clear that we should not assume that Abraham's taking Keturah "as a wife" was in chronological sequence with the previous chapter of Genesis. In other words, Keturah and Sarah *may have* both been Abraham's wives at the same time. The Torah commonly employs a literary device whereby there is an interruption to the sequence of events; the story goes back a few years and adds new information about someone or something. This is not unusual for the Bible or writings from other cultures in that era, and even eras well before and after that.

One possibility concerning the timing of Keturah stands out above all the rest to me: these sons of Abraham, born through Keturah,

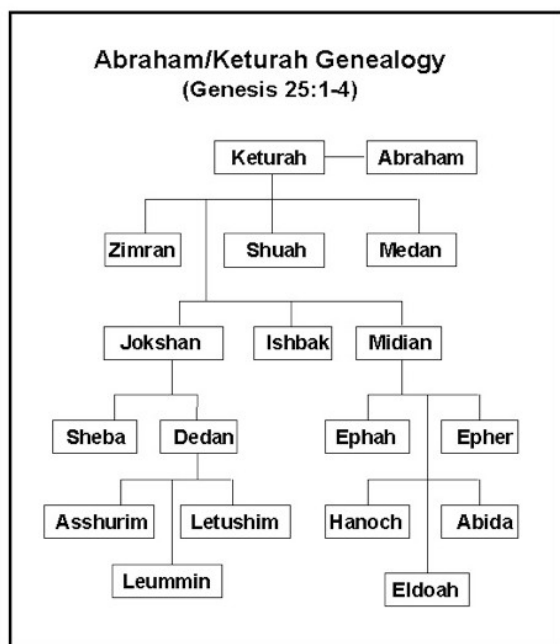
could have been born to Abraham before Isaac. This is because Abraham was far past the age when men typically have the ability to sire a child when Isaac was conceived. Therefore, unless these sons from Keturah were “miraculous conceptions,” which is unlikely, they had to have come well *before* Sarah bore the miracle baby, Isaac. One could argue that upon God’s making Abraham capable of siring Isaac, Abraham regained fertility for an extended period of time. Several scholars choose that approach. Nevertheless, it’s nearly impossible to nail down exactly when Abraham took Keturah as a wife, when these other children were born, and whether these sons came before or after Isaac.

We’re told that Keturah gave Abraham several children, of which six are mentioned. We have no idea who Keturah was or who her ancestors were. However, it is clear that the etymology of Keturah’s name is the Hebrew word *ketoret*, which means “spices.” In fact, certain tribes that have long been suspected as being descendants of Abraham and Keturah were associated with the spice trade in ancient times. It is also helpful for us to know that the prime spice-producing region for the Middle East at that time, and for many centuries to come,

was an area of southern Arabia today known as Yemen. This shows just how extensive and regular trade and travel was among these ancient peoples so very long ago.

As is customary in the Bible, only Keturah’s male children are mentioned, but it’s unthinkable that Keturah didn’t give Abraham several daughters as well. We will run into several of these named children of Keturah later on in Scripture, and yet others will never be heard of again, so let me point out one son in particular because the territory he settled played a large role in Moses’s life: that son is named Midian. True to his mother’s name, the Midianites were known as spice traders, particularly of the highly valued frankincense. Their territory was located on the Arabian Peninsula, bordered by the eastern edge of the Red Sea, today called the Gulf of Aqaba. This is the same region where Moses fled from Egypt, where God came to Moses in a burning bush, and where Moses found a Midianite wife. In fact, the Gulf of Aqaba is most likely the biblical Red Sea that Moses led the Israelites through to safety when they were fleeing from the armies of Pharaoh.

These six sons of Keturah, along with Ishmael, the son of Hagar the Egyptian girl, formed what we can loosely call the Arab peoples, people who populated the Middle East and northern Africa. However, the term *arab* wasn’t in use until some time after the reign of King David; that is, there was no such identifiable or named people group called “Arabs” or “Arabians” until probably at least 900 BC, some nine centuries after the time we’re currently studying.



The descendants of Ishmael and of Keturah populate the Middle East and Asia.

ISAAC'S INHERITANCE

We are told in verse 5 that “Avraham gave everything he owned to Yitz’chak,” which would have made Isaac a very wealthy and powerful man. This gift also set the stage for enormous jealousy and strife between Isaac and his large cadre of half brothers and sisters, especially Ishmael. That strife and jealousy continues to this very day. With all those brothers and sisters—dozens at the least—Abraham had to do something to assure that Isaac was decisively and without opposition elevated above all the rest and given a clear path to continue along the road of covenant promise that Yahweh had ordained. This is another dramatic example of the ongoing God principle of dividing, electing, and separating; this time, the subject of the division and separation was Isaac.

GIFTS TO ABRAHAM'S OTHER SONS

Upon his death, Abraham gave everything to Isaac, but we're told that he also gave gifts *before* he died to the sons of his *concubines*. Although most Bibles say that Abraham took Keturah as a wife, and Hagar as well, they were not technically his wives as Sarah was. They were concubines—a different class of wife. These so-called wives would not have been given a *ketubah*, a marriage contract. There would not have been a marriage ceremony. Rather, there would have been a simple declaration by Abraham that they were to be included in his household as legitimate mothers of his children. These concubines were well-treated and respected, and they enjoyed the status of being joined to Abraham's clan. They did not, however, have the exalted status of a legal wife, and their children had lesser rights of inheritance than the sons of the legal wife. In fact, the law of that era was that it was entirely up to the father to choose which, if any, of his children from concubines would gain inheritance. While Isaac got all of the inheritance and family authority, the other sons of Abraham, by means of his concubines,

got gifts—likely fairly substantial gifts because Abraham was so wealthy.⁹⁶

Abraham sent these sons away to other territories, another example of how dividing and electing always leads to separating. This parallels God's permitting circumstances to unfold that led to the necessary separation of Abraham from his nephew Lot. Notice that once again they were sent to the east!

THE DEATH OF ABRAHAM

In verse 7, Abraham died at the ripe old age of 175 years. What a life Abraham lived! Oh, that each of us could have such a close and intertwined relationship with the Lord, and that His purpose would be played out through us. We are told that Abraham was gathered to his people. This is a term far different from “dying,” “being buried in the ground,” or “going down to Sheol.” Rather, it implies a sort of reunion with those, likely from the line of Seth, Noah, and Shem, who had come before him. It also speaks to a belief that death is not the end, a concept that will from here forward be built upon only slightly in the OT Scriptures, but will take on a greater meaning with the advent of Christ in the NT. Nevertheless, while there is a hint of something beyond death in the statement “gathered to his people,” there is no mention of going to heaven. What lay beyond the grave—an afterlife, if you would—is not discussed with any depth in the OT; it seems from the varying terms for death and dying, all of them being vague and general, that the concept of an afterlife was very fuzzy in the minds of the people of the OT. For some Hebrews, it is obvious in Scripture that dying without a son to carry on the family name spelled the end of their own essence as well, something they greatly feared. In some unexplained way, they believed that a father lived on through his son—not in a sense of reincarnation, and maybe not even with any consciousness at all. The idea of the human spirit as a vessel of existence after death is not well defined in the OT. The thought that

somehow a human would live in heaven with God simply didn't exist, at least not until the close of the OT at about 400 BC.

Ishmael and Isaac came together to bury their father, and as would have been customary when possible, the husband was buried with his wife. Abraham was buried in the same tomb as Sarah—the cave of Machpelah at Hebron. Later Isaac and Rebecca would join them in that same location, as would Jacob eventually.

ISAAC: THE SON OF THE PROMISE

In verse 11, God makes it clear to any who might doubt where the line of promise led: “After Avraham died, God blessed Yitz’chak his son, and Yitz’chak lived near Be’er-Lachai-Ro’i.” The handing of the torch from Abraham to Isaac was complete. Isaac was the new patriarch of the Hebrews, and Abraham was but a memory.

Generally speaking, the sons of Keturah formed tribal confederations, and along with Ishmael, they made up the various Arab peoples of today. Unlike the Israelites, who very much tended to stay closely identified with their individual tribes (Reuben, Simeon, Ephraim, Judah, Benjamin, and so on), the sons of Keturah quickly became less identified with their individual tribes and banded together to have staying power and influence. In fact, most of the names of the sons of Keturah have been lost in history, and we really can't follow their progress at all. The one that does have a biblical impact is the tribe of Midian, who lived on the western end of the Arabian Peninsula, with the Gulf of Aqaba as one of their boundary lines. This is the same Midian that Moses fled to from Egypt after he had killed that Egyptian soldier; it is the same Midian where he found a wife and lived for forty years as a shepherd.

Verses 12–18 record the line of Ishmael. Ishmael was the dispossessed “firstborn” of Abraham and the Egyptian handmaiden Hagar. Recall that Ishmael was a teenager by the time Isaac was born. Also recall that until Abraham's

only legal wife, Sarah, bore him Isaac, Abraham had declared Ishmael to be his firstborn son. Ishmael, as far as Abraham was concerned, was the son of promise, the son who would carry on the covenant that Yehoveh had made with Abraham. It is no coincidence that the genealogy of Ishmael immediately follows this reminder that God blessed Isaac, and not Ishmael. It was a reminder that Yehoveh had rejected Ishmael as the son of promise. The son of promise was the one God Himself had caused to be born in a miraculous way, by means of the dead womb of Sarah and the dead seed of Abraham. The son of promise was Isaac.

THE DESCENDANTS OF ISHMAEL

Ishmael was a Semite, just as Isaac was, and of course, Abraham. Semites are the descendants of Noah's son Shem. Actually, the word should be *Shemite*, not *Semite*. The error is a rather typical Gentile Christian one because the Hebrew alphabet character that we transliterate as an *S* can be used in one of two ways: as the letter “sheen” ש or as “seen” שׁ. Moving the little dot located above the character to the far right makes it a Sheen, which gives us a “sh” sound as in “she” or “shoot” or “Sharon.” Moving the little dot to the far left makes the same character a Seen, giving us the “s” sound, as in “Sam” or “Seattle” or “seaside.” The word *Shem* is spelled with a Sheen, not a Seen.

Since Isaac and Ishmael had the same father and he was a descendant of Shem, *both* of those children were Semites. In fact, all the children Abraham sired were Semites. The Arabs and the Jewish people are very much related; they're all Semites. That's what makes the term *anti-Semitic* such an oxymoron. *Anti-Semitic* is technically a term that means “against Semites,” against the descendants of Shem. Yet the way that term has always been used is to declare bigotry against the *Jewish* people. Interestingly, it is the Arab peoples who are usually most accused of being anti-Semitic. Arab Semites being called anti-Semitic. Just another of those mindless phrases

and terms that are regularly used but no one seems to have any idea what they're actually saying.

WAS ISHMAEL CURSED?

Just because Ishmael was rejected by God as the son of promise does not mean that Ishmael was cursed by God. Ishmael was not punished or judged; he simply could not be the son of promise because Yehoveh had determined that another, Isaac, was to be that son. In fact, to sort of make up for Ishmael's being dispossessed of the firstborn status that he held until Isaac was born, Ishmael was given an almost equal physical inheritance as Isaac. It's just that while Abraham would provide Isaac's wealth and prosperity, Yehoveh would provide for Ishmael's. So, in our age, while the Arab peoples are generally Israel's enemy, they are in no way an accursed people any more than we are just because the leaders of our nation have come against Israel by forcing them to divide their land. Oh, the Arabs have been and will continue to be disciplined severely by Yehoveh for coming against His set-apart people, just as we Americans (as a nation) will continue to be severely disciplined by God for forcing Israel to turn over some of their land to their enemies. But whereas the descendants of Noah's son Ham are a line of people who did have a curse put on them, that is not the case with the descendants of Shem—Arabs as well as Hebrews—or of Japheth, for that matter.

ARABS: A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

For all practical purposes, we could say that the descendants of Ishmael, together with the descendants of Keturah, form the modern-day Arab peoples. These descendants of Ishmael and Keturah began commingling very early on. We find mention in Isaiah 60 of Midian, Ephah, and Sheba, who were tribes from Keturah, living side by side with Kedar and Nebaioth, who were sons of Ishmael.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Isaiah 60:1–7.

This is an end-time prophecy about what has been happening and is continuing to happen with Israel, mostly right before our eyes. It's about the return of the Jews to their homeland. And, of course, the modern era return of the Israelites to their God-given land is an ongoing process that has been occurring since the 1940s.

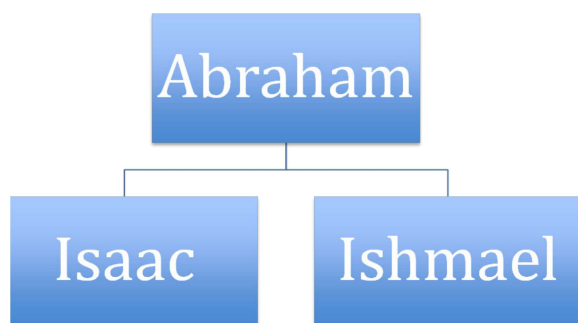
And in Isaiah 60:6–7 we see the names of those five tribes, the Arab tribes of Midian, Ephah, Sheba, Kedar, and Nebaioth. These names also appear in Genesis 25. What is being said here is that Arab peoples will eventually become friends and servants of Israel and bring them wealth and prosperity. More pointedly, Arab peoples will come to worship Messiah in Israel. So this is not about what is happening today, but what will happen sometime in the near future. Hordes of Arabs will bow down to the Hebrew Messiah.

We must very careful how we disciples of Yahshua view the Arab peoples. Yes, today, most Arabs are on the wrong side of the issue with Israel.⁹⁷ They have even chosen to abandon the God of their forefather Abraham to take on a false-god, a nongod called Allah. They have chosen to be outright enemies of Christians and Jews.

The Arab Muslims who believe in Allah are no *more* deceived than our families, friends, and neighbors who believe in no god at all! So while we must stand beside Israel, knowing that will set us against most of the world, because it is our duty and call before God, that does not mean we should hate Arabs or Muslims. We can hate what they believe, and we can hate what they do when they're wrong. We're no more wrong to destroy those who try to destroy us or Israel than we were to fight Hitler's armies in World War II. But we shouldn't revel in it or have joy in the doing.⁹⁸

SOME THOUGHTS ON ISLAM

Islam claims that Ishmael is the true founder of Islam. This is willful ignorance and an agenda-driven fantasy about the simple history of the matter of Islam and Ishmael. Ishmael is not the father of Islam. He's not even the father of all the Arab peoples, just some of them.



Isaac and Ishmael are a distinct fork in the road: Jews and Christians down one path, Arabs down the other. The differences between the Judeo-Christian world and the Islamic world are irreconcilable. There is no halfway point; there is no compromise. Islam claims that the words from Allah (their god) and the people of the promise of the covenants with Abraham descended through Ishmael and are recorded in the Koran. Of course, Jews and Christians believe that the promise of the covenants is passed down through Isaac and is recorded in the Holy Scriptures, the Bible.

We have just finished reading several chapters in Genesis that explicitly state that the son of promise and the line of the covenant is Isaac, not Ishmael. Interestingly, the Muslims also acknowledge that is what the Bible says, but they say the Bible texts have been corrupted and changed by Jews and Christians. They say that, in fact, the Bible should say that it was *Isaac* who was rejected and that *Ishmael* was the real son of promise.

Let's look at a couple of facts that make that claim utter nonsense:

1. The religion of Islam didn't come into existence until the Prophet Muhammad formed it; Muslims fully agree with that.

2. Muhammad wasn't born until almost six hundred years after the time of Jesus Christ.

3. The last book of the OT was written one thousand years before Muhammad was born. The last book of the NT was written five centuries before Muhammad was born.⁹⁹

MUHAMMAD'S CLAIM THAT THE BIBLE HAS IT WRONG

Upon reading the Bible, Muhammad, the founder of Islam, basically said, "Oh, all those writings were corrupted by the Jews just to pervert what I'm telling you." Imagine if someone today stood up and said, "Hey, the Constitution that is under glass in Washington, DC, the original one that was written 250 years ago . . . it's wrong. I just wrote the correct one. The original is corrupted, and it was corrupted by our founding fathers and this is so you wouldn't believe that I just wrote down the right one!" Isn't that about the most illogical, silliest thing you've ever heard? But that is precisely what Islam claims about the Holy Scriptures today.

By the time Islam was even invented by Muhammad, the Roman Catholic Church was dominant throughout Europe and Asia. Constantine, who declared the new Gentile form of Christianity to be the state religion of the Roman Empire, had already been dead for more than two hundred years by the time Muhammad was born. It doesn't even matter that the Dead Sea Scrolls, which are the oldest actual, original scriptural writings of the Hebrews from before the time Christ was born and on display in Jerusalem for any and all to see, fully agree with the Old Testaments we have today. This clearly proves that no corruption or change has occurred, at least not after about 100 BC, if ever. Yet Islam claimed in the AD 600s that Genesis should have said Ishmael was the chosen one and Isaac was the rejected one.



FALSE CLAIMS THAT ALLAH IS JUST ANOTHER NAME FOR YAHWEH

There are two ways and only two to know who a god is: by his name and by his attributes.

ISLAM'S NAME FOR GOD

There are scholars who say that *Allah* is just Arabic for “god.” While in the most general sense this is true, the only name of god in Islam is Allah. Muslims reject all biblical names for God, even when those names are Arabized. YHWH, El Shaddai, or any other biblical name or title for the God of the universe is wrong, according to Islam. It is clear that the god of Islam (Allah) has an entirely different name than the God of the Bible.

ATTRIBUTES OF ISLAM'S GOD

The god of Islam glorifies death. The God of the Bible glorifies life. The god of Islam says that Muslims are to win converts to Islam by means of the sword. The God of the Bible says that His believers are to win converts by means of love and faith. The god of Islam says that a Muslim's behavior determines his eternal future. The God of the Bible says the condition of one's heart determines his eternal future. The god of Islam has no Messiah for salvation. The God of the Bible says there must be salvation by means of a Messiah. The god of Islam is a war god. The God of the Bible is a shalom God. The contradictions go on and on and on. The attributes, character, and instruction of the god of Islam as found in the Koran are the *exact opposite* of the attributes, character, and instruction of the

ALLAH	YHWH, EL SHADDAI
Loves death	Loves life
Converts by the sword	Converts by love
Behavior	Condition of the heart
No Messiah	Messiah
God of war	God of shalom

God of the Bible. And yet, many Christian and other religious leaders tell us that Christians and Muslims worship the same God.

IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES

I have heard many well-meaning pastors say that the best way to approach a Muslim is to tell them that you respect that they are worshipping God, they just don't know that the God they are worshipping is Jesus! The Hebrew Yeshua! This is insanity! It is blasphemy of the worst kind, and it is teaching God's people to believe that worshipping any god is fine, no matter his name or characteristics, because any god is really just the God of Israel. Well, that's not what Yehoveh has been telling us, is it?

Please. If you love the people of the church or synagogue you attend, take this information with you and tell them the truth. Do you realize what happened to the Israelites who worshipped both Yehoveh and the gods of other nations? Those who tried to be politically correct and tolerant by the standards of their era? Those who declared that Yehoveh and Ba'al were one? They were scattered to the four winds and millions were destroyed. There is *no difference* between what they did and what we do today, right in our places of worship, when we declare that Yehoveh, Messiah, and Allah are one. God didn't deal with them on a person-by-person or

family-by-family basis. He placed *a national* judgment upon them, and the exact same thing is prophesied in our time. Not personally believing or accepting this blasphemy as truth doesn't exempt you or your family from suffering along with others in a nation under God's terrible discipline. Oh, certainly, you are saved, and your eternal future is secure. But is that really all that matters? Not for me, and I think not for you.

THE TRIBES OF ISHMAEL

Nebaioth was the firstborn son of Ishmael. His tribe was the people referred to as the Nabaiati, who are mentioned in Assyrian accounts of their empire's battles against the people of the Arabian Peninsula, only a few decades prior to Judah's being taken captive in Babylon. We know

these people as the Nabateans, and even more recently as the Jordanians of Petra.

Kedar is spoken of in the Bible many centuries after Genesis, and they formed some kind of association with the Edomite people (the descendants of Esau). These are people who wandered about as shepherds and goat herders throughout the Arabian and Sinai Peninsulas. Without doubt, they form at least part of the modern-day Bedouins.

Adb'e'l is known in Assyrian historical records as Idiba'il; they were conquered by Tiglath-Pileser, the same man who was instrumental in conquering the Northern Kingdom of Ephraim-Israel, and sent to guard the Egyptian-Assyrian border.

Dumah's tribe shows up again in Isaiah 21. They occupied a territory just above Midian



The tribes of Ishmael



along the Gulf of Aqaba on the Arabian Peninsula.

The tribe of Tema dwelled around a well-known oasis northeast of Dedan because it was located on a very well-traveled caravan route that connected the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula with the lower reaches of Mesopotamia.

Jetur and Naphish appear to have merged into a single tribe and are described later in the Bible, in 1 Chronicles 5, as the Hagrites, a contraction for Hagar-ites, descendants of Hagar.

For all practical purposes, nothing is known beyond pure speculation about the remaining twelve sons of Ishmael, so we won't go there.



ARAB CULTURE OF THEFT

Genesis 25:16 tells us that the descendants of Ishmael lived in villages (camps): “These are the sons of Yishma’el, and these are their names, according to their settlements and camps, twelve tribal rulers.” In other words, these tribes didn’t build and reside in walled cities. They were rural, farmers and herders, and some were desert wanderers and traders. This accounts for the lifestyle the Arabs developed in which they constantly attacked one another in hopes of gaining for themselves, by taking from another, because they lived in unfortified towns. This mentality is still at work today. Part of what fundamental Islam is fighting against is a way of life that produces things, as opposed to their traditional way of life that takes what others have produced. The traditional Arab tribal ways revolved around one tribe seeking to take wealth and power and people from another tribe. Even Muhammad, the founder of Islam, gained his reputation as a leader by attacking other Arab tribes and winning. The goal was always the same: spoils of war.

Why is it that those Arab/Muslim strongholds of the world are also the most poverty-stricken, undeveloped places in the world? Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Egypt, and so on. Generally speaking, the people there have little concept of working, producing, fundamental fairness, or technological progress (at least from the Western viewpoint). When Islam attacked Europe in AD



711, it was the European wealth that they were after, not a European way of life or European technology. They wanted to take what Europe had produced. That is exactly what they want today. The war on terror is indeed a fight about a way of life. But, the way of life they want is: “You produce it; we’ll take it.” They don’t even know how, nor do they want to know how, to produce or share.

ISHMAEL’S DEATH

In verse 17 we are told, “This is how long Yishma’el lived: 137 years. Then he breathed his last, died and was gathered to his people.” Here again, we find no reference to what that “gathered to his people” means. Was this an afterlife? If so, what did it consist of? We’ll never find out in the Torah, and very little detail is given in the whole of the OT. Rather, this is just a nice way of saying he lived out a good life and died peacefully, probably of natural causes. His “people” were undoubtedly his descendants as opposed to his ancestors. He had been divided and separated away from his father, so he was the start of a new line. Being gathered to his kin, I feel certain, refers to his immediate family, who would not be known as Arab for several more centuries.

ISHMAEL’S TERRITORY

The general territorial boundary where Ishmael’s descendants lived started at the border of the Sinai Peninsula with Egypt (*Shur*, which means “wall”) and then went north to the Assyrians of Mesopotamia. The location of Havilah is not known, as there are many locations in the Middle East that went by this name or variations of it. The inference is that the descendants of Ishmael tended to stay among themselves; for it says they camped alongside their kinsmen. They didn’t seem to mix with the Mesopotamians, Egyptians, Nubians, or other non-Semitic peoples of the earth. Generally speaking, the descendants of Ishmael occupied areas to the north, south, and east of the land of Canaan.



ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 25:19–34.

FROM ISAAC TO JACOB

Here in the final third of Genesis 25, we begin to chart the end of Isaac’s story and the beginning of his son Jacob’s story: the torch was being prepared to be passed yet again.

In the Torah, Isaac is spoken of only sparingly as compared to his son Jacob and his father, Abraham. For instance, we are told at the end of Genesis 24 that Isaac married Rivkah, but then there is no information given to us about the first twenty years of their marriage. We do know that unlike Abraham, Isaac seemed to have stayed closer to home. The known stories about Isaac center around Be’er Sheva; as far as anyone knows, he didn’t live in Hebron as his father did, except near the end of his life. But, like his father, he was an owner of flocks and herds.

In verse 21, we find that, much in the same way as it was for Abraham and Sarah, Isaac’s beloved wife Rivkah was unable to bear

THE PROGRESS OF THE PATRIARCHS

Let's pause and put the progress of the patriarchs in perspective. Abraham, Jacob's grandfather, began life as a pagan. The world at the time of Abraham's birth consisted of only one kind of people: the human race. Other than genealogical and social divisions, all humans were about the same in Yehoveh's eyes; the one exception being that the line of Ham, one of Noah's three sons, was an accursed line.¹⁰⁰ As of Abraham's time there was no division of humanity, there were no set-apart people.

Once God called Abraham to leave his country and his immediate family, He began the process of a divine dividing of the world into two groups of people: His people and everybody else. The name we give to "God's people," the name we find in the Bible, is *Hebrew*. When Abraham obeyed God and moved to the land of Canaan, by declaration God divided mankind into Hebrews on the one hand and everyone else on the other. Decisions by Abraham and a declaration by God were the sole factors in making Abraham and his descendants different in God's eyes from all other human beings.

BIRTHRIGHT VERSUS DECLARATION FROM GOD

Isaac, son of Abraham, represents the next step in the evolution of the Hebrew people. Isaac was the firstborn Hebrew. Purely by *declaration* was Abraham a Hebrew, but Isaac was a Hebrew by *birth*. Yet, even then, a declaration of God was still involved; for Abraham had another son, Ishmael, whom he thought to be his firstborn and therefore the one to carry on the covenants God had made with Abraham. As far as Abraham was concerned, Ishmael was a Hebrew. And in the strictest sense, Ishmael was a Hebrew until something changed. A time came when Yehoveh said to Abraham, "Not so fast! Just as I divided you away from your father and brother, I'm going to divide Ishmael away from his father and brother." Ishmael was to be divided and separated away from his father, Abraham, and his brother, Isaac. The effect was that Ishmael was not to continue being Hebrew, but Isaac was.

If Ishmael and Isaac *both* had a Hebrew father (Abraham), why is only the one, Isaac, considered a Hebrew today? Why isn't Ishmael just another branch of Hebrews? Why don't we think of Ishmael and all of his descendants—the ones we refer to as Arabs—as Hebrews, too? This is an important principle: while birthright (that is, genealogy, your physical bloodlines) establishes your physical identity, it is the election and declaration of the Lord that establishes your spiritual identity. Your physical identity and your spiritual identity are two different matters, are they not? So the term *Hebrew* began by denoting much more than simple physical identity; Hebrew also defined a spiritual identity.

By God's design, *Hebrew* was meant to be a term that described a *combination* of physical and spiritual attributes of a person. The life of a Hebrew, physically and spiritually, was to operate under a set of laws and promises that God made with the first Hebrew, Abraham. A Hebrew's earthly life was to revolve around his spiritual life. We call these laws and promises that define the overall life of a Hebrew the Abrahamic covenant, and later they were expanded and given to Moses and are now called Torah.

Even though Isaac was physically of the right stock to be a Hebrew, it still took an act of God, an election of God, for him to be *declared* a Hebrew. Ishmael was also of the right physical stock to be a Hebrew, but God did not grant Ishmael the necessary spiritual status to be a Hebrew. Therefore, the election of Isaac and the rejection of Ishmael create an enormous fork in the road. One direction led to the Hebrews, the other away from the Hebrews.

him an heir for a long time. Further, she was barren, meaning she had given Isaac no children at all, not even girls. As did Abraham, Isaac went before Yehoveh and Yehoveh granted his request for a son. Rivkah became pregnant. While there of course are great similarities between the situations of Abraham and Sarah and Isaac and Rivkah conceiving, there are also great differences. For instance, neither Isaac nor Rivkah was beyond child-bearing years. Secondly, Isaac didn't turn to any concubines, and Rivkah didn't offer a handmaiden



or slave girl to bear a child in her stead. There appear to have been no plans to do anything but live with the situation of childlessness until Yehoveh decided to do something.

Did the Lord wait for Isaac to approach Him before allowing him children? Was the Lord constrained by Isaac, in that Isaac's *prayers* were necessary before God could allow Rebecca to become fertile? This is the substance of many fascinating arguments among spiritual leaders: Does God need our prayers in order to act?

I think not. But God does want to teach us. He also wants a relationship with us; yet, what relationship is possible without communication? While oral speech is the traditional human-to-human way of communicating, prayer is the God-ordained method for human-to-God communication. God does not need prayer, but He does want prayer. Conversely, Christians need to pray. I cannot think of a way that builds a stronger faith than communicating my needs, or the needs of another, to God and then marveling over His response.

This much-longed-for pregnancy of Rivkah's almost immediately became uncomfortable for

her. These apparently very active twin sons within her womb caused her to inquire of God just what was going on. Let's be clear: this pregnancy worried Rivkah. The activity within her womb was not normal. Even an unusual Hebrew word is chosen to describe the goings-on—the word *va-yitrotsetsu*, which is usually translated as “struggled.” This verb has the sense of crushing, thrusting, and smashing; it is pretty violent.

The battle within Rivkah's womb between Isaac's twin sons, Jacob and Esau, highlights the principle that God declares some to be chosen and others not, even though they both come from the same physical stock. The issue of who would be chosen as inheritor of the rights of the covenant given to Abraham was at the core of their dissension. Both Jacob and Esau were, by all physical evidence, born from their Hebrew father, Isaac. By birth, if one went purely by physical definition, it would seem that both were Hebrews. And, in a sense, they both were. But, God would again, by declaration, elect and *divide*.

Let us remember that while we could see some physical and genealogical differences between Isaac and Ishmael—after all, they had different mothers of different nationalities—it was entirely different for Jacob and Esau because they, of course, had the same mother and father. Jacob and Esau were twins; physically and genealogically there was no difference between Jacob and Esau. So, how is it that Jacob was elected to be a Hebrew and Esau not? It was by declaration alone, God's sovereign decision to choose Jacob over Esau. Jacob would be a Hebrew; Esau was stripped of his right to be called Hebrew. The only difference between Jacob and Esau was spiritual, and that was brought about purely by the declaration of Yehoveh.

DEFINITION OF A HEBREW

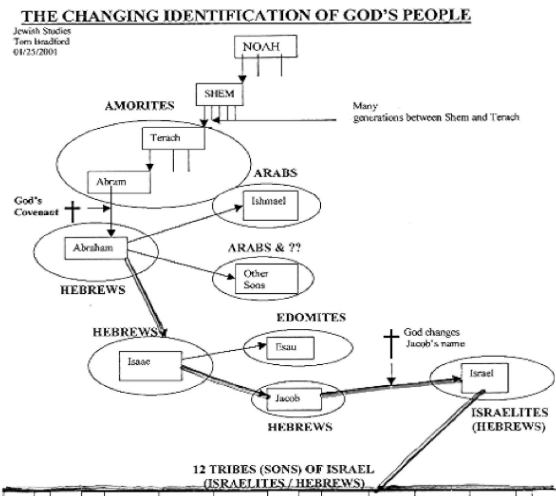
A Hebrew is one who has been made a descendant in the line of covenant promises given to Abraham. A Hebrew is an *inheritor* of the covenant promises as given to Abraham. If

a person is an inheritor of the covenant promises, then that person is part of God's set-apart people. Thus the world was, upon God's covenants with Abraham, divided into two groups: Hebrews and all others. Abraham established the line of covenant promise at the declaration of God; Abraham's father and brother were excluded. Abraham's son Isaac continued the line of covenant promise at the declaration of God; Abraham's other son, Ishmael, was excluded. Isaac's son Jacob would continue the line of covenant promise at the declaration of God; Isaac's other son, Esau, would be excluded.

But from Jacob forward all descendants of Jacob would be called Hebrew—no more exclusions and no more election by declaration of God. Beginning with Jacob's offspring, one was a Hebrew by law. If one was physically born to a Hebrew, that person was a Hebrew. Period. Even more, if one who was not born a Hebrew (that is, a Gentile) wanted to become part of the Hebrew people, it was allowed by means of rules and laws that had been set down by Yehoveh.

THE NEW COVENANT

So how one comes to be called part of God's set-apart people, the Hebrews, occurs by means of a number of sequential forks in the road. It started with the Abraham fork, then the Isaac fork, and then the Jacob fork. And it stayed that way for about eighteen hundred years. Eighteen centuries after Jacob we find yet another fork in



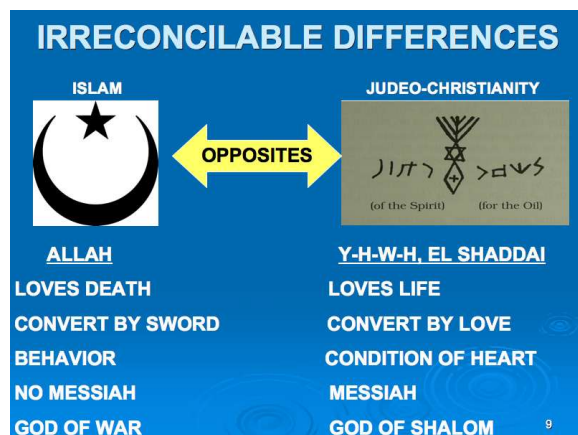
the road; it's called the new covenant. The new covenant is the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy about a time when the physical covenants and laws of the Hebrews, called the Torah, would be written, spiritually, on certain men's hearts. Not all men's hearts, just those who were elected and declared by God to be His. This would happen by means of a Messiah. This new fork in the road brings us full circle; this fork brings to fruition that promise of the Abrahamic covenant that "all the families of the earth will be blessed" in you, Abraham. *All* doesn't mean Gentiles and not Jews. It also doesn't mean Jews and not Gentiles. *All* means "all." Those who are included under the covenants of the Hebrews involve God's election and declaration, and the key to all this is the Messiah.

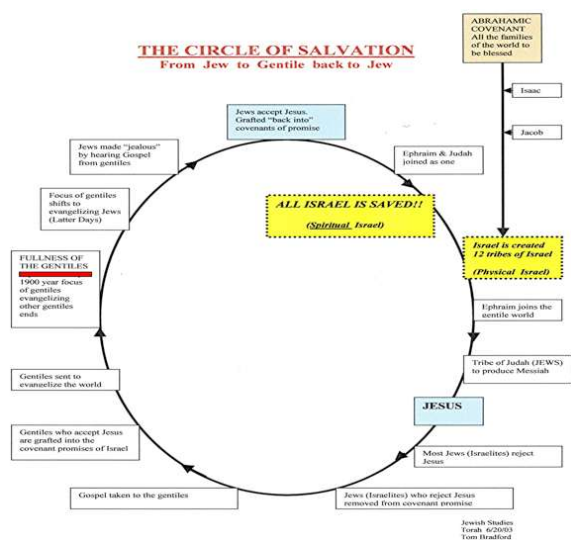
Genesis 25 is the story of a crucial division, election, and separation by the God of Israel. It is one that has many wonderful nuances and establishes many messianic principles.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Genesis 25:19–34.

THE BATTLE IN RIVKAH'S WOMB

Rivkah, wife of Isaac, was worried. Her womb was in absolutely violent upheaval. What





was going on in there was not normal. These may have been her first children, but she had undoubtedly witnessed scores of pregnancies and assisted in not just a few births; that's part of what women did. So she sought Yehoveh for reassurance and to calm her fears. God gave her His answer: two nations lived within her, and what she was feeling was a struggle for dominance. Even more, He told Rebecca that the first one out of the birth canal should not be given the rights and honor of the firstborn—in Hebrew, *bekhor*—as was customary; rather, it should go to the second one born. This is a theme that is ongoing in the Bible, a theme that separates what seems to be in a physical-earthly sense from what actually is in a spiritual-heavenly sense. In a physical sense, it seemed to Abraham that Ishmael, the son of his concubine Hagar, was his firstborn son, the son of promise. But in a spiritual sense, it was Isaac, born miraculously by Sarah, who was to have the firstborn rights and be the all-important son of promise.

Rivka was carrying twins. The law was that the first one to be born was the firstborn, the *bekhor*; and the second one to be born was more or less subservient to the first. The fact that a firstborn was a twin meant little. They didn't divide the inheritance; they didn't each get a share of the firstborn inheritance. One was chosen and the other was not. This violent

struggle in Rivka's womb foretold the coming struggle over which child would dominate the other. Even more, we find that God had predetermined the outcome; neither Isaac nor Rivkah was involved in the decision.

In verse 23, Rivkah was told that “the older will serve the younger.” In other words, the *physical* firstborn would not receive the usual customary rights of the *bekhor*. Instead, the second would be given that right. The eternal importance of this matter was that the *physical* firstborn, Esau, was not going to be the inheritor of the covenant promises; instead, the physical second-born, Jacob, was going to be the inheritor. Jacob was the *bekhor* on a *spiritual* level; he was the firstborn based on divine declaration. These two separate nations, one being Jacob and other Esau, would have enmity for each other. That is part of the meaning of the phrase “the older shall *serve* the younger.”

The physical firstborn of Isaac, Esau, is parallel to Ishmael, the *physical* firstborn of Abraham. The *spiritual* firstborn of Isaac, Jacob, is parallel to Isaac, the *spiritual* firstborn of Abraham and the future carrier of the covenant promises. This is an ongoing principle and pattern of the Reality of Duality: there is a spiritual reality and a physical reality that exist simultaneously.

ISAAC'S TWINS

The twins were born. The first one to be born was Esau; he was of red or ruddy complexion and very hairy—a lovable little fuzzi-ball. The Hebrew word for “hairy” (as used here in this verse) is *se'ar*. We'll find out later in Genesis that Esau moved away from Jacob and established his nation in the district called Mount Seir. This is a wordplay; Mount Seir (literally meaning “hairy mountain”) got its name from Esau's being born very *se'ar*; or hairy.

During the birth process, Jacob was holding on to Esau's heel; Jacob was trying to keep Esau from being born first.

Now, to better help explain what comes next, we should understand that Rebecca would

not have kept the information Yehoveh gave her about the destinies of her twin sons to herself; that would have been disloyal and disrespectful to her husband. Rather she would have told him posthaste that God declared whichever of the twins came out first was not to be declared *bekhor*, firstborn; rather it was the second to emerge who would have that designation. There was little more important in a family of that era than who would succeed the father in authority over the clan, that successor being the *bekhor*, the firstborn.

Likewise, you can be sure Rebecca informed her twin sons, Esau and Jacob, of God's determination that Jacob, not Esau, would be *bekhor*. How cruel it would have been to wait until their maturity to inform them of this all-important decree, a decree that mother and father were aware of before these children were born. So, it is with this understanding of the family's awareness of the younger, Jacob, being destined to have the birthright above the older, Esau, that we must view what happens next.

ESAU GIVES AWAY HIS BIRTHRIGHT

As the story unfolds, we find that, as is common within families, parents have their favorites. Isaac preferred Esau. He was apparently impetuous, brave, skillful with a bow, quite macho—things dads typically admire in their sons. Jacob was quieter and introspective, more sensitive—things mothers typically prefer. Notice our parallel once again with Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael was a favorite of Abraham; Isaac was a favorite with his mother. When Yehoveh told Abraham that it was to be the second-born, Isaac, who would obtain the firstborn position, Abraham cried out to God, “Oh, if only Ishmael could live in your presence!” Abraham determined he wanted Ishmael as the firstborn; Isaac determined he wanted Esau as the firstborn. Neither would get what they wanted.

So the day arrived when Esau came in from a hunt, famished, and saw that Jacob had prepared a pot of lentils, or more literally translated, red

stew. Jacob, apparently never having been entirely comfortable with having the rights of the firstborn assigned to himself, decided he was going to help God out: he would get Esau to openly and finally sell his traditional birthright to Jacob.

The impulsive Esau said “since [he was] about to die” he might as well give his birthright to Jacob, and sealed the deal with an oath. “I’m about to die” is not literal; it was just a saying, something akin to “Who cares?” Of course, since God had long ago settled the issue, in reality Esau had no birthright to sell, for it already belong to Jacob. And Jacob had no need to resort to treachery to obtain the birthright, because the Lord had already assigned it to him: but neither Jacob nor Esau had the faith to accept it as fact.

We’re also given here a small piece of information we will find useful in the chapters ahead: Esau is given a nickname—Edom. *Edom* means “red,” and it not only refers to his ruddy, hairy body features, but also to this infamous incident at the stewpot that just transpired. For future reference, remember that Edom and Esau are the same. The future nation of Edom, so prevalent from here on in the Bible as an ongoing enemy of Israel, will also play a role in end times. The people of Edom, the Edomites, are simply the descendants of Esau.

In verse 34, we’re told that Esau despised his birthright, a very serious biblical condemnation of Esau. I have little doubt that Rivkah told Esau, as she undoubtedly did Jacob, that despite the chronological order of birth, it was Jacob who was to have the firstborn rights. What a hurtful thing for Esau; knowing that, from his point of view, his own mother was telling him, the *bekhor*, that he would not be recognized as the firstborn. How else could he have felt than that his mother was siding with Jacob? This had to have shaped much of Esau’s life, making him somewhat bitter, untrusting, and cynical. His father, Isaac, was not a poor man. To think that Esau had no interest in having all the rights and powers of the firstborn, frankly, doesn’t make any sense. He probably saw his losing the firstborn rights as inevitable,

though grossly unfair, and behaved as though it didn't matter in the first place.

A DEATH IN THE FAMILY

Does it seem odd that we have a male, Jacob, doing the cooking here? Clearly, the Scriptures say that Jacob cooked the stew. Cooking was a woman's task, particularly when they were camped or living in villages. Certainly, men who were away from home did some cooking for survival, but it was traditional and would have been shameful under normal circumstances for a young man to be cooking. Was Jacob a sissy? Had his mother's favoritism turned him into a mama's boy?

When we understand ancient Hebrew culture, much of which has carried over into modern Hebrew traditions, we can recognize when something out of the ordinary is happening, like this scene with Jacob and Esau. It is not usual that Jacob would have been doing the cooking. It just wasn't done. So, what's going on here? The answer may lie in one of those beautiful Hebrew traditions that is part of every observant Jewish family today; it is a tradition that goes back to the beginning of time and is called "sitting Shiva." It is part of the rites of mourning the dead. The ancient Hebrew sages are near unanimous that the context for what was playing out between Esau and Jacob was that there had been a death in the family. And the one who died was Abraham.

What's the point of the Holy Scripture specifying that this was a red stew, and then identifying it as "lentils" in verse 34? How does it add anything to the context? What difference does it make that the soup was lentil? Lentil stew, or lentil soup, is called the meal of mourning. Lentil soup is a traditional food eaten during the seven-day period of mourning that is called "sitting Shiva." Any good Jew knows that this is indicative of a period of mourning.

Members of the immediate family were not to cook during that seven-day period. Other family members, or friends, were to provide



food for those seven days; additionally, foods preprepared (cooked and preserved before the death of the family member) could be eaten. The definition of who makes up the immediate family is important: one's father and mother, sister and brother, son and daughter, and spouse are immediate family members. Grandchildren are not immediate family members for the purpose of this part of the mourning rites. Rivkah, who normally cooked for the family, would have been prohibited from cooking. Jacob, Abraham's grandchild, was permitted to cook; he was outside that circle of immediate family. Perhaps that's why it was *he* who was cooking the meal of mourning, lentil stew.

So it appears that Abraham had just died and Jacob was preparing the meal of mourning when Esau showed up from the hunt. He didn't return to the surprise that his grandfather Abraham had died; he was well aware before he went out. Rather than be with the family and do his duty to be a mourner and a comforter, to his father in particular, he did what it pleased him to do—hunt game.

It is no coincidence that when Jacob approached Esau with the offer to trade Esau's

birthright for lentil stew, Esau responded with the morbid words: “Look, I’m about to die, what use is my right of the bekhor?” This was, at least in part, graveyard humor done at a most inappropriate time.

Let’s remember, at this point Esau was in his mid to late teens, and *angry*. His words weren’t mature or well thought out; they were impetuous and foolish. Yet it shows us just what he thought about his exalted position as the bekhor, the firstborn. And the answer is, not much.

When we study the rights of the firstborn, which include getting a double portion of the family’s wealth and the right to rule over the clan, it’s easy to forget the *responsibility* that went hand in hand with those rights. Any straight-thinking

parent knows what I’m speaking about. Any executive or manager or leader knows what I’m talking about. Yes, there are rewards and honors that come with the position: but there are duties that, if carried out properly, rise above any amount of reward or personal benefit. Esau knew his grandfather Abraham well and was equally aware of the great and terrible burden he carried. Esau, of course, knew his father, Isaac, well, and the tremendous burden of responsibility for the covenants of God that he carried. Esau wanted no part of it. Without doubt, like many teens, Esau wanted all the perks of power—telling people what to do, nobody telling him what to do, possessing the best place at the table, being wealthy, and so on—but he did not want the responsibilities and duties that went with those perks.

The great sage Rashi says that another lesson of this incident is how a righteous person views life in general versus how a wicked person does the same. Jacob’s view of life was, “What am I here to accomplish? What are my duties and my goals?” This is the righteous view. Esau’s view was “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we may die.” This is the wicked view. Esau was thinking, after contemplating the death of his grandfather, that he didn’t want to be tied to all the duties of the firstborn and family patriarch when his father, Isaac, died. He just wanted to enjoy life as much as he could, and to get all he could. Responsibility was for suckers.

Jacob chose that very moment to challenge Esau, because no one knows another person better, perhaps, than one twin knows another. Jacob knew that Esau was ready to give up his birthright and all the burdensome duties it came with. The death of his grandfather and the thinking we tend to do about our own lives when someone near to us dies drove him over the edge. The divinely ordained duties that Isaac and Abraham must have talked about incessantly were nothing Esau wanted, but so great was the importance of carrying on with the line of covenant promise that nothing could be put above it.

WHY LENTILS?

Lentils and eggs were considered foods suitable for mourning. What these two food items have in common is that they are round. The roundness illustrates the circular nature of life, the cycle of being conceived from nothing and returning to nothing—physically speaking, of course. And, it also speaks of one generation dying off, and the next beginning in an unending pattern.

The Bible and the Hebrew thought that comes from it show us that history is circular; it repeats itself. Over and over we see these same patterns that God ordained, established, and wove into the fabric of the universe repeating. Naturally, it is secular humanism and its proud son Darwinian evolutionism that says, “No, no; history is a straight line. It starts from some unknown place in the past, and randomly proceeds to some unknowable future. Every moment of every day is new and there is nothing in the past to compare it to. There are no patterns. Morality evolves and adapts. The old becomes obsolete, and the new becomes pre-eminent. The old becomes replaced by something that destroys the prior pattern and establishes a new one.”

The illustration of the lentil and the egg says otherwise. We humans need physical illustrations of God’s spiritual principles. When we put them aside or think we no longer need them, the result is deception and error.

THE CHARACTER OF THE TWINS

Much is contained in verse 27 to inform us of the character of each young man: “The boys grew; and ‘Esav became a skillful hunter, an outdoorsman; while Ya’akov was a quiet man who stayed in the tents.”

Only in two places in the Holy Scriptures is a man called a hunter, a *tsayid*. The first man to be labeled as a hunter as a means of identifying his character was Nimrod; the only other is Esau. As the Bible uses it, *tsayid* is a negative term, it really means a stone-cold killer. A guy who kills animals for the love of killing and has little if any conscience in killing a man.

Jacob, on the other hand, is called a “quiet man” in some Bibles, a “plain man” in others, and a “peaceful man” in still others. The Hebrew word that is being translated is *tam*. While “peaceful” or “plain” is not necessarily incorrect, it misses the point: Jacob and Esau are being contrasted. They are being compared as opposites. *Tam* means blameless, or not

having guilt; it is implied that this is blamelessness before God. It is another way of saying “righteous.” The contrast here is about one who loves killing versus one who loves life. One who wanders aimlessly versus one who stays near. One who slaughters the flock versus the one who shepherds the flock.

The last verse sums up this entire episode: “Thus Esau showed how little he valued his birthright.”

DISCUSS

1. What do you think is the difference between God’s wrath and His discipline?
2. What did you learn about Jacob or Esau that you had never known before? What did you find most interesting about their story?

Time to complete the Week 12 Review!