

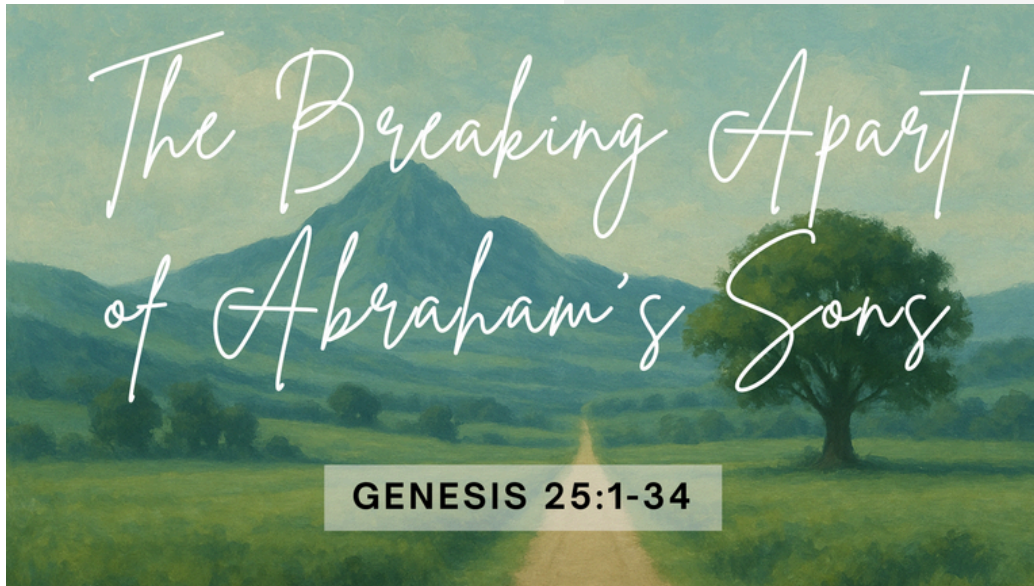
CCLEB SERMON NOTES



SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 12, 2025
GENESIS 25:1-34

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THE BREAKING APART OF ABRAHAM'S SONS



Genesis 25 is broken into three sections that may seem unrelated, but they all are connected.
Genesis 25:1-11 Abraham's death & the division of his sons: The covenant blessing passed to Isaac.
Genesis 25:12-18 Ishmael's genealogies: The division and defiance of Ishmael from his brothers.
Genesis 25:19-34 The division of Jacob and Esau: Esau despises his birthright. Each of the section descriptions corresponds with the last verse of each section.

Genesis 25		
Abraham's death & the division of his sons: The covenant blessing passed to Isaac.	Ishmael's genealogies: The division and defiance of Ishmael from his brothers.	The division of Jacob and Esau: Esau despises his birthright.
25:1-11	25:12-18	25:19-34
Each of the section descriptions corresponds with the last verse of each section.		

So let's look at the first 11 verses, and we are going to start with the last verse of that section.
Genesis 25:11. So this summary verse is God passing the covenant blessing on from Abraham to the promised seed - heir of the covenant, Isaac. Not Ishmael, nor the other six brothers we learn from this chapter that Isaac has. The covenant is passed to Isaac alone.

Now for context and reminder, the covenant blessing that Abraham received from the LORD, and that is passed to Isaac was: **Genesis 15:5** "Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That's how many descendants you will have!" **Genesis 15:18a** "I have given this land to your descendants, all the way from the border of Egypt to the great Euphrates River..."

Genesis 17:4 “I will make you the Father of a multitude of nations...”. **Genesis 17:7b-8** “This is the everlasting covenant: I will always be your God and the God of your descendants after you. I will give the entire land of Canaan....It will be their possession forever, and I will be their God.

What was the Covenant? God Said...	
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So when **Genesis 25:11** says “God blessed his son Isaac”. That is the LORD passing the blessing of the covenant onto Isaac the descendant of Abraham.

Now in order for the blessing to pass to the next descendant Isaac, Abraham must be dead. So let’s go back to verse one that leads up to Abraham’s death.

So sometime after Sarah died, 137 year old Abraham, full of life and vitality and apparently vigor, decides to remarry and is able to have more children.

Ab remarries Keturah – and note in **verse 1** the word “wife” – “Isha” is used... not “concubine”. This is the same word used in **Genesis 2** to describe Eve. So Sarah his first wife has died, Hagar, his second wife – the Egyptian slave, was sent away with Ishmael their son, and Abraham marries Keturah – his third wife.

We don’t know much about Keturah, other than her name means “pleasing incense” or “aroma”- implying perhaps that she was pleasant to be around, or a welcomed presence. The other detail we know about her is that in contrast to Sarah, Keturah was fertile. This contrast of fertile to barren is significant later in the chapter.



We see that Keturah bore six more sons to Abraham, giving Ab a total of eight sons. Eight sons, but only one of them was the son of promise that carried the covenant, Isaac.

So now in **Genesis 25:1-4** we have the six sons of Abraham through Keturah, presented in contrast to Isaac. In **verse 5** it says “Abraham gave everything he owned to his son Isaac”. Isaac has six-half-brothers through Keturah... but Isaac gets it all. Why the divide?

We see in **verse 6** that Abraham gave all the other sons gifts, and then sent them away east, and it specifically says “east, away from Isaac”.

Now we already know so far in Genesis that going east is “away from God” – Adam and Eve were exiled east of Eden (**Genesis 3:24**). When Cain was exiled he went even further east (**Genesis 4:16**). And Noah’s descendants after the flood - traveled east to Babel (**Genesis 11:1**).

East

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But specifically in this narrative east is away from the land promised in the covenant, Canaan. The land promised in the covenant would go to Ab’s son Isaac, the son of the covenant. The land would not go to Abraham’s other sons, thus Abraham sent all his other sons east away from Isaac.

Now Keturah’s sons and grandsons who were sent “east” end up populating much of the Arabian Peninsula: Zimran went to Arabia, Jokshan went to Sheba, Medan and Midian became the Midianites, Ishbak is thought to have become a nomadic tribe east of the Jordan. One of the sons of Keturah, Shuah, some suggest went on to have a famous descendent named Bildad the Shuhite, one of the chatty but not helpful “friends of Job”. Some say he was the shortest man in the bible, a shoe-height.



Between **chapter 24 & 25** Abraham is protecting Isaac and the covenant. In **chapter 24** when Abraham was securing a wife for Isaac, he makes sure Isaac doesn’t marry a cursed Canaanite woman, and Ab makes sure that Isaac would not go back east to find a wife. In **chapter 25** Abraham protects Isaac and the land of promise by sending all his other sons east, away from Isaac.

So with all those protective measures in place for Isaac and covenant, Abraham dies **verse 7**. Interesting that Ab dies at the age of 175... exactly 100 years after the LORD called him to leave his family and home country in the east. Let’s pause and reflect on his life. Ab had 100 years of a journey of learning to trust and walk with the LORD. It was an impressive journey with the LORD.

Look at all Abraham learned! From being called by the Lord to go to Canaan, to disobeying the LORD right from the gate by bringing his father and brother along, and disobeying the LORD by leaving the land of promise and going to Egypt – then growing in his faith through other adventures to the place where he, as per God’s instructions, lifts his knife to slay his son Isaac on the altar at Moriah. Faith, trust, walking in intimacy with the LORD, Ab was called a “friend of God”. Would you want that on your tombstone? “A friend of God”?

In **verse 9** we see that Isaac and his half-brother Ishmael together bury their father. It is not uncommon for family divisions to be unified by a death. Estranged siblings sometimes reconcile at the death of a parent or family member. But this picture of Isaac and Ishmael brought together at the death and burial of Ab may also provide us a faint glimpse of a future event.

Isaac and Ishmael who have been separated, divided, since Isaac was a wee lad are now together at the death of their father, at least for that scene. The descendants of Isaac and Ishmael, become mortal enemies to this day. What hope is there for the descendants of Isaac and Ishmael to become a unified family once again? What force will bring them together again? Another death and burial and a resurrection. For the conflicting descendants to be a family again, the descendants of both Isaac and Ishmael will have to bow to the death and resurrection of Jesus. That unified family is what we see in **Revelation 7:9-10**. Jesus is the only hope for these divided siblings and we see a brief glimpse of that in **Genesis 25:9** when Isaac & Ishmael are briefly together to bury their father.

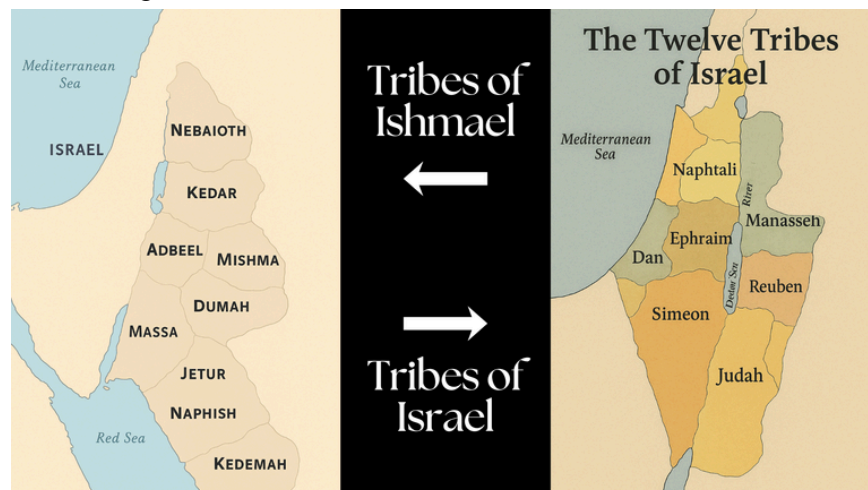
Genesis 25:11 tells us that after Abraham died, God blessed Isaac. This was not just a casual blessing like “aww.. bless your heart”, this was the blessing of the covenant that was given to Abraham by God now passed to Isaac.

Now in summary, in **verse 1-11** we saw Abraham send his six sons through his wife Keturah, away east, separate them from Isaac, where they became their own tribal nations. Why? Because they were not the son of promise that would inherit the land of promise, the covenant blessing, Isaac was. Brothers scattered, brothers broken apart.

Well that accounts for six of the eight brothers, but after the death of Abraham, what happened to Ishmael the son of Abraham’s wife Hagar? The second section in **chapter 25:12-18** answers that. And just like the first section, the last verse of the second section provides a summary of what happens to Ishmael. **Verse 18** “Ishmael’s descendants...

Genesis 25:18 really summarizes the six verses in this section – but let point out a few interesting things from this genealogy.. then we will move on to Jacob and Esau.. the last section.

In this section we learn here are twelve sons of Ishmael. They are referenced in **verse 16 NASB** as the twelve princes of the tribal nations based on where they either settled or traveled. One generation later, Jacob, the son of Isaac has sons, how many? Twelve sons! And they become the 12 tribes of Israel. 12 Tribes of Ishmael, 12 tribes of Israel (~500 years later). The divide of these 24 tribes is that the twelve sons of Jacob, the twelve tribes of Israel come from the one son of promise, heir of the covenant Isaac. And the other twelve are from the son of the slave woman, Ishmael. What is important to see here is the trend of the division of the brothers that is clearly visible just a few generations later.



Now all of these son’s becoming nations is the initial fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham that Abraham would be the “Father of many nations”. That promise is ultimately fulfilled through Christ and the global church, because Ab is the Father of our Faith.

That closes out the lineage of Ishmael.. but the lineage of Isaac and the passing of the covenant to one of his son's, Jacob, is just beginning. That's the last section of **chapter 25**.

The story of Jacob and Esau in **verses 19-34**, can be summarized by the last line of **verse 34b** "So he (Esau) showed contempt for the rights as the firstborn." What is it that Esau is rejecting in essence? The covenant – thus Esau, the brother of Jacob, is rejecting the LORD. Now think this through, if there are two sons of Isaac, Jacob and Esau, and one rejects the covenant, the covenant is passed to the other. This story is another division of brothers.

Let's see how this all starts in **verses 19-21**. Now what we don't know until this point is that Rebekah is barren, just like Isaac's mom Sarah was barren. So two generations in a row of bareness. Two generations in a row doesn't really make a pattern, but what if it's three generations in a row? In **Genesis 29:31** in the story of Jacob and Rachel, it says Rachel could not conceive.

Now three barren women in a row is a pattern, so what is going on here? Remember, this lineage of Abraham to Isaac, Isaac to Jacob is all about the covenant passed from generation to generation. But note, the first three generations of the mother's: Sarah, Rebekah, then Rachel, who bear the sons who inherit the covenant all start off as unable to conceive. And then the Lord intervenes, the once barren women conceive, and their sons who inherit the covenant are born. Three generations of bareness turns into three son's who inherit the covenant because God intervened.

What is God up to here? Scholar John Sailhamer suggests that God's message is that "The promised blessing thru the chosen seed is not accomplished by human effort." Now as the Old Testament is the foundation for the gospel, think of how God's intervening for the birth of the chosen child lays a foundational truth for the future birth of Jesus, born of a virgin, Jesus ushers in the new covenant.

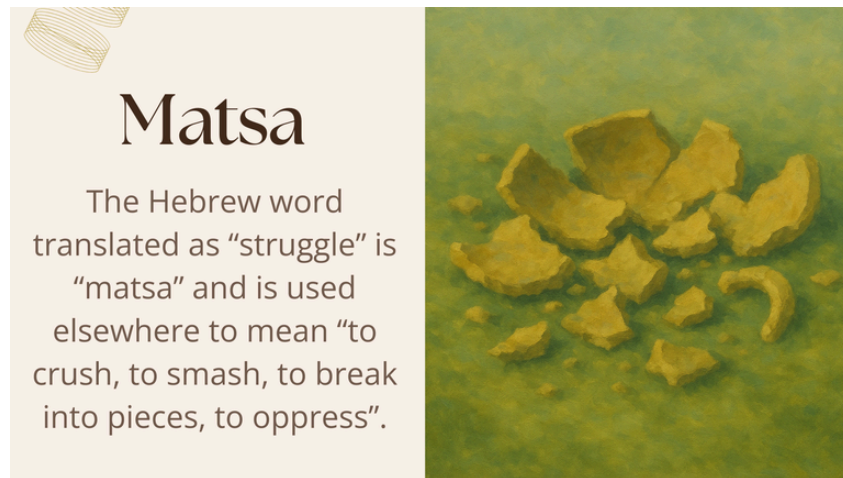
"The promised blessing through
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John Sailhamer

Now back in **Genesis 25:21**... Rebekah is barren, Isaac prays, the LORD answered Isaac's prayer, and Rebekah became pregnant. The verse reads as if that all happens quickly. Boom, boom, boom. But when you compare that in **verse 20** Isaac is 40 when he marries Rebekah, and that in **verse 26** Isaac is 60 when the twins are born, then we know they were unable to become pregnant for 20 years till the LORD intervened. Unanswered prayer for 20 years then answered? What an encouragement to us about the faithful prayers of those before us, and the LORD's faithfulness in answering – even after 20 years of waiting.

In **verse 22** we begin to see the divide between the two brothers. It says. So two children inside the womb struggling with each other. The translated word "struggle" here really tones down the Hebrew meaning of what was happening between the two brothers in the womb. The Hebrew word translated as "struggle" is "matsa" and it is a much stronger word. "Matsa" is used elsewhere to mean "to crush, to smash, to break into pieces, to oppress". For example in **Judges 9** in the story of Abimelech, one of the son's of Gideon, Abimelech is attacking a tower in the city of Thebez and a woman drops a millstone on his head and "crushes" it... "matsas" his skull.

So take that strong notion of aggressiveness back to fighting twin brothers in Rebekah's womb and it makes sense then why Rebekah asks the question of the LORD **verse 22**: "Why is this happening to me?"

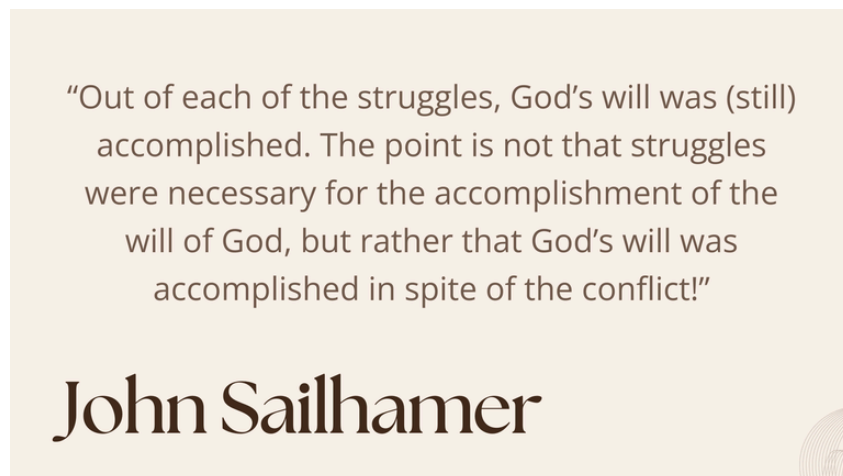


Now, note – she in desperation takes this to the LORD. This is beautiful. Rebekah is a woman of faith and when she is dealing with this battle of two sons in her own body she rightly takes it to the LORD. This is Rebekah's faith in action, indicating she has a personal walk with the LORD. And her prayer is an expression of intimacy, and the intimate LORD answers her in **verse 23**.

The LORD's answer is that within here are two brothers – divided against each other. These are not words of comfort or words that bring about healing, but rather harsh prophetic words about Esau and his brother Jacob, the heir of the covenant.

The theme of struggles between brothers traces through the Old Testament. Cain & Abel; Ham, Shem & Japheth; Ishmael & Isaac; Esau & Jacob, Joseph and his brothers, David and his brothers, Solomon and Adonijah.. etc. Some are reconciled, some end in death. What is going on here and how does this play into our story today?

Another quote from John Sailhamer: "Out of each of the struggles, God's will was (still) accomplished. The point is not that struggles were necessary for the accomplishment of the will of God, but rather that God's will was accomplished in spite of the conflict!" God's hand was clearly at work in the line of the covenant.



Now another observed pattern is that the younger often ends up the one God chose to carry on the covenant – as is the case here with Jacob, as it was Isaac, with Joseph, with David, with Solomon etc... so in the struggle bw brothers, followed by separation or division, often ends with subversion or reversal of the expected order, in which it is clear to see that younger or weaker are chosen and receive what they don't deserve. These are stories teach a foundation for New Testament grace, receiving from the LORD what one does not deserve.

In the next three verses we learn more about each of the boys. **Genesis 25:23-25**.

It's hard to for me to read **verse 25** and not imagine Esau as a baby monkey, "very red and covered with thick hair"... I know that's not right, but it just pops into my head. The name "Esau" is connected to both the ideas of "full/robust" and "hairy".



And then **verse 26** we see strong imagery of the aggression between the two in the womb. It is almost as if baby Jacob in the womb sees his nemesis Esau leaving the womb, thinks to himself, "you are not getting away from me" - lunges and grabs onto Jacob's heel and they both squirt out birth canal Esau first, then Jacob holding on to Esau's heel.

Jacob's name has the Hebrew word for "heel" in it, referencing Jacob grabbing Esau's heel at birth. When we look at how the root word "heel" (aqeb/aqab) is used elsewhere in the old testament we see that it carries the meaning of: "to supplant or deceive" in **Genesis 27:36** and **Jeremiah 9:4**; and it means "ambush or snare" in **Psalms 49:5**.

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So we have these two brothers in conflict Esau and Jacob, growing up in Isaac and Rebecca's household and their differences and thus divisions become more obvious as they age. **Verses 27-34**.

Esau, the hairy one was the outdoorsman, the "skillful hunter", the one who lived in the field, field meaning in the wild. (Esau was probably a skillful hunter because he had built in camouflage - he was covered in hair). Curious if hairy Esau was the inspiration for the Chewbacca character in Star wars?



Jacob on the other hand is described in **verse 27** as “a quiet temperament, preferring to stay home”... so picture Esau in the wild, and Jacob living in the tent city – what some bibles translate as “civilized”. It’s hard for me to grasp “tent” and “civilized” in the same sentence, but that was 3500 years ago. So more differences emerging here.. Esau lives in the wild and Jacob is civilized.

And then we get to the main story of conflict between the two brothers in **verse 28** and how it affects their parents.

Isaac is described here as loving Esau because Isaac likes eating the wild game Esau hunts and prepares – that’s giving love based on instant gratification someone provide to you. And Rebekah on the other hand loves Jacob, the one that stayed home more – she as well is playing favorites.

But the story here and the later story in **chapter 27** really centers around Isaac the father’s love for food and Isaac giving his love to his sons based on what gratification they give him. This is ugly. Conditional love based on gratification of the flesh. Isaac loves Esau based on Esau providing wild game prepared well. So it no surprise then what Jacob is doing in the next scene... making food! The food link between Isaac’s love for Esau and Jacob the younger making food is too coincidental, especially since the story of Jacob deceiving his father to get the blessing in **chapter 27** is also based on... preparing food for Isaac. So back in **Genesis 25:29** my understanding is that Jacob is trying to earn his father’s love, that’s sad to have to earn a father’s love

So as the story goes, Esau one day comes back from the field famished “dying of starvation” according to him. Esau sees/smells Jacob cooking stew, and then the “snare layer” Jacob sells Esau a bowl of stew and bread for the price of the Esau’s firstborn birthright.

The firstborn birthright in most families was simply a double portion of inheritance. At the father’s death, the firstborn received a double portion of inheritance because when the father died, the firstborn as head of the family assumed all the responsibilities: relational, financial and legal – taking care of their mom, and dependents, business and land. Hence the double portion.

Birthright

At the father’s death, the firstborn received a double portion of inheritance because when the father died, the firstborn, as head of the family assumed all the responsibilities including relational, financial and legal – taking care of their mom, and dependents, business and land.

However in the story of Jacob and Esau as sons of the heir of the covenant, the birthright is more. The birthright of the first born included the covenant blessing. Including the covenant blessing in the birthright towers over the value of normal birthright blessing. Yet Esau valued his birthright only worth a bowl of stew and bread. Yet as the covenant blessing goes think of what Esau gave up for a bite of stew! He gave up the covenant blessing of God, the protection of God, the land of promise. And he gave that up for instant gratification? Yes. This is an echo of Adam & Eve giving up Eden for a bite of forbidden fruit! Eve’s thinking in **Genesis 3:6**.. “the fruit looked delicious” and that bite cost them Eden.

Verse 34 Esau despised his birthright.

Thoughts for prayer and meditation:

1. Our opening question was “The breaking apart of Abraham’s sons can’t be right! Or can it? In the lineage of Jesus there are 42 generations between Adam and Jesus. How was their going to be a singular lineage that led from Adam to Jesus the Messiah, Messiah meaning the chosen one, if there was not choice made by God at every generation of who was going to pass the covenant to the next generation? This is what the challenging passage in **Malachi 1:2-3** means. This is God choosing the son by which the covenant will be passed, and thus “rejecting” the others. And despite the frailty and sinfulness of the covenant bearer, God’s will leading to Jesus still prevailed. Jesus ushered in the new covenant based on his blood which purchases our life from the debt of sin and grants us adopted status in the family of God, full rights as children, as heirs as firstborns. Through Jesus every person is offered the new covenant (for God so loved the world...). When we accept Jesus we become children of the new covenant. This lineage of Adam to Abraham to Isaac to Jacob to Jesus is our lineage as well. Think about what that means for your identity, your security, your future. Just as God was faithful to everyone in the lineage up to Christ, God will likewise be faithful to those of the covenant after Christ. Only in Christ are we secure, loved, and part of the family of God. Only in Christ are we free from trying to earn the Father’s love. His love is freely given, unconditional.

2. And now as covenant bearers of the new covenant, what are we going to do with that covenant? Esau despised his birthright? Sold it for a bowl of stew and bread. As children of God, how do you value the new covenant you have been given? Will you exchange it for something of much lesser value?

3. Here are just a few ways we exchange or sell the covenant for things of lesser value.

Comfort & Convenience over Obedience.

Approval & Reputation over Faithfulness.

Wealth & Security over trust in God.

Pleasure & Immediate Gratification over Holiness.

Power over Servant leadership.

Idols of productivity over rest with the LORD.

Fear & Anxiety over God’s promises.

SUPPLEMENTAL

NOTES:

Is Chapter 25 in chronological order? There are some scholars that suggest that Abraham died while his servant was sent to find a wife for Isaac. Support for this is that when Isaac marries Rebekah, he takes her into his mother's tent **Genesis 24:67**, not Father's tent. Ancient authors sometime would shuffle stories around to better carry the intended meaning as communicating messages was more important than chronology. Sometimes ancient authors included literary clues if a story is presented out of chronological order. Perhaps "brought her into his mother Sarah's tent", is such.

Genesis 25:6 East: "Babel" that becomes known as "Babylon" is just north of where Abraham was from, Ur of the Chaldeans. God called Abraham from Babylon to go west to the promised land, Canaan, then much later Abraham sent all his sons except Isaac back east.

Genesis 25:4 Cool genealogy stuff: In this genealogy of Abraham's descendants through Keturah -there is a cool thing imbedded here that is a link to a beautiful story. We don't know detail of what happened to the majority of Keturah's sons - what became of them and their descendants, other than where they ended up. However, about six hundred years later, when Moses flees Pharaoh in Egypt he ends up in Midian. Midian was one of the sons of Keturah, 600 years before, and his descendants became the Midianites. Moses marries Zipporah the daughter of Reuel, a priest of Midian **Exodus 2:16**. Reuel the priest, later in (**Exodus 18:10-12**) offers sacrifices to YHWH (function of a priest). So both Moses and Zipporah now married, genealogically have a link back to Abraham, just vastly different genealogical paths. What's even more interesting Reuel's name means: "Friend of God".. which is what later passages refer to Abraham as: "Friend of God". **James 2:23** "...He was even called a friend of God." Abraham's father-in-law Reuel, a descendant of Midian was "a friend of God", and Abraham later is called "a friend of God". Aren't genealogies awesome?

Genesis 25:12 Toledot. "This is the account of the family of Ishmael". This line is called a "toledot" in Hebrew - it's the records of generations of a person and serves to begin or end the focus of Genesis writings on a particular character. There are ten of these "toledots" in Genesis. The "toledot" of God **Genesis 1:1-4:26**. The toledot of Adam 5:1. Of Noah 6:9, of Sons of Noah 10:1. Of Shem 11:10. Terah (father of Abraham) 11:27. Ishmael 25:12. Isaac 25:19. Esau 36:1, and Jacob 37:2. Note Ishmael's sections is only six verses long, while Terah (Abraham's) is fourteen chapters and Jacob's is fourteen chapters long as well. What is communicated in this structure by the weight of number of chapters is the importance of the stories in the lineage of the covenant that leads to Christ.

Genesis 25:13-16 More Genealogy fun: The last name in **verse 15** is Kedemah. Kedemah in Hebrew is a direction, like N-S-E-W. And true to our narrative, "Kedemah" means "east", perhaps serving as a double meaning for where Ishmael's descendants ended up. This direction of east is later reinforced in **Genesis 25:18** where we see the word "east" again. "They settled...east of Egypt...". East being away from, divided from Isaac, heir of the covenant, and the land of promise. Isaac is in the land of promise, the seven other brothers are "east" of him.

Genesis 25:17 Ishmael was 137 years old at death. That is exactly the age of Abraham when Sarah died. Coincidence? Probably not, we have just not learned to ask the right question that this information answers.

Genesis 25:18 That Ishmael's descendants lived "in open hostility" towards his family (meaning all of Ab family) is a fulfillment of **Genesis 16:12** which is what the LORD told Hagar would be true about her future son Ishmael.

SUPPLEMENTAL

NOTES:

Sources:

1. Bible Project Classroom: Abraham; Teacher Notes, pgs. 224-228
2. IVP Bible Back Ground Commentary: Old Testament pgs. 56-58
3. Enduring Word, David Guzik, Gen 25.
4. The Five Books of Moses: Robert Alter. Chapter 25, pgs. 127-131
5. The Pentateuch as Narrative: John H Sailhamer, Genesis: pgs. 183-186
6. Bema Podcasts, Marty Solomon, Season 1, Episodes 12-13
7. The Complete Jewish Study Bible, pg. 35
8. The Literay Structure of the Old Testament: David A Dorsey, pgs. 57-58
9. Josephus, The Complete Works.
10. Blue Letter Bible

*** All of these sources have been used for my research - this list is by no means an endorsement of the authors theological interpretations.**