

## **Genesis 25**

### **Genesis 25:1-4 Abraham took a wife... Keturah. And she bare him Zimran, and Jokshan...**

Keturah is listed as Abraham's wife in verse 1 and his concubine in verse 6. The writer is emphasizing that Keturah did not have the same status as Sarah, nor would his children. Keturah's sons would be treated well, but they were not the son of the inheritance, nor were they the sons of the covenant. Like Hagar's son, Ishmael, they were sent away before they could be a threat to Isaac.

Interestingly, the scribes responsible for the text include some of Keturah's grandsons and even some great-grandsons. Obviously, this list is not a comprehensive one. Either the scribes listed all the genealogy they knew, or more likely, they included lineage that would be familiar to their ancient Jewish audience. For instance, Midian's sons are all listed. The Midianites were a righteous, priesthood holding people (Ex. 2:16-22), and Moses' father-in-law was a Midianite. Another grandson Sheba is listed. It is assumed he is the one who settled the land of Sheba whose queen famously sought out the wisdom of Solomon (1 Kgs. 10:1).

### **Genesis 25:6 Abraham... sent them away... unto the east country**

"The earliest Arabians, according to the Bible, were the descendants of Joktan (or Jokshan), who lived five generations after the flood. The Joktanites lived in the fertile regions of southern Arabia, and were the 'Arabians that were near the Ethiopians.' They were traders, some of whom in later years actually crossed the Red Sea to settle in Ethiopia. One of the sons of Joktan was Sheba, ancestor of the Queen of Sheba who visited Solomon.

"The northern Arabian tribes were, for the most part, descended from Abraham through Ishmael, son of his Egyptian wife, Hagar. His descendants inhabited the coastal area of western Arabia.

"By his third wife, Keturah, Abraham had six sons, whom he sent to dwell in the east so that Isaac could inherit Canaan. Because they lived in an essentially desert land, they were nomads, and hence we read of the 'travelling companies of Dedanim,' and of 'the Arabian in the wilderness.' Some of them pitched their tents as far away as Babylon, it would seem.

“Perhaps the best-known tribe was the Midianite tribe. Moses’ father-in-law Jethro was a Midianite, and his descendants, the Kenites, settled in Palestine with the Israelites under Joshua.

“The Edomites, located in the mountainous region southeast of the Dead Sea, were descendants of Abraham and Isaac through Esau or Edom. They mingled with the Horites or children of Seir, but acknowledged their close relationship to Israel as descendants of Jacob’s brother. They often warred with Israel, and were never included within the Israelite borders. In Maccabean times, their land was called Idumea, and hence, King Herod the Great, an Idumean convert to Judaism, was a descendant of Esau.” (John Tvedtnes, “Who Is an Arab?” *Ensign*, Apr. 1974, 27-28)

### **Genesis 25:8 Abraham gave up the ghost... and was gathered to his people**

The greatness of the prophet Abraham has been extolled for many chapters both in Genesis and in the Book of Abraham. He is the great ancient prophet; the one prophet three great religions can agree on. He symbolized Elohim in nearly sacrificing Isaac, and he symbolizes all the great and magnificent blessings that God will bestow on those who love him and keep his commandments. He is the first prophet of the covenant. In no instance, does the Lord find fault with Abraham. His virtues are always extolled and he is specifically justified by the Lord, “Abraham... as Isaac and also Jacob did none other things than that which they were commanded; and because they did none other things than that which they were commanded, they have entered into their exaltation, according to the promises, and sit upon thrones, and are not angels but are gods.” (D&C 132:37)

### **Joseph Smith**

Abraham was guided in all his family affairs by the Lord; was conversed with by angels, and by the Lord; was told where to go, and when to stop; and prospered exceedingly in all that he put his hand unto; it was because he and his family obeyed the counsel of the Lord. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 251-252)

### **Genesis 25:9 Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah**

Last we heard of Ishmael, he had been sent away, banished from the presence of Isaac (Gen. 21:14). Apparently, Ishmael was not resentful towards his father because he appears here as a dutiful son at the time of his

father's burial. The family conflict had been resolved and Ishmael's family gathered to pay their respects.

“The Cave of Machpelah is the world's most ancient Jewish site and the second holiest place for the Jewish people, after Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The cave and the adjoining field were purchased—at full market price—by Abraham some 3700 years ago. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, and Leah are all later buried in the same Cave of Machpelah. These are considered the patriarchs and matriarchs of the Jewish people. The only one who is missing is Rachel, who was buried near Bethlehem where she died in childbirth.

“The double cave, a mystery of thousands of years, was uncovered several years ago beneath the massive building, revealing artifacts from the Early Israelite Period (some 30 centuries ago). The structure was built during the Second Temple Period (about two thousand years ago) by Herod, King of Judea, providing a place for gatherings and Jewish prayers at the graves of the Patriarchs.

“This uniquely impressive building is the only one that stands intact and still fulfills its original function after thousands of years.”

(<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/machpelah.html>)



**Genesis 25:12-16 Now there are the generations of Ishmael**

“We in the Christian world are accustomed to think of Abraham’s descendents in terms of Isaac, Jacob, and the Israelites. Many of us forget that through Abraham’s first-born son—Ishmael, whose name is translated as ‘God heareth’—another great nation developed which has also influenced the course of history.

“The scriptures suggest that at least one of the promises given to Abraham applies equally to both Ishmael and Isaac. Long before either Ishmael or Isaac was born the Lord promised Abraham: ‘And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing ... [to] all families of the earth’ (Gen. 12:2–3). Although we accept a specific role for the House of Israel, in a general sense it is true that the descendents of both Ishmael and Isaac have been ‘great’ in population and achievement, a blessing to mankind. The Lord gave Abraham a second promise: ‘Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them. ... So shall thy seed be’ (Gen. 15:5). Later, when Hagar conceived Ishmael, an angel echoed Abraham’s promise: ‘I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude’ (Gen. 16:10).

“It is interesting that the children of both Isaac and Ishmael have desired to apply the scripture given to Abraham:

“ ‘This is my covenant which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised’ (Gen. 17:10, 25). Circumcision has been a custom of the Jews (Israelites) as well as of the Arabs (Ishmaelites) since that time.

“God further promised Abraham: ‘And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, ... all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession’ (Gen. 17:8). Again, this promise has been fulfilled for both Ishmael and Isaac, since both Arabs and Jews have resided there. Indeed, the scriptures prophetically and accurately said, ‘And he [Ishmael] shall dwell in the presence of his brethren’ (Gen. 16:12).

“The Lord describes Ishmael’s descendents, the Arabs, in these terms: ‘And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation’ (Gen. 16:12; Gen. 17:20).

“According to the Koran, Abraham brought Ishmael and his mother to Arabia and settled them near what was to become the great city of Mecca.

Eventually the descendents of Ishmael's twelve sons began to fill the Arabian peninsula. The Biblical account, though it differs in specifics, suggests also that Hagar and Ishmael were directed in their wanderings. Genesis recounts that an angel of the Lord comforted and preserved them, and that 'God was with the lad [Ishmael].' (See Gen. 21:14–20)

"We are familiar with the history of Jacob's twelve sons—the twelve tribes of Israel; but we are not equally familiar with the history of the twelve sons of Ishmael, a great and noble tradition that has created one of the truly great cultures of the world—the Islamic culture.

"The Muslim's religion permeates his life from dawn to nightfall and from his inner chamber to his shop in the crowded marketplace, with a thoroughness that most Christians are often slow to understand. Many Westerners have secularized such large areas of their lives that they have forgotten what it is to live a life in which every activity is religiously oriented.

"Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have reached a new threshold in the gospel's expansion throughout the world. As Africa and Asia become a part of our great missionary program, we need a new sensitivity to the history, cultures, and religions of these areas. We cannot be friends with a person or community if we disdain or ignore what that person or community most deeply cherishes. I strongly feel that we must appreciate the Arab's feeling for his language, his prophet, Muhammad, the religious duties of the Muslim, and the remarkable civilization Islam produced." (James B. Mayfield, "Ishmael, Our Brother," *Ensign*, June 1979, 26–27)

### **Genesis 25:21 Isaac intreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren**

"When the Isaac-Rebekah narrative resumes, we learn that Rebekah was barren, an echo of her mother-in-law's heartache, and Isaac 'intreated' the Lord to bless her with a child (Genesis 25:21). According to Jewish Midrash, Rebekah united her prayers with her husband's pleas to the Lord for a child. God answered their petitions, and Rebekah conceived (Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:312-13).

"Concerned over struggles she felt in her womb, Rebekah did not go to family or friends for help but turned first to God to receive understanding and comfort. Furthermore, the biblical text is clear that Rebekah spoke directly to God and God responded directly to her, without her prophet-

husband's intervention (Genesis 25:22-23). That she recognized God's multifaceted revelation suggests that fervent prayer was not a novelty for Rebekah. She had already developed a close relationship with the Lord and the spiritual sensitivities necessary for clear communication. In response to her prayer, Rebekah learned prophetic truths: she would give birth to twin boys, each son would be a leader of a nation, and the second-born would lead the firstborn (Genesis 25:23). In time, all three prophecies were fulfilled." (Camille Fronk Olson, *Women of the Old Testament*, [SLC: Deseret Book, 2009], 58)

### **Genesis 25:22 if it be so, why am I thus?**

Rebekah is wondering what is going on with her pregnancy? "If this is supposed to be a normal pregnancy, why am I as big as a house?" **Josephus** states, "when her belly was greatly burdened, Isaac was very anxious, and inquired of God; who answered that Rebekah should bear twins." (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book I, 18:1) Before the days of ultrasounds, you wouldn't know if you were having twins until the time of delivery. Rebekah might have been feeling two sets of feet kicking her and she was large. Apparently, the news that she was having twins came from revelation not ultrasound.

The Josephus version states that Isaac inquired of the Lord and answered Rebekah, but the Genesis version is better. It teaches that a woman can get revelation for herself. She needs neither her husband nor prophet to inquire of the Lord for her.

### **Dallin H. Oaks**

There is a choice example of personal revelation in the twenty-fifth chapter of Genesis. When Rebekah was carrying the twins Jacob and Esau, "the children struggled together within her." The scripture says she was troubled at this and so "she went to enquire of the Lord." (Gen. 25:22.) Here we see a major principle of revelation. It usually comes in response to earnest prayer. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." (Matt. 7:7.)

In this instance the Lord spoke to Rebekah, saying: "Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger." (Gen. 25:23.) Though she was the wife of a prophet and patriarch, Rebekah inquired of the Lord and the Lord instructed her

directly on a matter of great personal concern to her, to the children she would bear, and to generations unborn. After recounting this incident, **Elder Bruce R. McConkie** concluded: “The Lord gives revelation to women who pray to him in faith.” (*New Era*, May 1978, p. 36.) (“Spiritual Gifts,” *Ensign*, Sept. 1986, 70)

### **Bruce R. McConkie**

Women are appointed to be Rebekahlike, to be guides and lights in the family unit and to engineer and arrange so that they lead in the way that will bring about salvation in the Father’s kingdom. (*Ensign*, Sept. 1978, 73)

### **Genesis 25:25 the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau**

“The wondrous birth of Jacob and Esau parallels the birth of Isaac himself. Sixty years earlier, his own mother had been barren and Isaac was conceived when she was ninety years old. Rebekah’s painful pregnancy foretells the future of the belligerent relationship of her twin sons. An oracle given to her reveals that the struggle between their two sons is the struggle that will ensue between them and their progeny—the nation of Israel and the nation of Edom. In the end, the latter will succumb to the former. Indeed, she gives birth to twins, the first born being Esau and the second Jacob.

“Since Esau is of a ruddy (red) complexion and has an affinity for red foods, we realize he is the progenitor of the nation of Edom, which also means ruddy. Jacob is born hanging on to Esau’s heel while trying to displace him and be born first. The two boys could not have been less alike...

“Esau’s name denotes hairiness in ancient Semitic language and so the country inhabited by Esau and his descendants is known variously as Seir (meaning ‘hairy’) and Edom (meaning ‘ruddy’).” (Barry J. Beitzel, ed., *Biblica: The Bible Atlas*, [Australia: Global Book Publishing, 2006], 114)

### **Dallin H. Oaks**

The contrast between the spiritual and the temporal is also illustrated by the twins Esau and Jacob and their different attitudes toward their birthright. The firstborn, Esau, “despised his birthright.” (Gen. 25:34.)

Jacob, the second twin, desired it. Jacob valued the spiritual, while Esau sought the things of this world. When he was hungry, Esau sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. "Behold," he explained, "I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?" (Gen. 25:32.) Many Esaus have given up something of eternal value in order to satisfy a momentary hunger for the things of the world. ("Spirituality," *Ensign*, Nov. 1985, 61)

### **Genesis 25:31 Sell me this day thy birthright**

What did it mean to be the birthright son? Look at how Abraham handled his birthright. Abraham "gave all that he had unto Isaac," while the patriarch's seven other sons were sent away with gifts (v. 5-6). Abraham's wealth was not distributed evenly among his 8 sons, Isaac received it all. But there is a difference if the son was born to a wife rather than a concubine. They did not have equal status and did not receive an equal inheritance. Jacob and Esau were both from Rebekah and therefore a different rule applied. Generally, in that situation, the inheritance would be divided equally among sons with the eldest getting a double portion. Since Isaac only had two sons, he would theoretically give 2/3 to the birthright son and 1/3 to the other son.

But it wasn't just about money. The birthright son was in charge of family matters. If there were any issues that needed resolution, it would fall upon the eldest to resolve them. With this responsibility came and added influence that Jacob desired and Esau despised.

### **Erastus Snow**

Isaac... bought the birthright of his brother Esau. From the story that is told of Rebekah helping her son Jacob to get the first blessing from his father Isaac (Gen. 27), on purpose to secure the birthright from his brother Esau, many would be inclined to think that deceit, dishonesty and unrighteous means were employed to secure it, and they perhaps wonder why it should be so. This was really not the case; it is only made to appear so in the eyes of those who do not understand the dealings of God with man, and the workings of the Holy Spirit to bring about His purposes. There was neither unrighteousness in Rebekah nor in Jacob in this matter; but on the contrary, there was the wisdom of the Almighty, showing forth his providences in guiding them in such a manner as to bring about his purposes, in influencing Esau to transfer his birthright to Jacob, that He might ratify and confirm it upon the head of Jacob; knowing as He did that Jacob and his seed were, and would be, more deserving of the birthright,



and would magnify it in its true spirit. While Esau did not sense nor appreciate his condition and birthright; he did not respect it as he should have done, neither did he hearken to the counsels of his father and mother. On the contrary, he went his own way with a stubborn will, and followed his own passions and inclinations and took to wife one of the daughters of the Canaanites whom the Lord had not blessed; and he therefore rendered himself unacceptable to God and to his father and mother. He gave himself to wild pursuits—to hunting, and to following the ways of the Canaanites, and displeased the Lord and his parents, and was not worthy of this right of seniority. The Lord therefore saw fit to take it from him, and the mother was moved upon to help the younger son to bring about the purpose of the Lord, in securing to himself the blessing through the legitimate channel of the Priesthood. And as you know, his father was induced to bless him and confirm this blessing upon him. (*Journal of Discourses*, 21:371)

### **Genesis 25:32 I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?**

Esau's logic seems superficially sound, but in giving up his birthright for a single meal he becomes the poster child for sacrificing his future to the immediate needs of the body. He wasn't really going to die; it just seemed that way at the moment. Metaphorically, Jacob represents Satan tempting Esau to give up what is important for what he wants at the moment. For one mess of pottage, he loses his birthright. A million times over in a million subsequent tragedies, men have done the same thing—whether for a mess of pottage, a drink, a cigarette, one night of indulgence, one peek at pornography, or one more hit of heroine—the eternal inheritance is relinquished for a momentary pleasure. “If only we could realize that the momentary pleasure we might feel by an act of disobedience can never be equal to the feelings of peace and happiness that result from obedience.” (Janet G. Lee, *New Era*, Feb. 1994, 49)

“When we are inactive and drift along, we become Esaus. When we forsake the promise from God of health and strength, wisdom and knowledge, and the mercy of the destroying angel toward us, and adopt the cigarette, the steaming cup, and the hip-pocket flask, we are parting with the invaluable. When we read that the Lord has promised to open the windows of heaven and pour us out blessings to overflowing, if we will but remember him, as Abraham did, with tithes and offerings, and then fail of our ten per cent, we have no claim on those blessings. When we think of the sacrifices of our parents and grandparents for the sake of the gospel, and then dishonor them by not remaining "true to the faith," we cut ourselves off from our heritage. When we fail of salvation and exaltation in

the Celestial kingdom because of not enduring to the end, and of keeping ourselves unspotted from the sins of the world, we are despising our birthright just as Esau despised his.

“Let us beware lest we part with our blessings and our heritage ‘for a mess of pottage.’” (“For a Mess of Pottage” by George F. Christensen, *Improvement Era*, 1926, Vol. Xxix. September, 1926 No. 11)

## **John Taylor**

Too many of us follow after the world. Can the world give you the light that you have received, and the Gospel and the hopes of heaven you have received, and the Priesthood you have received? And will you barter these things for a mess of pottage, and wallow in the filth, corruption, iniquity, and evils which abound in the world? What have we come here for? To worship God and to keep his commandments. And how is it with many of us? We forget, in many instances, our high calling's glorious hope, and we give way to follies, foibles, weakness, and iniquity, and we are governed more or less by covetousness, drunkenness, Sabbath-breaking, and evils of various kinds. (*Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. [London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854-1886], 18: 142)

## **Genesis 25:33 he sold his birthright unto Jacob**

What shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matt. 16:26)

“Is anything in this life worth my soul? Is there any reward, any honor, any mortal station that is so deserving of my attention and my affections that I would mortgage my eternal future for them? How much is a soul worth? Can it be purchased? Traded away? Is a modern mess of pottage so appealing as to cause me to forfeit my place at the banquet of the Bridegroom? Is the devil's first article of faithlessness—that anything in this world can be acquired with money—really true, as so many contend?” (Robert L. Millet, *An Eye Single to the Glory of God: Reflections on the Cost of Discipleship* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1991], 30)

## **Mark E. Petersen**

We have always felt that that merchant was an extremely wise man, because he was willing to give up all that he possessed in order to acquire the pearl of great price. But let me ask you, what would you have thought

of that merchant had the parable been reversed and he had given up the pearl of great price in exchange for something of little or no value?

We have some among us who are doing that very thing. In their own lives they reverse the parable of the Lord and they give up the pearl of great price for a fleeting fancy. They actually sell their birthright in the kingdom of God for less than a mess of pottage... individuals who have been excommunicated from this Church... at one time were all members of the kingdom of God, and at one time they all possessed the pearl of great price. But each one of them has reversed that parable in his own life and has given up the pearl of great price with all its values and with all its blessings. What a pity! What a tragedy! (*Conference Report*, October 1945, Afternoon Meeting, 88)

### **Gordon B. Hinckley**

Several years ago I was speaking with a friend concerning a mutual acquaintance, a man looked upon as highly successful in his vocation. "But what of his activity in the Church?" I asked. To which my friend responded, "He knows in his heart that it is true, but he is afraid of it. He is fearful that if he were to acknowledge his Church membership and live its standards, he would be cut off from the social circle in which he moves."

I reflected, "The day will come, though possibly not until old age, when in hours of quiet reflection this man will know that he traded his birthright for a mess of pottage (see Gen. 25:34); and there will be remorse and sorrow and tears, for he will come to see that he not only denied the Lord in his own life, but also in effect denied Him before his children, who have grown up without a faith to cling to." (*Ensign*, Mar. 1995, 5)

### **Genesis 25:34 thus Esau despised his birthright**

"It would be hard to believe that Isaac's twin sons, Jacob and Esau, were not taught or did not hear about their father's and grandfather's supreme faithfulness. As the brothers matured, however, they took different paths. Esau became a cunning hunter, while Jacob is described in the Hebrew text as an *'ish tam*, a man 'whole, complete, perfect' (Gen. 25:27, footnote b). The implication is that Esau was concerned about one pursuit to the exclusion of other important considerations.

"As a younger man, Esau seems to have possessed little sensitivity to spiritual matters. Certainly, he thought more about immediate physical

needs than either the covenants of God or those turning points of life which determine the course of the future. Thus, Esau sold the birthright (see Gen. 25:29–34). And, like some of us, he valued what was lost only after it was gone (see Gen. 27:36–38).

“Esau added to his own misery and that of his parents by vowing to kill Jacob because of the lost birthright and blessing, even though he himself was responsible for that loss and Isaac did still give him a father’s blessing (see Gen. 27:39–42). Moreover, Esau had married outside the covenant, among the Hittites, which caused great grief to Isaac and Rebekah (see Gen. 26:34–35). Without doubt, Esau’s behavior was on his mother’s mind when she exclaimed: ‘I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth: if Jacob [also] take a wife of the daughters of Heth ... what good shall my life do me?’ (Gen. 27:46). In other words, Rebekah felt that all her life’s work, all her planning and teaching about the importance of the covenant God made with Abraham, all her care in guarding and guiding its perpetuation according to divine desires, would be worthless and wasted if Jacob were to follow in Esau’s footsteps.

“Here we see a recurring problem of the ages laid bare in an ancient, Old Testament context. Is there anything so heart-wrenching for a caring parent as seeing a child of hope choose to devalue or disregard eternal family bonds, temple-centered covenants, and matters of everlasting consequence? Do faithful parents, of any gospel dispensation, ever not worry about their Esaus?

“By contrast, Jacob trifled not with sacred things (compare D&C 6:12). He chose to obey his mother and father, and eventually he set out on a journey to seek a wife from among a known and acceptable branch of the covenant family. This was of paramount importance to his mother, for she was ever conscious of God’s promises regarding her twin boys, especially the promise of Jacob’s ascendancy over nations, though he was the younger (see Gen. 25:23).” (Andrew C. Skinner, “Jacob: Keeper of Covenants,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1998, 51)

### **Spencer W. Kimball**

“[In the parable of the prodigal son] the older son's being ever with his father is significant. If this parable is a reminder of life's journey, we remember that for the faithful who live the commandments there is a great promise of seeing the Lord and being with him always in exaltation. On the other hand, the younger son could hope for no more than salvation as a

servant, since he "despised his birthright," and dissipated "all" of his inheritance, leaving nothing to develop and accumulate toward eternal heirship again. He had sold it for a mess of pottage as did Esau, another prodigal.

He had sold something he could not recover. He had exchanged the priceless inheritance of great lasting value for a temporary satisfaction of physical desire, the future for the present, eternity for time, spiritual blessings for physical meat. Though he was sorry for his rash trade, it was now so late, "everlastingly too late." Apparently neither his efforts nor his tears could retrieve his lost blessings. Thus God will forgive the repentant sinner who sins against divine law, but that forgiveness can never restore the losses he sustained during the period of his sinning. (*The Miracle of Forgiveness* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969], chap 20)