

Exegetical Notes – Genesis 25:1-18

“Families”

Prepared by Charles H. Jensen for Cornerstone Fellowship

101 Kylies Road, Coatesville, PA 19320

610-384-1375

charleshjensen@aol.com

(Genesis answers three basic theological questions. The first question is, “Whose world is it anyway?” The text answers the question by affirming that it is God’s world by right of creation. It is God’s world because God made it. The second question Genesis asks is “How do we get along in God’s world God’s way?” The answer is by trusting God and obeying Him. To this point in the text, Abraham has been the model of a man who trusts God and obeys Him even though Abraham is not a perfect model of trust and obedience. The first two questions have been answered. At this point in the Book of Genesis the text turns toward the third question which Genesis asks, “How do we get along in God’s world God’s way particularly with the members of our own family?” Abraham’s family has grown with the births of his sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Abraham has an extended family with the births to his brother, Nahor (see Genesis 22:20-24). Family becomes the concern. And Genesis begins to answer the third question. In last week’s text Abraham sought a wife for his son, Isaac, from among his extended family. Rebekah is chosen to be Isaac’s wife. Her family seems to work in agreement with each other. We now take a closer look at Abraham’s family.)

Genesis 25:1-18

Verses 1-4

¹ Abraham had taken another wife, whose name was Keturah. ² She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah. ³ Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan; the descendants of Dedan were the Ashurites, the Letushites and the Leummites. ⁴ The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanok, Abida and Eldaah. All these were descendants of Keturah.

- Keturah is listed as one of Abraham’s concubines in 1 Chronicles 1:32. Concubines were women men kept in their households as sexual partners but to whom they were not married. It seems that Keturah’s status was changed and that Abraham did marry her and make her one of his wives.

- At that time in history, men practiced polygamy. They had more than one wife, but this was never God's plan for marriage (see Genesis 2:22-24). God's plan for marriage was always one man married to one woman for life. When God's plan for marriage is ignored, the structure of the family is always negatively impacted, as we shall see in Abraham's family.
- Keturah bore Abraham six sons.

Verses 5-6

⁵ Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac. ⁶ But while he was still living, he gave gifts to the sons of his concubines and sent them away from his son Isaac to the land of the east.

- Abraham did not inherit any of his sons except Isaac. During his lifetime he made gifts to his other sons, but he left his estate only to Isaac.
- He sent all of his other children away from where Isaac was. This suggests that even during his lifetime there was animosity between Abraham's sons. The only way to keep peace was to separate his family. This is because Abraham did marriage his way and not God's way.
- Isaac was not Abraham's first-born son, Ishmael was. God had promised to make Abraham's offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky. Initially Abraham trusted God to do what God had promised to do (Question #2: How do we get along in God's world God's way? We trust and obey!). But with the passage of time, Abraham took matters into his own hands (see Genesis 15-17). He stopped trusting God and trusted himself instead. From that moment, Abraham's family was divided. The division was the result of his sin.
- Isaac was the child of promise. He was God's way of making Abraham the father of many nations. But Abraham had failed to trust God and suffered the consequence of his failure to do so. He complicated those consequences by favoring Isaac above his other sons.

Verses 7-11

⁷ Abraham lived a hundred and seventy-five years. ⁸ Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people. ⁹ His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, ¹⁰ the field Abraham had bought from the Hittites¹ There Abraham was buried with his

wife Sarah.¹¹ After Abraham's death, God blessed his son Isaac, who then lived near Beer Lahai Roi.

- Abraham lived 175 years. When he died, he was buried with his only wife Sarah, Isaac's mother.
- Isaac and Ishmael buried him together. There was apparently peace between these two for the moment, but it was not lasting. Apparently, none of Abraham's other sons attended their father's funeral.

Verses 12-18

¹² This is the account of the family line of Abraham's son Ishmael, whom Sarah's slave, Hagar the Egyptian, bore to Abraham.

¹³ These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, listed in the order of their birth: Nebaioth the firstborn of Ishmael, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam,¹⁴ Mishma, Dumah, Massa,¹⁵ Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah.¹⁶ These were the sons of Ishmael, and these are the names of the twelve tribal rulers according to their settlements and camps.¹⁷ Ishmael lived a hundred and thirty-seven years. He breathed his last and died, and he was gathered to his people.¹⁸ His descendants settled in the area from Havilah to Shur, near the eastern border of Egypt, as you go toward Ashur. And they lived in hostility toward all the tribes related to them.

- Through Ishmael, Abraham's son by Hagar, Sarah's maid, Abraham had 12 sons. (He will also have 12 sons through Isaac. That means that Abraham had 30 sons in all. He had one wife and two concubines.)
- Today, the Arab nations trace their ancestry back to Abraham through Ishmael. They claim that Ishmael was Abraham's first-born son and that Isaac was a usurper.
- The sons of Ishmael and those of Isaac, all descendants of Abraham, live in hostility to each other. This is not the way God chooses for family to be.

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