

THE SOVEREIGN HAND OF GOD

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

One must be careful to maintain a dispensational approach to Genesis lest he become lost in the many details given in this book. The major purpose of Genesis 11-50 is to trace the history of the four major patriarchs and their contribution in the formation of the nation of Israel. Abraham was chosen by God to be the father of the nation (11:10-15:21). Through a special miracle of God, Isaac was born and became the heir of God's covenant with Abraham (16:1-25:18). Next, Jacob was chosen by God to be the successor of Isaac and receive the covenant in place of Esau (25:19-36:43). Basically, his twelve sons became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. Joseph was especially important because he, through God's providence, brought the nation to Egypt where it was saved from destruction through famine (37-50). This also set the stage for God's future dealings with Israel.

With these facts in mind, the basic point of chapter 25 is that Isaac was superior over all the other sons of Abraham in that he alone was the heir of Abraham and had received the covenant that God made with him. Other details given in the chapter serve to complement this theme. In spite of Isaac's weaknesses, God reconfirmed the covenant to him twice: once in Gerar when he was warned not to go down into Egypt (26:1-5); and later after his return to Beersheba (26:23-25). The grace of God was clearly manifested in chapter 27 when the blessing was transferred from Isaac to Jacob (27). Jacob did not deserve the blessing, but Esau, the logical successor, sold his birthright to Jacob for a meal of pottage (26:27-34) and by so doing he also forfeited his spiritual right to receive the blessing. Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Esau were all guilty of intrigue, but God providentially overruled and used man's failure for His glory.

I. Isaac Receiving the Covenant — 25:1-34

A. The Covenant Heir Designated — 25:1-11

1. Abraham's choice of an heir — 25:1-6

25:1-4 — Sometime following Sarah's death, Abraham took a second wife named Keturah who bore him six additional sons. Some of these sons have been identified with certain Arab tribes (Midian - the Midianites; and Shuah - probably the Shuhites, i.e., Bildad the Shuhite, one of Job's friends). These six sons help fulfill the promise made to Abraham that he would become the father of many nations (cf. 17:4).

25:5-6 — Isaac was the son of promise and therefore he received his father's inheritance. The other brothers only received gifts. The property, authority, and spiritual possessions went to Isaac. To further certify Isaac's position, Abraham sent Keturah's sons eastward.

2. Abraham's Completion of His Life — 25:7-11

25:7-8 — Abraham died at the age of 175 but notice that he died "in a good old age, an old man, and full of years." He died having lived a full life. Isaac was 75; Jacob and Esau were 15.

25:9-10 — Isaac and Ishmael were perhaps reconciled for they jointly buried Abraham in the cave at Machpelah.

25:11 — Isaac was especially blessed by God and lived near Beersheba at the well of Lahai-roi. God's blessing to Abraham was passed on to his son after Abraham's death.

B. The Covenant Heirs Delineated — 25:12-34

1. Ishmael's descendants — 25:12-18

25:18-34 — There are two reasons for this genealogy to be listed here. First, it shows that God kept His promise of making a great nation of Ishmael (21:8). Second, it serves to complement the theme that

only Isaac of Abraham's sons was the recipient of the Abrahamic Covenant. Ishmael had 12 sons, some of which can be identified as Nabataeans. Others lived northeast of Arabia and others lived east of Egypt. Ishmael died at the age of 137.

2. Isaac's descendants — 25:19-34

a. Struggling in the womb — 25:19-26

25:19ff — Isaac was 40 when he married Rebekah and she was barren for 19 years. This caused much concern for Isaac so he entreated God (prayed as a suppliant) to remove her sterility. God responded but Rebekah soon noted an unusual significance during her pregnancy. There was a struggling within her womb. The Lord informed her that this signified two nations were in her womb. The younger son would be stronger and would be served by the elder. Hence, Jacob would become the next Israelite patriarch while Esau would become an ancestor to the present Arabs — the Edomites.

25:24-26 — The elder son, Esau, was born red and hairy. The younger son, Jacob, grabbed hold of Esau's heel signifying his nature -- a supplanter. Esau became a rugged outdoorsman while Jacob developed into a cunning schemer.

b. Struggling in the world — 25: 27-34

25:27ff — This episode presents interesting insights into the characters of both sons and forms the basis of the stolen blessing in chapter 27. One time when Esau wearily returned home from hunting, he was famished to the point of being faint. Jacob had been cooking a pottage (red lentils prepared with garlic, onions, and olive oil and usually served with some meat) and Esau strongly craved his pottage. He desired it so much that he sacrificed his future blessings, yes, his eternal blessings for a present momentary satisfaction. He was willing to sell (barter) his birthright because he despised (had no respect) God's spiritual promise. Esau was a profane, worldly person (Heb 12:16); he desired worldly women (26:34-35) and did not worship God.

The birthright was important both materially and spiritually. Materially, the eldest son would receive twice the inheritance (Deut. 21:17) and he was the recipient of spiritual blessings (27:35; cf. Ex 22:29; Num. 8:14-17). Nuzu customs indicate the privilege of the firstborn could be sold. Scripture indicates it could also be forfeited (Gen 35:22; 49:3, 4). Esau's real problem was a spiritual deficiency, not a physical deficiency. His famished condition only provided the occasion for despising God's promises. Jacob, however, would be blessed but reap troubles later in life for his scheming activities.

II. Isaac Retaining the Covenant — 26:1-35

A. The Covenant Confirmed at Gerar — 26:1-22

1. God's appearance — 26:1-5

26:1-5 — As with Abraham, God tested Isaac with a famine. Isaac, trusting his flesh, departed to go to Egypt and stopped to camp at Gerar. God commanded him to remain in the land promised to him and He would bless him as He had promised to bless Abraham.

Note that Abraham's faithfulness was the basis for making a blessing available for Isaac.

2. Isaac's failure — 26:6-16

26:6-11 — Isaac, like many Christians today, was a "borderline" believer. He did not go to Egypt, but neither did he return to the Beersheba area. He followed his father's example in sin by lying about his wife. He said she was his sister instead of his wife so that no one would kill him in order to marry his wife. However, his true relationship to Rebekah was revealed to Abimelech. The sin was confessed and God blessed him.

26:12-16 — God's blessing continued upon him so that Abimelech (a dynastic title) asked him to leave his land. The Philistines were concerned lest Isaac become greater and more powerful than they were.

3. Isaac's disputes — 26:17-22

26:17-22 — Isaac moved away but stayed within the general vicinity; he moved to the valley of Gerar. Perhaps Isaac still feared further famine at Beersheba. A dispute over the ownership of wells that Isaac had dug arose and this ultimately resulted in Isaac's return to Beersheba. Note the wells and their significance: Ezek--a well of contention; Sitnah--signifying animosity; Rehoboth--signifying room. Perhaps these struggles were God's way of getting Isaac back to his proper place.

B. The Covenant Confirmed at Beersheba — 26:23-35

26:23-25 — Isaac returned to Beersheba and there God reappeared to encourage him. He appeared at night and confirmed to him His person, His protection, His presence, and His promise (v. 24). Isaac responded by building an altar signifying his worship of the Lord and his trust in the Lord's promise.

26:26-33 — God's blessing of Isaac caused Abimelech to desire a peace treaty with him because his possessions were getting so great. They had a feast to celebrate their covenant, and after the feast, Isaac's servants came with the report of another well and Isaac called it Shebah (signifying oath) to commemorate the oath he had just made with Abimelech. Therefore, the place is called Beer-sheba, well of oath.

26:34, 35 — A little note is tucked in at the end of this chapter. This serves to show Esau's wickedness and how he despised God's promises. Esau, at age 40, rebelliously married two Hittite women. This completely defied Abraham's principles in choosing a wife for Isaac (cf. Gen 24).

III. Isaac Releasing the Covenant — 27:1-46

A. The Release Realized — 27:1-33

27:1ff — This is a most interesting episode showing God's grace with a wicked people because all four individuals involved were guilty of sin. Note the evident sin in each of these people. Esau sinned in even attempting to get the blessing since he had forfeited that blessing when he bartered away his birthright. Isaac sinned by not accepting God's intent to have Jacob carry on as the leader of his posterity. This was revealed to him by God (cf. 25:23). Furthermore, Esau had forfeited his blessing by selling his birthright (25:29ff) and by marrying ungodly women (26:34, 35). Isaac was a respecter of persons in preferring Esau above Jacob because he loved his venison (25:28). Rebekah acted according to God's desire but she sinned by not acting in accordance with God's principles. It is not God's desire for man to use sinful means to accomplish His purpose. It was not right for Rebekah to be a schemer and to cause division in the home. Jacob sinned by following Rebekah's plan to deceive his father. This had become an integral part of his character but he paid dearly for this corruption in his character. He not only deceived but he also lied to his father. Yet, in spite of all this scheming and sinning, God later confirmed the Abrahamic covenant with Jacob who continued the Messianic line. This is what God's grace can do. The blessing was a special oral pronouncement by the father upon the son (normally the eldest). Jacob's blessing consisted of prosperity, service from other people, a curse for those who cursed him and a blessing for those who blessed him (27:28, 29).

B. The Release Regretted — 27:34-46

27:34-41 — Esau had great remorse when he learned that Jacob had out-manuevered him. He begged for some blessing and, finally, Isaac blessed him with a promise of prosperity. The Edomites became enemies of Israel and will receive punishment in the future (Ezek. 34; Obadiah). Esau's anger mounted to the point of a plan to kill Jacob (27:41).

27:42-46 — Rebekah learned of Esau's plan and told Jacob he must go to her brother Laban in Haran to escape Esau's plot. The "few days" (v. 44) turned into twenty years. It was during this time that Jacob dealt with another deceiver and received the rewards of his own deception. Rebekah cited matrimonial reasons for Jacob's departure to Haran. This family was rent with schisms because of deception, favoritism, and lying. God pity the parents who are not open, honest and fair in all their relationships with one another.