

“Abraham again took a wife, and her name was Keturah. And she bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. Jokshan begot Sheba and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. And the sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abidah, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah” (Genesis 25:1-4).

Following Sarah's death and Abraham's subsequent remarriage, he fathered several children who are mentioned in the passage quoted above. While these names may seem inconsequential, we should remember God's earlier promise to Abraham in Genesis 17:4: “...***you shall be a father of many nations.***” These verses tell us how God fulfilled that promise in the lives of these children.

The most recognizable name among these children is undoubtedly Midian. Midian's descendants (known as the Midianites) would eventually grow to become a prominent population group with dozens of appearances within the pages of the Old Testament.

“And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. But Abraham gave gifts to the sons of the concubines which Abraham had; and while he was still living he sent them eastward, away from Isaac his son, to the country of the east” (Genesis 25:5-6).

Although Abraham divided his inheritance among these sons, there was one condition: they had to depart from the land that God had given to Abraham and his son Isaac. By sending his other sons away in this manner, Abraham minimized the potential for rivalries to develop between Isaac and his half-brothers.

“This is the sum of the years of Abraham’s life which he lived: one hundred and seventy-five years. Then Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people. And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, the field which Abraham purchased from the sons of Heth. There Abraham was buried, and Sarah his wife” (Genesis 25:7-10).

This marked the end of an era, for Abraham is recognized as one of the most significant figures in Biblical history. For instance, Abraham's name appears seventy-one times in the New King James translation of the New Testament, and James 2:23 identifies him as “...***the friend of God.***”

We're also told that Abraham was “...***an old man and full of years***” at the time of his death. This phrase conveys the idea of a long, satisfying, and fulfilling life. So Abraham was someone who maintained a close relationship with God, and God blessed him with a life that was lengthy and rewarding.

“And it came to pass, after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac. And Isaac dwelt at Beer Lahai Roi.” (Genesis 25:11).

The region of Beer Lahai Roi now makes its third and final appearance in the book of Genesis. This was the place where Hagar was apprehended by the angel of the Lord upon her departure from Abraham's wife Sarah in [Genesis chapter sixteen](#). Hagar named that area Beer Lahai Roi (which means, “*the well of the Living One who sees me*”) in recognition of that event.

[Genesis 25:12-15](#) then offers a list of the descendants of Hagar and Abraham’s son, Ishmael. Verse sixteen completes that section by saying...

“These were the sons of Ishmael and these were their names, by their towns and their settlements, twelve princes according to their nations” (Genesis 25:16).

This provides us with another illustration of God’s faithfulness in fulfilling His promises to Abraham.

For instance, consider God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 17:20: “...*as for Ishmael, ... I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation*” (NIV).

Our text from Genesis 25:12-15 thus provides us with a historical record that documents the fulfillment of that promise. This portion of Genesis chapter twenty-five [then closes](#) with the account of Ishmael's passing and the extent of his territorial influence.

The following verses will introduce us to two significant Biblical figures. But before we get to those introductions, Genesis 25:19-21 will first establish some important background information...

“This is the genealogy of Isaac, Abraham’s son. Abraham begot Isaac. Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah as wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan Aram, the sister of Laban the Syrian. Now Isaac pleaded with the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived” (Genesis 25:19-21).

Genesis 25:26 will later tell us that Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth. Since Isaac and Rebekah were married when he was [forty years old](#), this couple had been childless for twenty years.

Childlessness was a great social disgrace in that era, but God graciously acted on Isaac's petition and Rebekah became pregnant. While this was surely cause for celebration, Rebekah had one significant prenatal concern...

“But the children struggled together within her; and she said, 'If all is well, why am I like this?' So she went to inquire of the Lord” (Genesis 25:22).

In the original language of this passage, the word “struggled” conveys a sense of intense activity or competition. One source reports that the word used here suggests a violent struggle that was out of the ordinary. ⁽¹⁾ In light of this, Rebekah took a wise course of action: “...*she went to ask the LORD for an answer*” (GNB).

Here was God’s response...

“And the Lord said to her: 'Two nations are in your womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, And the older shall serve the younger'” (Genesis 25:23).

So Rebekah received the remarkable news that she was carrying twins. She also learned that each of her twins were destined to establish separate people groups. One of those groups would grow to become stronger than the other, and the older child would eventually serve the younger child.

Since the eldest son typically held a priority position within the family structure of that era, that arrangement was certainly beyond the norm. Rebekah was thus advised to prepare for an altered family dynamic before her children were born. This advisory will take on greater importance as we approach the events that unfold at the end of this chapter and later in Genesis chapter twenty-seven.

“So when her days were fulfilled for her to give birth, indeed there were twins in her womb. And the first came out red. He was like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau. Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau’s heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them” (Genesis 25:24-26).

In the Old Testament era, parents sometimes chose names for their children that reflected the circumstances of their birth. Such was the case with Rebekah's sons, Esau and Jacob. Esau's name meant “rough” or “hairy-feeling” ⁽²⁾ while “Jacob” meant “heel-catcher” or “supplanter.” ⁽³⁾

While “hairy” may be a regrettable name for a child, Jacob's name was arguably worse. The idea behind Jacob’s name refers to someone who takes the place of another. Today, the meaning of Jacob's name might evoke the image of a con-artist, cheater, or swindler.

Jacob would eventually become a fast talking deceiver, just as his name implied. The New Testament will later describe Esau as a godless, sexually immoral person ([Hebrews 12:16](#)). Their lives will eventually reveal these personality traits, beginning with the series of events that take place next.

(1) See Genesis 25:22 [footnote 30] *NET Notes, The NET Bible®* Copyright© 2005 by Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C. <http://net.bible.org/verse.php?book=Gen&chapter=25&verse=22>

(2) Esau - *Fausset's Bible Dictionary* -. (n.d.). StudyLight.org. <https://www.studylight.org/dictionaries/eng/fbd/e/esau.html>

(3) H3290 – ya ' aqob - *Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (kjv)*. (n.d.). Blue Letter Bible. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3290/kjv/wlc/0-1/>

“So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob” (Genesis 25:27-28).

So Esau became an expert hunter and outdoorsman. That endeared him to his father Isaac, who relished his ability to hunt game and prepare delicious culinary creations. On the other hand, Esau’s brother Jacob was something of a homebody who enjoyed hanging around the house, so to speak. Jacob was the favorite of his mother, Rebekah.

These expressions of parental favoritism will eventually lead to serious issues within this family. But first, Esau and Jacob will reveal some unfortunate aspects of their individual personalities...

“Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary. And Esau said to Jacob, 'Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary.' Therefore his name was called Edom.

But Jacob said, 'Sell me your birthright as of this day.' And Esau said, 'Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?' Then Jacob said, 'Swear to me as of this day.' So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright'” (Genesis 25:29-34).

So Esau was weary and famished from what seems to be an unsuccessful hunting trip. He subsequently arrived to find that Jacob had prepared a meal that was perfect for a starving hunter. As you might expect, Esau asked Jacob for a portion of the stew he had created. But instead of feeding his brother, Jacob took the opportunity to negotiate a deal: ***“First sell me your birthright” (Genesis 25:31 NIV).***

This brings us back to God's earlier message to Rebekah regarding her sons: ***“...the older [son Esau] will serve the younger [son Jacob]” (Genesis 25:23)***. If Rebekah’s partiality toward Jacob led her to relay that message concerning him, Jacob may have viewed this situation as an opportunity to fulfill this prophetic revelation on his own.

The first-born son within that culture traditionally received the birthright referenced in this passage. The eldest son also received a double portion of the family inheritance, as well as a family leadership role when his father passed away. However, this birthright included more than money or property for Esau; it also included the spiritual inheritance that God had bestowed upon his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac.

Jacob obviously recognized the importance of this birthright and saw Esau's hunger as an opportunity to leverage an arrangement with his older brother: *"I'll give you a bowl of stew in exchange for your rights as the first-born son."* Esau responded to that proposition by saying, ***"Look, I'm dying of starvation!... What good is my birthright to me now?"*** (NLT).

Now before we continue with this narrative, there are some important things to remember concerning these events. First, Esau and Jacob were members of a wealthy family, and it's likely that Isaac and Rebekah had many servants in their employ. All Esau had to do was call one of them and say, *"I'm hungry- make me something to eat right away."* But Esau neglected to do so.

Instead, it appears that Esau was thinking about what he wanted *at that very moment* and not about how that choice might affect him in the future. Esau was apparently the kind of person who lived for the "here and now" and dismissed the potential cost of his decisions. Esau was hungry, and he wanted some of the food his brother prepared. Everything else was secondary.

This also offers some insight into Esau's spiritual life as well. For Esau to sell this valuable possession so cheaply shows us how he felt about his family's spiritual legacy. It seems that Esau said to himself, *"I'm going to die of starvation and I'll never live to see these promises that God supposedly gave my grandfather Abraham. So why not sell my birthright? What good will it do me when I'm dead? I'm hungry now."*

So Esau made a poor decision in selling his birthright for a bowl of Jacob's homemade stew. However, Jacob did not act in a praiseworthy manner, either. First, God had already promised to give this family birthright to Jacob before he was born. In light of this, there was no reason for Jacob to manipulate his brother into selling it to him.

Instead, Jacob seemingly felt that he needed to secure this inheritance on his own instead of trusting God to deliver on His promise. So Jacob took advantage of his brother and maneuvered him into selling the birthright God promised to give him. But Esau foolishly traded his future for something he desired at the moment.

"Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright" (Genesis 25:34 NIV).

It seems that Esau simply finished his meal and then left as if nothing extraordinary had taken place. This tells us how little Esau thought of his privilege as the first-born son. Unfortunately, Esau will come to regret this choice later on.

So what lesson can we derive from this passage? Well, Esau was an impulsive individual who allowed his immediate desires to dictate his choices. Thus, he offers a good example of what can happen if we make decisions based on whatever feels good at the moment. He also shows us what can happen when we allow our physical desires to take us where they wish to go.

This explains why the New Testament book of Hebrews depicts Esau's life as a cautionary message...

"Watch out that no one becomes involved in sexual sin or becomes careless about God as Esau did: he traded his rights as the oldest son for a single meal. And afterwards, when he wanted those rights back again, it was too late, even though he wept bitter tears of repentance. So remember, and be careful" (Hebrews 12:16-17 TLB).