Abraham's death & progeny: tracing the children of promise (Genesis 25)

Although this chapter reports a transition, it focuses more on further fulfillment of God's promises and traces the "children of promise". This is attested by the thematic and non-chronologic structure and by at least two key statements: "God blessed Isaac" (v 11) and "Esau despised his birthright" (v 34). Further evidence to a theme of blessing and promise can be seen when other Scriptures are compared. We are to be challenged if we are believing God and valuing properly His promise of blessing.

I. ***The last days of Abraham (25:1-11)***

In the 37 years after Sarah died until his own death Abraham had six more sons by Keturah. She is called both a wife (v 1) and a concubine (v 6; *cf.* 1 Chr 1:32) which probably reflects are secondary status. These sons along with Ishmael were sent off to lands eastward so that the primary position of Isaac would not be endangered. When Abraham died "at a good old age" (NIV), he was buried by Isaac and Ishmael. Afterwards God blessed Isaac. In these events God was fulfilling His promises to Abraham.

1. God promised to bless Abraham (Genesis 12; 22) which He did by giving a long, good life and restored physical vigor (*cf.* Heb 11:11-12).
2. God promised Abraham that many nations would come from him (Genesis 17) which was fulfilled in Ishmael and the sons of Keturah.
3. God promised Abraham that he would die in peace at a good, old age (Gen 15.15). The same phrase in 25:8 points to God's fulfilment of this promise.
4. God promised the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants (Gen 12, 13, 15 & 17). Abraham's burial in Canaan hints at that promise (*cf.* ch. 23).
5. God had promised Abraham that blessing would continue through Isaac (Gen 17 & 21) which is fulfilled in 25:11. Isaac was the child of promise.

God is again shown to be One who keeps His word. In Jesus Christ there is the ultimate fulfilment of His promise to bless the peoples of the world.

II. ***Ishmael and his descendants (25:12-18)***

Ishmael's 12 sons became tribal chiefs, whose names also represent their tribal divisions and locations. This and even their manner of living (v 18) was in fulfilment of God's word.

1. God promised Abraham many descendants and many nations. Also Hagar was promised that Ishmael's descendants would be innumerable (Gen 16).
2. Many kings would come from Abraham (Gen 17:4) and Ishmael would father 12 rulers (Gen 17:20).
3. God word to Hagar concerning how Ishmael would live (Gen 16:12) is also fulfilled.
4. Although we observe the fulfilment of promised blessing upon Ishmael (*cf.* Gen 17:19-20), it is not explicitly stated as such, probably because of the preeminence of the covenant promises to Isaac. The blessing of Ishmael was nothing compared to the covenant promises.

Similarly today the blessings which may come through association with true believers is incomparable with the blessings that they receive. We are truly blessed by God when we have entered into a covenant relationship with Him by means of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

III. ***Isaac and his offspring (25:19-34)***

Little is said here of Isaac, the child of promise, and more about his sons, Esau and Jacob.

1. *The birth of Esau and Jacob (25:19-26)*

   Rebekah conceives after 2 decades of bareness when Isaac intercedes for her. Doubt concerning the pregnancy and its end arises from the struggle of the twins within her, but God replies to her question, explaining that she carried twins representing two nations. One nation would be stronger than the other. The older child would serve the younger.

   God's revelation to Rebekah points us to the significance of this account. The relationship between older and younger would be contrary to the normal cultural practice. Paul explains God's purposes in Romans 9:10-13 to demonstrate that His calling was by sovereign grace.

   God extends His blessing to those who do not deserve it, working contrary to the thinking of the world (*cf.* 1 Cor 1). There is no room for boasting.

2. *The birthright exchanged (25:27-34)*

   Esau, the skillful hunter, is willing to exchange his birthright with Jacob for a bowl of stew to satisfy his hunger. The birthright represented special responsibilities and privileged which the blessing of the father at the end of his life would formalize. By making this exchange Esau despised his birthright.

   The character of Esau is used as a negative example in Hebrews 12:16. Esau was concerned only with the temporal and material without appreciation for divine blessing. Jacob did value the birthright but does not model godly behavior in his of obtaining it.

   We should guard against being like Esau and not treat spiritual and eternal things with contempt. We should store heavenly rather than earthly treasure as Jesus taught. We should redeem or buy up our time now.

God makes sovereign choices and keeps His promises. His promised blessings to Abraham were being fulfilled. Isaac was the child or promise. Jacob was chosen over the elder son. Neither position nor deeds affected God's decisions. His choosing is by grace.

We should be challenged to believe God and value his promises. God keeps his word. And what He has planned for us is far better than any pleasures of this world.

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