

Separation 7-29-07

Genesis 25:1-18

Apparently Abraham was lonely in his old age. His son Isaac had moved his family to the Beer Lahai Roi, so Abraham had no immediate family with him in Beersheba. We don't know when he remarried, but considering his reluctance to take Hagar as a wife, he probably did not marry Keturah until after Sarah had died. If I had to guess, I would say it was after Isaac was married. That would make Abraham over 140 years of age, but he still had another 35 years of life. It seems that Abraham preferred a monogamous relationship, which was unusual for men of his time.

In his loneliness, he married Keturah. We know nothing about her ancestry or background. Her name means "spice" or "incense smoke". It is somewhat surprising to see that he fathered six sons by her. Apparently, God's gift of life to his dead reproductive system was a long lasting gift. (Romans 4:19) God's gifts are usually for life. (Romans 11:29) Children are such a joy, and I'm sure Abraham enjoyed having his children around in his old age. (Psalm 127:3) He would live long enough to see them all mature. In fact, he would live long enough to see Isaac's sons, Jacob and Esau. He may have even seen his grandchildren through Keturah. The genealogy lists a few of his great-grandchildren.

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.* Before his death, he sent the sons of Hagar and Ishmael away from Isaac. He probably gave them enough to get a start in life, but the bulk of his estate went to Isaac. The sons of Keturah settled mostly along the Gulf of Aqeba and were involved in trading spices from the Arabian Peninsula to Egypt and Babylon. The descendants of Midian eventually became one of the great enemies of Israel. Notice the expression, land of the east. We saw that earlier in the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden (Genesis 3:24), that was Cain's direction, and also with Hagar and Ishmael leaving Abraham's camp (Genesis 12:21).

"Through millennia of migrations and intermarriages, it seems likely that ... the descendants of Ishmael, Lot, and Esau, along with earlier descendants of Shem and, in some cases, Ham, have gradually merged and become the modern-day Arabic peoples" (Henry M. Morris. The Genesis Record, p.408).

Abraham's life had been wrapped around the idea of an heir that was the promised child. The drama of sending away Hagar and Ishmael only heightened the sense of Isaac's importance. (Genesis 21:11) The promise to bless the world through his seed must have stirred constantly in Abraham's heart. He knew the promise was coming through Isaac, and as much as he loved the other sons, Isaac was unique. (Genesis 17:19) He had to separate Isaac from the other sons.

Commented [notes1]: 19 Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead--since he was about a hundred years old--and that Sarah's womb was also dead.

Commented [notes2]: 29 for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.

Commented [notes3]: 3 Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him.

Commented [notes4]: 24 After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

Commented [notes5]: 21 While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt.

Commented [notes6]: 11 The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son.

Commented [notes7]: 19 Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.

Separation had been a theme throughout Abraham's life. He was separated from his country, family and friends. (Genesis 12:1) He was separated from the green part of the Promised Land, the wickedest part. (Genesis 13:9) He was separated from Lot, from Hagar and Ishmael, (Genesis 21:14) from Egypt (Genesis 12:20), and from his beloved Sarah by death. Now he was separating his sons by Keturah from himself and Isaac. Separation was a tool of God to help Abraham turn his heart toward God in an increasing way. Abraham knew the spiritual and carnal should not be mixed. God uses the same in our lives as well. (Galatians 5:17) He calls us to separate ourselves from worldliness. ¹⁷ "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." 2 Corinthians 6:17

Abraham had certainly seen that as people of God, there are things that we must avoid. Immersing yourself into those heathen cultures had the tendency to corrupt one's relationship with God, as Abraham saw in the life of his nephew, Lot. Because Abraham's life had been so interwoven with the promise of an heir that would bless the world, he felt he had to do everything he could to separate Isaac from the ungodly influences of the world. He must have been concerned that the sons of Keturah would have a worldly influence on Isaac and perhaps even contend for Abraham's estate.

Christian parents today try to separate their children from the world. It's very tricky business. We cannot keep our children from the world. Though we, too, look for a heavenly city, we live in a world that has numerous ways to influence our thought life. We could go live in the woods, and some do, but then we would not be fulfilling the Great Commission. (Mark 16:15) Children that are kept from all worldliness and then thrown into college have no preparation to resist temptations. We actually set them up for failure when we don't prepare them to face inevitable temptations. We must teach them how to be in the world but not of the world. (John 17:14-16) That was Jesus' prayer for His disciples and it should be ours for our children and grandchildren.

In Abraham's day, isolation was somewhat of an option. In our day, we must prepare our children and grandchildren to face the world while separating our hearts from its destructive influence. I think it is much more difficult to teach our children to be in the world but not of the world in our time, but it has always been a struggle for the people of God. Jesus taught His disciples this by example. That is the best way to teach our children and grandchildren. An example means so much more than words. A recent study showed that children have similar TV viewing habits as that of their parents. The pattern probably holds true in many areas of life. Once children are grown, they have been shown to have similar church attendance patterns as their father. Our example of separation from worldliness is more caught than it is taught. Our separation is a by-product of our connection with Jesus. (John 15:4) Only a personal relationship with Jesus is strong enough to keep us from the allure of the world.

Commented [notes8]: 1 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

Commented [notes9]: 9 Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."

Commented [notes10]: 14 Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the desert of Beersheba.

Commented [notes11]: 20 Then Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men, and they sent him on his way, with his wife and everything he had.

Commented [notes12]: 17 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

Commented [notes13]: 15 He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.

Commented [notes14]: 14 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.
15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.
16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.

Commented [notes15]: 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

We come out from the world in a spiritual sense, (John 15:19) while we live with different motivations in it. Our heart and treasure are not in worldly things. (Matthew 6:33,34) Our daily direction comes from a different source, and so, like Abraham, we are aliens and strangers in this world. (Hebrews 11:13) Are you separated to the Lord? Does your life send that message to your family? That is actually the definition of holiness, to be separated for God's purposes.

I spoke at a memorial service in which the person who had passed on was eulogized as a wonderful leader and world traveler. Great things were said about the person, even of their charitable work. But they did not pass on to their family and friends a spiritual priority. Their life's message was to be somebody. Up until a few days before their death they had missed the essence of this earthly life. (James 4:14) Suddenly, when staring death in the face, seeing the world and being important meant very little, and a relationship with God meant everything.

The fact that Isaac received all that belonged to Abraham is an important lesson for believing parents. Christian parents ask about what to leave their unbelieving children. I've seen time and time again when unbelieving children have blown through an inheritance. We have a Biblical picture of that in the Prodigal Son. (Luke 15:13) Since we are stewards of all that God has placed in our possession, we have a responsibility to glorify God with those material things. To leave them to an alcoholic child because we want them to think well of us, is to destroy the child and be a poor custodian of the blessings of God. Abraham helped his other children with gifts, but the estate went to his believing son, Isaac. He wanted to see his material blessings invested in the promise God had given him. If all of our children are born again, the decision is much easier. Equitable distribution does not have to be your main goal. Glorifying God by using your assets as He would have you should be the motivating factor.

⁷ Altogether, 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. God had promised to make Abraham the father of many nations. The genealogies surrounding this account of his death, show us that God was faithful to His word. From the age of 100 and onward, he had seven sons. Ishmael was born earlier for a total of 8 sons. God literally kept His promise, but He was fulfilling it in a spiritual way that Abraham probably did not understand. God blessed Him physically with wealth and children, but He also blessed him spiritually with a relationship with Himself.

It is interesting that Abraham's long life was stated in four ways: 175 years, good old age, an old man, and full of years. I think the emphasis is on the fullness of life that Abraham lived. Though he had many trials, he also had many victories. His life was a journey of faith, and he was continually learning and stepping out in increasing faith. James points out that his demonstration of faith is proof that his faith was real. (James 2:21)

Commented [notes16]: 19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

Commented [notes17]: 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.
34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Commented [notes18]: 13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.

Commented [notes19]: 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

Commented [notes20]: 13 "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.

Commented [notes21]: 21 Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?

He died 100 years after entering the Promised Land (Genesis 12:4), 75 years after the birth of Isaac (Genesis 17:17), 38 years after the death of Sarah (Genesis 23:1), 35 years after Isaac and Rebekah were married (Genesis 24:67) and 15 years after the birth of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:26). The Hebrew has the idea of being satisfied and fulfilled in life, of completing one's life to the fullest degree, of being satisfied with life and all its blessings (*Pulpit Commentary*, Vol.1, p.313). This longevity was the fulfillment of the word God spoke to him in chapter 15 verse 15. ¹⁵ *You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age.* That kind of satisfaction can only be found when a person finds God's will for their life. People try to live to the fullest degree by indulging themselves in the pleasures of the world. That is the surest way to wind up empty and unfulfilled. Fulfillment is finding God's special plan for you and living it out. I wonder if the psalmist had Abraham in mind when he wrote. ¹² *The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon;* ¹³ *planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God.* ¹⁴ *They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green,*

Abraham was gathered to his people. This phrase often means the person was buried with their ancestors, but that is not the case here and the text makes sure we understand that. This is a declaration that those who died in believing faith are still alive. Jesus alludes to this when he responded to the Sadducees, ²⁶ *"Now about the dead rising--have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' ?* ²⁷ *He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!"* Mark 12:26,27 (NIV) In one of Jesus' parables, He referred to this place that the dead in faith are gathered as Abraham's bosom. (Luke 16:22)

Commented [notes22]: 22 "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried.

The Old Testament psalmist certainly believed in the afterlife. He wrote, ¹⁵ *But God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself.* Selah Psalm 49:15. Job was sure of an afterlife. ²⁵ *I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.* ²⁶ *And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God;* ²⁷ *I myself will see him with my own eyes--I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!* Job 19:25-27 With these clear affirmations of an afterlife, it is a wonder that many Jewish rabbi did not believe in life after death.

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 Hittites. There Abraham was buried with his wife Sarah.* The death of their beloved father brought Isaac and Ishmael together again. Death has a way of doing that. (Psalm 90:12) We suddenly realize that the grudge isn't worth holding on to. There are other things that are more important than nursing that wounded spirit. I've seen parent and child finally let go of some issue when one of them is dying. They inevitably wished they had let go long before, and wonder why they wasted so many years. Swallow your pride and take the humble route. Is your insistence on being right more important than your relationship?

Commented [notes23]: 12 Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

¹¹ After Abraham's death, God blessed his son Isaac, who then lived near Beer Lahai Roi. The blessing that had been on the life of Abraham was now on the life of Isaac. Why? Had Isaac done some great thing? We don't have any clear record of a great achievement that this was attributed to, but like his father, God chose to bless him before he had done anything commendable. This was especially true because he was the promised seed. His son Jacob would experience a name change directly from God. (Genesis 35:10) He will be called Israel and father 12 sons that would become the tribes of Israel.

Commented [notes24]: 10 God said to him, "Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel." So he named him Israel.

The rest of the chapter is the about the line of Ishmael. We are told again that he is the son of the maidservant, Hagar. It is mentioned to remind us that he is not the son of promise. He, like Israel, will also have 12 sons that will become the heads of tribes. He will also be blessed according to the word of the Lord in 17:20 and 21:13. The LORD had predicted he would father twelve sons and that He would make him into a great nation.

Commented [notes25]: 20 And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: 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.

In spite of his earlier animosity toward Isaac, when Ishmael died, he was also said to be "gathered to his fathers". I believe that he found saving faith when he cried out to the Lord as he was dying of thirst. (Genesis 21:17) He came to believe in his name, "the LORD hears". He was no longer separated from his father, but now enjoys eternity with him. He also looked for a city whose builder and maker is God. We will see Ishmael in heaven. (Hebrews 11:13-16)

Commented [notes26]: 13 I will make the son of the maidservant into a nation also, because he is your offspring."

Commented [notes27]: 17 God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there.

Finally we have one last reminder that the word of the LORD always comes to pass. The closing expression in regards to Ishmael's descendents is an echo of God's earlier warning (Genesis 16:12). They lived in hostility toward all their brethren. To this day we see the fulfillment of that prediction. Throughout the chapter on the end of Abraham's life, we have seen previous predictions from the LORD fulfilled. God is always faithful to His word.

Commented [notes28]: 13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. 14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. 15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 Instead, they were longing for a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

We have finished the life and testimony of Abraham. We saw his compromises, growth in faith, and maturity. Today, we noted God's work of separating Abraham to the LORD. Not every testimony in Scripture ends on a high note like Abraham's. Many end in calamity. We are warned many times in Scripture to carefully cling to what we have heard (Hebrews 2:1), to continue to fight the good fight (1 Timothy 6:12) that, like Abraham, we might finish strong. I want to ask you to consider God's work in your life to separate you from influences that would distract you from your walk with Him. (Hebrews 12:1) Are you progressing in your faith, or have you stagnated? God's call to Abraham is the same as His call to us today. "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless." Genesis 17:1b

Commented [notes29]: 12 He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers."

Commented [notes30]: 1 We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.

Commented [notes31]: 12 Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Commented [notes32]: 1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.