

21. The choices we make

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Life is full of choices. From what to eat for the breakfast this morning to whom we should marry, to where we are going to spend our eternal life. I wish I could say I made more wise choices than bad ones in the past. But by the grace of God, I will make more wise choices in the future.

We may not be able to make our own choices when it comes to the time of death and location, but we can make many good choices how we can live until the death comes to us, if the Lord does not come back before our final days on this earth.

If every single dead person could come back and tell us, they all would say, "God is real, heaven is real, hell is real."

Someone said it well, "Man can defy the gravity, but he cannot defy the grave." For Christians, death is both friend and enemy. Death is a friend when it releases a believer of Jesus Christ from pain and suffering of life to the eternal life in heaven. But it is an enemy, because it robs us our family members, friends and loved ones from us. Even though we have assurance that those believers are with our Savior Jesus Christ in heaven immediately after their death, but we still grieve over their temporary separation from us.

In chapter 23 and 25 of Genesis, we are going to find the death of Abraham's wife Sarah and Abraham himself and the choices by his grandsons Esau and Jacob that separated them in eternity.

A. THE DEATH OF SARAH THE PRINCESS

Genesis 23:1-2 Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. 2 So Sarah died in Kirjath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.

Notice that Sarah's age is given as 127 years old. Some of you have learned from other Bible teachers including myself that human can not have the length of life more than 120 years according to Genesis 6:3.

Genesis 6:3 And the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years."

What does it mean? Does it mean what God say didn't come true? Because we see Sarah lived 127 years and many other lived over 120 years after the Great Flood. Is the Bible wrong? No, the Bible is never wrong, our interpretation is wrong. I was wrong.

If we look at Genesis 6:3 in context, God is talking about the people who were mocking at Noah and not repenting of their wicked sins. God gave them 120 years to repent while Noah was building the Ark.

How often in my Christian life I have heard well-meaning but ignorant people say to grieving friends or relatives, "Now, don't cry!" That is very poor counsel, because God made us with the ability to weep. Grieving is one of God's gifts to help heal broken hearts when people we love are taken from us in death. However, we cannot

mourn over our dead forever. There comes a time when we must accept what has happened, face life, and fulfill our obligations to both the living and the dead. And move on.

For the believer, to be “absent from the body” means to be “present with the Lord.” So Christians should not approach death with fear.

B. FINDING A BURIAL SITE

Genesis 23:3-16 Then Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, 4 “I am a foreigner and a visitor among you. Give me property for a burial place among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.” 5 And the sons of Heth answered Abraham, saying to him, 6 “Hear us, my lord: You are a mighty prince among us; bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places. None of us will withhold from you his burial place, that you may bury your dead.” 7 Then Abraham stood up and bowed himself to the people of the land, the sons of Heth. 8 And he spoke with them, saying, “If it is your wish that I bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and meet with Ephron the son of Zohar for me, 9 that he may give me the cave of Machpelah which he has, which is at the end of his field. Let him give it to me at the full price, as property for a burial place among you.” 10 Now Ephron dwelt among the sons of Heth; and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the presence of the sons of Heth, all who entered at the gate of his city, saying, 11 “No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field and the cave that is in it; I give it to you in the presence of the sons of my people. I give it to you. Bury your dead!” 12 Then Abraham bowed himself down before the people of the land; 13 and he spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, “If you will give it, please hear me. I will give you money for the field; take it from me and I will bury my dead there.” 14 And Ephron answered Abraham, saying to him, 15 “My lord, listen to me; the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver. What is that between you and me? So bury your dead.” 16 And Abraham listened to Ephron; and Abraham weighed out the silver for Ephron which he had named in the hearing of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, currency of the merchants.

Why didn't Abraham take Sarah somewhere else to bury her? He buried her in Hebron, because it is the promised land and the hope of the future is here.

The men of the land called Abraham “a mighty prince”, which in the Hebrew is “a prince with God.” He had a good testimony among them, and they respected him. These Hittites did not worship Abraham's God, but they respected Abraham and his faith.

It is a wonderful thing in a time of sorrow when the child of God has a strong witness to the non-believers around. There is a natural sorrow that everyone expects us to manifest, but there is also a supernatural grace that God gives so that we might have joy in the midst of sorrow. The unsaved can tell the difference, and this gives us opportunity for sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The Canaanite, Ephron, follows the cultural customs of bargaining. First, the seller offers to give the item. Then, when that is refused, the seller suggests a price, which he claims is modest but is really high. This is understood to be the starting point, and from there the bargaining begins.

Abraham shows how a Christian should do business with the world – courteously and fairly.

By the way, if you ever go to Israel and you pay whatever the merchants ask for, they will laugh at you after you leave their shop. They always start extremely high. So you need to start at a half price of what they ask for. You haggle and get the merchandise at the price you want to pay or walk away. Because you can get the exactly same thing from the next shop at cheaper price.

Genesis 23:17-20 So the field of Ephron which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field and the cave which was in it, and all the trees that were in the field, which were within all the surrounding borders, were deeded 18 to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the sons of Heth, before all who went in at the gate of his city. 19 And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah, before Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. 20 So the field and the cave that is in it were deeded to Abraham by the sons of Heth as property for a burial place.

The text emphasizes this property was Abraham's land by deed, not only by the promise of God.

This is where Isaac and Ishmael buried Abraham. Isaac and Rebekah were both buried here. Jacob buried Leah here, and Joseph buried Jacob here. And this was the place Joseph told his descendants to bury him, taking his bones with them when they came into the Promised Land.

C. THE DEATH OF A PATRIARCH

Genesis 25:1-11 Abraham again took a wife, and her name was Keturah. 2 And she bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. 3 Jokshan begot Sheba and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. 4 And the sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abidah, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah. 5 And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. 6 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. 7 This is the sum of the years of Abraham's life which he lived: one hundred and seventy-five years. 8 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. 9 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, 10 the field which Abraham purchased from the sons of Heth. There Abraham was buried, and Sarah his wife. 11 And it came to pass, after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac. And Isaac dwelt at Beer Lahai Roi.

Abraham passes from the scene, being one of the most important men of the Bible. He is mentioned 70 times in the New Testament alone.

Like Sarah before him, Abraham "died in faith." For 100 years, he had been a stranger and a pilgrim on the earth, seeking a heavenly country. And now his desires were fulfilled. His life had not been an easy one. But he had walked by faith and the Lord had brought him through.

I need to talk to those who have been in the Lord for a long time and now you are facing your sunset years. You have so much wisdom to offer to young believers in

the Lord. Instead of sitting on your hands and expecting someone to serve you, you go serve others. Let God use your wisdom and service for the Kingdom and His glory to the maximum. Because there is no retirement in the service for the Lord.

Abraham was flourishing and fruitful to the very end. How few people really experience joy and satisfaction when they reach old age! When many of them look back, it is with regret. When they look ahead, it is with fear. When they look around, it is with complaint. You don't have to be like that anymore. When you truly walk with God, you get to understand His peace, His joy and His hope.

D. THE GENEALOGY OF ISHMAEL

Genesis 25:12-18 Now this is the genealogy of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's maidservant, bore to Abraham. 13 And these were the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to their generations: The firstborn of Ishmael, Nebajoth; then Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, 14 Mishma, Dumah, Massa, 15 Hadar, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. 16 These were the sons of Ishmael and these were their names, by their towns and their settlements, twelve princes according to their nations. 17 These were the years of the life of Ishmael: one hundred and thirty-seven years; and he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people. 18 (They dwelt from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt as you go toward Assyria.) He died in the presence of all his brethren.

Just as God promised to Hagar about her son Ishmael's future, his descendants became 12 nations of Arab people.

E. THE TWO SONS OF ISAAC

Genesis 25:19-26 This is the genealogy of Isaac, Abraham's son. Abraham begot Isaac. 20 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. 21 Now Isaac pleaded with the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived. 22 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. 23 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." 24 So when her days were fulfilled for her to give birth, indeed there were twins in her womb. 25 And the first came out red. He was like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau. 26 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.

Even so, it was some 20 years until they had children, and these were the only children born to Isaac and Rebekah.

As Rebekah sought God, the Lord spoke to her regarding the sons within her womb. What God says is simple. She has twins within her. The twins will each father nations. The younger will be greater than the older.

It is good to desire that the Lord would speak to us, but we must realize we do not hear perfectly from God. We can become far too confident in our ability to hear from the Lord, and forget that it is easy for us to stop listening when God wants to keep speaking. We may add to what the Lord is saying, or hear it clearly but misunderstand the timing or application of what the Lord says to us. The most reliable way to hear from the Lord is through the Word of God in context.

During that time, circumstances surrounding the birth of each child were often responsible for their names. Esau refers to the hairiness on his body. Jacob refers to the way the second born was holding on to the heel of his brother. Additionally, the idea of a "heel-catcher" which is the definition of 'Jacob' meant something else in that day. It had the idea of "trickster," "con-man," or "scoundrel." It wasn't a compliment.

F. THE OPPOSITE CHARACTERS OF THE TWO BOYS

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

Esau was a skilled hunter, covered with hair all over his body, rugged, rough and tough. He probably looked like Tom Selleck. According to chapter 27, Esau smelled like a field. I don't think that he has been using deodorant lately. He was only interested in that which was physical. He represents the flesh.

On the contrary, Jacob lived indoors. He was mama's boy and was tied to her apron strings. I bet he had the look of Leonardo DiCaprio.

According to Romans 9, Apostle Paul points out God's choice was not based on the performance of Jacob or Esau. The choice was made when they were not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil.

God announced these intentions to Rebekah before the children were born and repeated His verdict long after Jacob and Esau had both died.

Malachi 1:2-3 "I have loved you," says the Lord. "Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?' Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" Says the Lord. "Yet Jacob I have loved; 3 But Esau I have hated, And laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness."

Is it fair for God to love one and hate another, and to choose one and not choose another, before they are even born? The real thought here is much more like "accepted" and "rejected" more than it is like our understanding of the terms "loved" and "hated."

A woman once said to the great preacher Charles H. Spurgeon, "I cannot understand why God should say that He hated Esau." "That," Spurgeon replied, "is not my difficulty, madam. My trouble is to understand how God could love Jacob."

Our greatest error in considering the choices of God is to think God chooses for arbitrary reasons, as if He were sort of an "eeny-meeny-miny-moe" chooser. We may not be able to fathom God's reasons for choosing, and they are reasons He alone knows and answers to, but God's choices are always perfect.

G. THE SOLD BIRTHRIGHT

Genesis 25:29-34 Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary. 30 And Esau said to Jacob, "Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary." Therefore his name was called Edom. 31 But Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright as of this day." 32 And Esau said, "Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?" 33 Then Jacob said, "Swear to me as of this day." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. 34 And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Jacob knew that the birthright was valuable and he wanted it. Passages like Deuteronomy 21:17 and 1 Chronicles 5:1-2 tell us the birthright involved both a material and a spiritual dynamic. The son of the birthright received a double portion of the inheritance, and he also became the head of the family and the spiritual leader upon the passing of the father. In the case of this family the birthright determined who would inherit the covenant God made with Abraham, the covenant of a land, a nation, and the Messiah.

Esau had no spiritual appreciation. He would rather feed his body than enjoy the promises of God. Like many people today, Esau was a success in the world's eye and a failure with God's.

Esau wouldn't have died just because he was hungry at that point. He just could care less about anything spiritual like many people in America including many born-again Christians. Some of you may say, "I am here in the church on Sunday. Aren't I?" Yes, you are. But I'd like to ask you what you do daily? Do you spend time with God through the Word of God and prayer? If not, why? Because of TV programs? Because of ESPN sports? Because of whatever you'd prefer over the time with God?

What birthright might we despise? Ephesians 1:3-14 shows us a treasury of riches that is ours by birthright in Jesus: every spiritual blessing, the blessing of being chosen in Jesus, adoption into God's family, total acceptance by God in Jesus, redemption from our slavery to sin, true and total forgiveness, the riches of God's grace, the revelation and knowledge of the mystery of God's will, an eternal inheritance, the guarantee of the indwelling Holy Spirit right now. Will we sell out this birthright for a night of television?

QUESTION

What kind of choice are you going to make today? And the next day? Would it be something that pleases God or our own carnal flesh? It is the choice we make and we will get the result of that choice later: either a reward from God or the consequences of our bad choice.