

- 'Overflow' - other blessings

1. Abraham is given strength and virility in his old age

- Six sons

- Miracle strength and virility

2. Abraham leaves a message for his descendents

- The covenant promises will continue

3. There is blessing for the 'non-elect' as well as for God's elect

- Ishmael not predestined for covenant usefulness

- The issue here is not predestination to salvation

- Romans 9 and Genesis 25 are referring to different things

Genesis 25 is a chapter full of the side-effects of God's grace and mercy. When God blesses there is always an 'overflow' and there come other blessings besides the central ones.

1. **Abraham is given strength and virility in his old age.** Genesis 25:1–18 concludes the story of Abraham. Abraham takes another wife. Her name is Keturah ^{☞1}. This may have been after the death of Sarah and was certainly after the birth of Isaac. In either case the word 'concubine' in 25:6 and 1 Chronicles 1:32 makes it clear that she would never be the senior wife in the story of the covenant to Abraham. Through her Abraham has another six sons ^{☞2}. Genesis 25:3 traces the descent of one of them to the third generation, and 25:4 traces the descent of another son via Keturah.

At one point Abraham was thinking he would never have a son since he was too old ^{☞1}. But when the miracle takes place and God visits Abraham and Sarah, they both 'received power' ^{☞2}. Abraham not only has one son but another six through Keturah! The miracle of Genesis 21 involved newness of strength and virility.¹

2. **Abraham leaves a message to those who live after him.** The line in which the covenant-promises would go forward would be that of Isaac, so he inherited everything that belonged to Abraham at the time of Abraham's death ^{☞1}. Yet he took responsibility for his other children and provided for them during his lifetime so that there should be no dispute at the time of his death ^{☞2}.

Then he died as a very elderly man and 'full of years', that is 'thoroughly satisfied with life' ^{☞1}. He went to live with the people of God beyond the grave. (The phrase 'gathered to his people' must mean that. Only Sarah was buried at Machpelah.) The way he arranged his will and his burial testified to his faith that the covenant promises would continue.

3. **There is blessing for the 'non-elect' as well as for God's elect.** Isaac and Ishmael were reunited ^{☞1} but the special line of blessing continued with Isaac ^{☞2}.

In between the major sections of Genesis dealing with Abraham^{☞1}, Jacob^{☞2} and Joseph^{☞3}, there are smaller sections dealing with Ishmael^{☞4} and Esau^{☞5}. Genesis 25:12–18 looks briefly at Ishmael before continuing the story.

Ishmael is 'non-elect' as the heir of the covenant. It is Isaac who is chosen to be the bearer of the 'holy line of descent' leading to Jesus. 'In Isaac shall your seed be called,' said God. 'My covenant I will establish with Isaac.' At this point God's 'predestination' is not predestination to salvation, but predestination to usefulness in the progress of the covenant.

There are two mistakes that can be made here. Those who believe strongly in biblical predestination tend to read predestination-to-salvation into the Genesis stories of Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau. But the 'predestination' of Isaac and Jacob is not to salvation but to covenant-usefulness.

On the other hand those who like to play down the biblical teaching of predestination (as we have it in Romans 9 and elsewhere) tend to see nothing except 'predestination-to-covenant-usefulness' in Romans 9. Actually it is 'predestination-to-covenant-usefulness' in Genesis; and it is 'predestination-to-salvation' in Romans 9! Paul takes the stories of Genesis which refer only to 'predestination-to-covenant-usefulness' and he reapplies the principle to matters of salvation. The theme of Romans 9–11 is clearly

☞1 25:1

☞2 25:2

☞1 17:17

☞2 see

Hebrews 11:11

¹ see Note

☞1 25:5

☞2 25:6

☞1 25:7-8

☞1 25:9-10

☞2 25:11

☞1 11:27-

25:11

☞2 25:19-

35:29

☞3 37:2 -50 :20

☞4 25:12-18

☞5 36:1;7:1

• *In Romans 9 Paul reapplies the stories of Genesis*

• *The fact that Ishmael and Esau are 'non-elect' in the matter of 'covenant-usefulness' does not mean that they were 'non-elect' personally*

• *There is blessing for those who may not be chosen to special significance in the history of salvation*

• *One day those outside the seed of Abraham will experience God's worldwide revival and in that way come to be within the seed of Abraham!*

that of the salvation or non-salvation of Israel. Paul is taking the stories of Genesis and reapplying them. The interpretation of the stories in their original context does not determine what Paul means in Romans 9 because Paul is **reapplying** them.

This is an important matter for another reason. The fact that Ishmael and Esau are 'non-elect' in the matter of 'covenant-usefulness' does not mean that they were 'non-elect' personally. The fact that Paul uses them as an **illustration** of people not being chosen to salvation does not mean that **personally** they were rejected by God and I do not believe they were. Hagar also ought to be mentioned in this connection because in Genesis 16 Hagar is saved and wonderfully blessed by God, but in Galatians 4 Hagar is used as a picture of 'the flesh'. What a biblical character is in God's picture-language may be different from what that character is in and of himself. Ishmael is a model of being by-passed by God in one respect but he probably was not bypassed personally. Esau was a model of being by-passed by God in one respect but in the letter to the Hebrews I think he is an illustration of a Christian who is 'saved through fire'.

There is blessing for those who may *not* be chosen to special significance in the history of salvation. I do not suggest that anyone can experience salvation without faith, but one might not be 'elect' as an Abraham, a Paul, a John Calvin, or one might not be highly prominent in the story of God's church – but be 'elect' to salvation nevertheless.

One thing is certain. Even Hagar, Ishmael and Esau gained much from the 'overflow' of God's purpose in Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And Isaiah 60:6 mentions Midian, Ephah and Sheba (tribes descending from Abraham via Keturah!) and says to Israel 'Your sons will come from afar' ^{□1}. He says to them as well as to Israel 'Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.' One day those outside the seed of Abraham will experience God's worldwide revival and in that way come to be within the seed of Abraham!

Note

1. Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born ^{□1}. Sarah was ten years younger ^{□2}. Sarah died when she was 127 years ^{□3}; Abraham was 137 years old at the time. Abraham died when he was 175 years ^{□4}. Abraham outlived Sarah by 38 years. If Isaac married Rebekah about 3 years after his mother's death (Abraham – 140) then Abraham died 35 years after Isaac's marriage ^{□5}.

□1 Isaiah 60:4

□1 21:5
 □2 17:17
 □3 23:1
 □4 25:7
 □5 see 25:20



Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)* books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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