

**Saturday, April 25, 2020 • Read Genesis 25:1–18**

*Questions from the Scripture text: What did Abraham do in v1? How many sons did Keturah bear him (v2)? How many grandsons do vv3–4 mention? To whom did Abraham give his entire estate (v5)? How does v6 refer to Keturah (and Hagar) by comparison to Sarah? What did he do with all his other sons? How long did Abraham live (v7)? How does v8 describe him? What two things happen to Abraham in v8? What third thing happens to him in v9? Who bury him where? How did they get the field (v10)? Who else was buried there? What continued after Abraham died? Whose genealogy does v12 begin? How many sons of Ishmael do vv13-15 name? What else does v16 tell us about them? How long did Ishmael live (v17)? What three things happen to Ishmael in v17? Who is with him at his death (v18)?*

Sometimes, our perception of God’s promises in our lives is that they come true rather slowly.

Between Keturah’s six sons, and their ten grandsons, and Ishmael’s twelve sons who are princes of peoples, perhaps even by the time that Ishmael dies, the descendants of Abraham are many.

But “through Isaac shall your seed be called” (21:12). This is why Abraham leaves his entire estate to Isaac and sends the rest of his sons away (v6). One wonders why it is just he and Ishmael who bury him (v7–11), but there are many reasons, and the text simply doesn’t tell us. It does, however produce a stark contrast with the rather large gathering implied for Ishmael in v18.

The effect of the contrasts between Abraham’s burial v.s. Ishmael’s, and Ishmael’s progeny v.s. Isaac’s current childlessness, is to communicate that the covenant line again hangs by a thread. This has been a theme throughout Genesis, and will continue to be. Not only through Genesis, but throughout the history of God’s people. Not only in Scripture, but throughout church history.

But it is not the number of threads that matter, but the nature of the thread. The “Isaac thread” is not Isaac himself, but the faithfulness of the God who has determined to bring His promises through Isaac. Tensile strength: infinite.

So, yes, God’s promises seem to be coming true slowly. But there is nothing more sure.

And we see that, ever so subtly, in two different ways. The first is the language of “being gathered to his people”—something said of Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and Aaron in the Scriptures. In vv8–9, it is apparent that this is something other than death or burial, likely what Christ refers to in Luke 16:22 as “being gathered to Abraham’s bosom.” Believers do not perish at death, but the Lord receives their souls into a state of blessing until the resurrection (cf. Matt 8:11, Ps 73:23–24).

And that is a message that our passage announces against the backdrop of the thread by which the promise hangs. Where is his body laid? Next to his wife’s. In the only piece of covenant land that the covenant people formally own. A grave cave. Purchased in the hope of the resurrection.

God’s promises sometimes seem to be coming true rather slowly, sometimes seem to hang by a thread. But they are as sure as the faithfulness of the God who has promised, and as sure as the Christ in Whom those promises all have their “yes” and “amen” (cf. 2Cor 1:18–22).

What situation threatens to shake your confidence in God’s promises? Why mustn’t you let it?

Suggested songs: ARP116AB "How Fervently I Love the Lord" or TPH234 "The God of Abraham Praise"