

“And It Came to Pass...”

Genesis 25:1-18

November 20th, 2016

Jeanne Calment was born in 1875. She died in Arles, France in 1997... at the age of 122! She was the oldest human being whose age had been verified by official documents.

122!?! Until very late in her life, Jeanne ate more than two pounds of chocolate a week. She treated her skin with olive oil, she walked regularly and vigorously, she rode a bicycle until she was 100, and only quit smoking at the age of 117.

Jeanne Calment left no heirs. She outlived Andre-Francois Raffray, a lawyer who 32 years before her death, when she was merely 90, bought the apartment she lived in on a contingency contract. He would pay her 2,500 francs (about \$400) a month until she died, and then the apartment would become his. Mr. Raffray died at the age of 77 a year before Calment, after paying Mrs. Calment more than \$180,000, better than double the apartment's market value.

Having celebrated my 55th birthday this past Thursday, I'm one year older and more sensitive to the fact that my life on earth will one day come to an end (if Jesus doesn't come back first, that is!)

You know you're getting old when . . .

- Your dreams are reruns;
- You sit in a rocking chair and can't get it started;
- Everything hurts, and what doesn't hurt, doesn't work;
- You sink your teeth into a juicy hamburger...and they stay there!

We've come to the 25th chapter of Genesis, the half-way point of the 50 chapters making up the Bible's first book. And with chapter 25, an era is coming to an end here. Abraham's time is closing, and a new era – centering on Isaac, Jacob and Esau –begins.

There's much here though the passage contains two separate listings of names. As we look at those two family listings (Abraham's children with his second wife, and Ishmael's descendants) as well as Abraham's death and burial, we're reminded that God's plan for His kingdom people cannot be overcome!

Genesis 25:1-18:

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, Ephraim, 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.

¹² 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."

I've divided this text into three main ideas:

- MP 1 – Abraham's Seed Grows (v. 1-6);**
- MP 2 – Abraham's Life Ends (v. 7-11);**
- MP 3 – Ishmael's Seed Grows (v. 12-18);**

With the opening verses, we are introduced to more of Abraham's expanding family – **Abraham's Seed Grows**. In verse 1, we meet Abraham's second wife. Her name was "Keturah," which means "spices" or "incense." It's no surprise, then, that some of her grandchildren have names that are related to areas of the spice trade in Arabia. Verse 3 teaches us that her son Jokshan had two children – Sheba and Dedan. Regions with those same names are located in the Arabian Peninsula (Saudi Arabia).

Verse 2 instructs us that Abraham and Keturah had six children altogether (their seed was growing), but none of them are the seed of God's promise. Further, none of the couple's 7 grandchildren listed in verses 3 & 4 through sons Midian and Jokshan were the seed of God's promise (none of the other four siblings are shown to have children here, though it is likely they did). Finally, none of Abraham and Keturah's three great grandchildren listed in verse 3 were the seed of God's promise. As we've seen, only Isaac is the Seed of God's promise. Abraham gave him all that he had.

Backing up to verse 1, we learn that Abraham takes another wife *after Sarah dies*. This is an example of the teaching of sacred Scripture – there are times when a married person may marry again. In his New Testament letter to the Church at Rome, the Apostle Paul writes in **Romans 7:2 & 3**, "For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to *her* husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of *her* husband. ³ So then if, while *her* husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man."

Then in his first letter to the Church at Corinth, Paul writes these words, "A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord." (**I Corinthians 7:39**)

Of course, this is instruction to Christians, as both of these references come from letters the Apostle wrote to *churches*. A Christian whose spouse dies (like Abraham's) is free to remarry, but "only in the Lord", meaning only a Christian, who him or herself, is eligible to be remarried.

Few take advantage of the resources available to them in the church when it comes to seeking marriage or remarriage. If you have joined the local church, you are under the umbrella of the church's leadership. That is a safe place to be...God saves men and women to Himself, *and* to His people, the Church. Jesus, as Head of the Church, has appointed leaders as his earthly representatives. In various churches, to include ours, these leaders are the elders. The elders are answerable to God for their care of the souls of the members of the church. And, they possess qualities that assist them greatly in determining the credibility of a person's verbal profession of saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Not everyone who says he or she is a Christian is actually a Christian. In other words, a person isn't a Christian merely because he or she *says* so. There are determining factors that are typically also present in a person's life if he says he's a Christian, like receiving baptism and holding membership in a local congregation. Yes, I know – those alone don't make a person a Christian, either. But, if they are not present in a person's life, their absence doesn't prove that person's verbally expressed Christian faith is true; rather, they speak against it.

Wouldn't you think a church member would seek the blessing of his/her elders for their fiancée? One of the main responsibilities of the elders is to examine people for membership in God's Church. For a person to press on with a marriage with only their fiancée's word to go on regarding their relationship with Christ is tantamount to driving a big truck over a lake with only a thin veneer of ice. Sooner, not later, a great fall will take place.

Is death of a spouse the only grounds for remarriage for the Christian? No, there is one other ground with two parts. If a divorced person's former spouse has remarried, the marital union is permanently broken. Marriage could never reoccur between the original parties. Reconciliation of the broken marriage is, therefore, impossible and the unmarried former partner is eligible to remarry, but only to a Christian.

Secondly, the offended party in a divorce is also free to remarry another Christian, but I suggest this go forward under the elders' counsel. A person who has left a marriage without biblical grounds (desertion or sexual infidelity not repented of) is the offender; the spouse sinned against is the offended party. Those offended by sin leading to divorce may seek to remarry another spouse, but again, only to another Christian.

Because we live in a fallen world, very few things are ever "black and white." We live and move in various shades of grey because so many layers of sin are evident in just about every relationship. As a people of this Book, we must seek to live according to it; not primarily by the seat of our emotional pants, or our perceived lack of happiness, or our selfishness. That often requires the spiritual care and input of the elders and other mature Christians in the church.

We've seen that **Abraham's seed continued to grow**; next in verse 7-11, we see that **Abraham's life comes to an end**. Verse 7 tells us that Abraham was 175 when he died. That would mean he lived another 38 years after Sarah died. He lived another 100 years after arriving in Canaan after God called him to leave his home in Ur!

Want a primer on how much time 175 years is? Look back 175 years – to the year 1841. That year began with Martin Van Buren serving as the President of the United States (8th). William Henry Harrison became the 9th President in March that year, and following his death after just 31 days in office, John Tyler was promoted to the office from Vice President. There were only 26 states in the union in 1841!

Verse 8 says that Abraham died “an old man and full of years.” This suggests more than a quantity of time; it suggests a quality of life. Abraham flourished and was fruitful to the very end as **Psalm 92:14** puts it. He lived life to its fullest. Yet, as we look around us, few people really experience joy and satisfaction when they reach old age! “When they look back, it is with regret; when they look ahead, it is with fear; and when they look around, it is with complaint.” (Wiersbe, 133) This ought not describe us, fellow Christians! We, of all people, have reason to rejoice in the sunset years of life! Daily, we get closer to an eternity of glory!

Young people, listen carefully. Like everything else, to be prosperous in old age, you must start working at it while you’re young – right now counts forever! Listen to the wisdom that Scripture gives us in **Ecclesiastes 12**:

“Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth,
Before the difficult days come,
And the years draw near when you say,
“I have no pleasure in them”:
² While the sun and the light,
The moon and the stars,
Are not darkened,
And the clouds do not return after the rain;
³ In the day when the keepers of the house tremble,
And the strong men bow down;
When the grinders cease because they are few,
And those that look through the windows grow dim;”

A godly life beginning in one’s youth is an investment that pays rich dividends when physical life draws to a close.

Verse 8 also says that Abraham was “gathered to his people.” Yes, that means that Abraham had died, but it also implies that ‘his people’ still exist in some way even though they are physically dead. So many people think that death is the end of all things; that annihilation is what follows death - Poof! Vanished! To be gathered to our people, Christian, implies that we ‘survive’ in some way and join our forebears in the realm of the dead.

Verse 9 shows Isaac and Ishmael came together to bury their father in the same plot as Abraham buried Sarah. Most of us have buried family members and friends; and, as it has come to pass, it seems more people have their remains stored on a shelf or scattered somewhere on earth. We are greatly influenced by culture; and like all important areas of life, the Bible speaks to whether or not we should be buried upon death. The culture says it doesn’t matter.

Many people have their loved ones cremated, and usually that is a financial decision (it’s cheaper) and/or for sentimental reasons (keeping their ashes on display or in a locket). Those may seem to be important reasons to those grieving, *but are they biblical ones?* Judeo-Christian

practice through the centuries has been the burial of a Christian loved one's remains. And those practices abide with the teaching of sacred Scripture.

Dear ones, we must remember that God cares for all of us, body *and* soul. How we treat the body shows how much we desire to honor God even in the disposal of our remains at death.

For sure, history bears this out. Wherever Christianity has spread, cremation ceased among believers. "According to Francis Schaeffer, the spread of Christianity in Europe can be established by studying the cemeteries; Romans burned their dead while Christians buried theirs. Christian burial was one further custom to accentuate the difference between believers and those around them." (*Burial or Cremation*, Donald Howard, 26-27)

In many biblical instances, the burning of the deceased was an act of judgment. (Howard, 17)

* Within a few days of leaving Egypt, the Lord's anger was kindled against those who began complaining and sowing dissension. "Fire from the Lord burned among them and consumed some." Only when Moses prayed to the Lord did the fire subside. (**Numbers 11:1-3**)

* After the revolt of Korah in **Numbers 16**, 250 men who had assembled against Moses and Aaron were devoured by fire.

* When Achan stole the items from Jericho which were under the divine ban, the Lord did not "turn from the fierceness of his anger" until Achan and his family had been stoned to death and their bodies burnt before being buried under a pile of rocks. (**Joshua 7:25-26**)

From a practical standpoint, the burning process is now so efficient that only about 20% of the body (mostly bone) survives as ash. The other 4/5ths disappears. Cremation doesn't give testimony to the future resurrection of the body for those who sleep in Jesus.

On the other hand, the Bible often pictures God's people being buried without burning. In the last chapter of Genesis, Joseph, who spent much of his life in Egypt away from the Promised Land, leaves instructions for his bones to be returned to Israel upon his death. He wanted to be buried in his homeland with his people.

After our Lord Jesus died, Joseph of Arimathea approached Pilate and asked permission to bury Jesus' body (**John 19:38**). That request was granted, and Joseph prepared Jesus' body for burial. A core Christian truth is the belief in the bodily resurrection of the dead. (Christian funeral directors ensure the dead are buried with their feet pointing to the east in the understanding that when Christ returns to earth, the dead in Christ will rise from the dead, and they face the east in the understanding He'll be visible in that direction).

In death, as in life, we should seek to glorify our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The body is God's creation; it is in the body that we knew and loved those whom we have laid to rest. It is in the body that they served him in life and it will be in a changed body that they shall be raised.

Friends, consider the message your funeral will send, and in Whom you trusted when your body possessed your soul in life. I am convinced that burial of my body is the best and biblical

option; when my family and friends are grieving over my simple casket after my death, may the sight of my lifeless body impress upon them the promise of God that I will be raised from that state and my changed body will be rejoined to my soul and forever they will go – body and soul – through eternity.

The last point in this passage is the **growth of Ishmael's seed**. This listing in verses 12-18 demonstrate that God came through on His promise to Ishmael back in **Genesis 16:10, 17:20** and **21:18**. God had promised to make of Ishmael a great nation and to give him many descendants. Like Jacob would, Ishmael had 12 sons who would be princes of 12 tribes. These tribes settled in northern Arabia; Ishmael prospered as the father of 12 Arab nations.

Interestingly, no mention is made of Ishmael's burial after he died at the age of 137. We have no way of knowing from Scripture whether or not Ishmael was a worshipper of God.

MP 1 – Abraham's Seed Grows;

MP 2 – Abraham's Life Ends;

MP 3 – Ishmael's Seed Grows.

Some time ago, I participated in a controlled burn with the fire department at a property in the country. The house was still filled with furniture and other belongings. All were intended to go up in flames.

As we participated in some training in the structure before it was burned, we found a sealed urn. The only identifying mark on the urn was the year 2007 stamped on it. We decided to take the urn from the structure and seek to find family or friends for proper care. It was a pitiful moment.

I close with God's Word from **Isaiah 46:3 & 4:**

“Listen to Me, O house of Jacob,
And all the remnant of the house of Israel,
Who have been upheld *by Me* from birth,
Who have been carried from the womb:
 ⁴Even to *your* old age, I *am* He,
And *even* to gray hairs I will carry *you!*
 I have made, and I will bear;
Even I will carry, and will deliver *you.*”