

ABRAHAM AND OUR LEGACY  
GENESIS 25:1-11

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Alfred grew up in Europe. Initially his parents were very poor. But his dad was a smart guy. He had skills as an inventor and engineer. The family moved to St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1842 when Alfred was about nine years old. His father began to experience success as a manufacturer of machine tools and munitions. He invented a machine that made possible the production of plywood.

So Alfred was able to get a good education. He was also a smart kid. He learned to speak Russian, English, French, German, and Swedish. Like his father, he demonstrated good ability in the technical sciences. He especially excelled in chemistry. He spent a year in the United States where he worked under the direction of the builder of the ironclad warship *Monitor*.

As an adult, Alfred lived in Germany, Paris, and Italy. He never married. His inventive genius resulted in 355 different patents. He was especially interested in nitroglycerin and related compounds. Alfred exhibited considerable business smarts. Through his patents and his involvement in the starting of some ninety factories, largely related to munitions production, he became rich.

According to some historians when Alfred's brother Ludvig died in 1888 his death was mistaken for that of Alfred. Several obituaries appeared in European newspapers announcing Alfred's passing. One French newspaper announced "**The merchant of death is dead.**" It went on to add that Alfred who "**...became rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever before died yesterday.**" (Wikipedia, Alfred Nobel) Alfred was appalled to learn that this was written about him. Was this the kind of legacy that he was going to leave to the world?

Leaving a positive legacy was an issue of concern for Abraham. We come today to the last message in our study of the life of Abraham. We have seen, I hope, that Abraham was not some mythical hero in the same category as Robin Hood or one of the Greek epic heroes. He was a real human being who had imperfections but who matured in his relationship with God to the point that he became a model of faith.

Originally Abraham and his relatives worshiped other gods. The God who is there graciously chose to reveal Himself to Abraham and to call Abraham to serve Him. (PROJECTOR ON--- HARAN MAP) This revelation and call originally came to Abraham when he was living in Ur near the mouth of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. God directed Abraham to leave this place and go far to the west to the land of Canaan. (CANAAN HARAN MAP) There was a stop in Haran, where he and his family lived for

several years. After Abraham's father Terah died, Abraham and family went south into Canaan.

Abraham's faith grew as he had a difficult experience in Egypt. He tried to pass Sarah off as his wife. Later he offered his nephew Lot the choice of the best land. (CITIES OF THE PLAIN) When northern invaders came down and took Lot captive along with residents of Sodom and Gomorrah and the other cities of the plain, Abraham attacked and defeated this northern alliance.

We have seen that the Lord changed Abraham's name later in life. He was originally named "Abram," which means "exalted father. But late in life God told him that he was now to be known as "Abraham," which means "father of a multitude." The Lord apparently wanted Abraham to have a more powerful witness to the community by virtue of a name change. Apparently it is OK to change names if a new name has a better witness to the surrounding community.

In the midst of these experiences there were lapses of faith. Twice Abraham tried to pass Sarah off as his sister, and he took Sarah's maidservant Hagar as a secondary wife apart from what God had told him to do. Still he learned from his failures and grew in faith to the point that he was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac, believing that God would raise him from the dead.

We have also looked at the life of William Carey (WILLIAM CAREY), the missionary to India, to find illustrations of a faithful Christian. This Englishman became known as the Father of Modern Missions, and he gave us the motto: "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God." (PROJECTOR OFF)

The fact that we are still today talking about the lives of these two men indicates that they have left believers with a positive legacy. Webster's Dictionary defines a legacy as "**anything handed down from an ancestor.**" It seems clear that Abraham and William Carey left their physical and spiritual descendants with a good legacy.

As we come to the last lesson today concerning Abraham, the question that I would like for us to consider is: What kind of legacy do we wish to leave to the generations that follow us? Abraham made preparations for the future prior to his passing. What lessons are there here for us about the legacy that we should leave for future generations?

I.

First, let's look at vv. 1-6 of Genesis #25 as we consider ABRAHAM'S DESCENDANTS. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. ABRAHAM'S DESCENDANTS) In v. 1 we read, "**Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah.**" We know very little about this woman other than who her children were and that she is called a "concubine" in v. 6. The term "concubine" has a mostly negative connotation in our world. In the Ancient Near East a concubine was a legal wife. She was united with a husband through marriage. The difference between a concubine and another wife was that the concubine had a secondary rank in the household. Perhaps she came from a lower socioeconomic

background. In this case Keturah was probably classified as a concubine because Sarah was the mother of Isaac, the child of promise.

Why did Abraham remarry? Martin Luther said that Abraham did it out of obedience to God. In #17 v. 4 God had told Abraham that he would be not only the father of a great nation but also that he would be the father of a multitude of nations. So Abraham may have seen it as his responsibility to have more kids. He was acting in faith in response to the revealed will of God. Luther may have been right in his analysis.

In vv. 2-4 the children and some of their descendants who resulted from this union are listed. The identities of some of the names are uncertain. The two children whose descendants are further described--- Jokshan and Midian--- probably were ancestors of more notable nations. We know the most about the Midianites, who are mentioned several times later in the Old Testament. Moses married a Midianite woman, and several times in the Old Testament the Israelites fought against the Midianites.

There is some question about when Abraham married Keturah. (ROMANS 4:19) In Roman #4 v. 19 the Apostle Paul wrote that **“...[Abraham] did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.”** Abraham before the birth of Isaac appeared to regard himself as incapable of having any more children.

Some have suggested on the basis of this verse that Abraham must have married Keturah while Sarah was still alive. That is possible. The impression that most of us have is that Abraham was a one woman man. He took Hagar as a secondary wife only as a result of Sarah's encouragement. The relationship between these two women did not work out very well. It seems unlikely to me that either Abraham or Sarah would have wanted to have a second wife around again. So perhaps Abraham married Keturah after Sarah died.

If that was the case, there are two ways to explain Romans 4:19 and the “deadness” of Abraham's body. It could be that the rejuvenation of Abraham required for the conception of Isaac continued on after his conception. It could also be that the deadness of Abraham's body was only in connection with Sarah and her seeming inability to conceive. It was Sarah who was infertile and not Abraham. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Verses 5 & 6 describe the arrangements that Abraham made concerning the future. He gave the bulk of his estate to Isaac. Verse 6 says that he gave gifts to the sons of his “concubines”--- plural. I take this to be a reference to the sons of Keturah and to Ishmael, the son of Hagar who also fell into the category of a concubine, or secondary wife.

Abraham probably loved these sons, and I suspect that he was generous with gifts of cattle and material goods. Isaac, though, was to be the one who would inherit the land

of Canaan, and Abraham understood that. He did not want God's revealed plan to be threatened. So he sent these sons to live to the east of Canaan.

## II.

Then in vv. 7-11 we have a description of ABRAHAM'S DEATH. (PROJECTOR ON--- ABRAHAM'S DEATH) Later in the chapter the births of Jacob and Esau to Isaac and Rebekah are described. Jacob and Esau were born when Isaac was 60 years old. Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born. Therefore Abraham was 160 when Jacob and Esau were born to Isaac. Abraham was around then for the first fifteen years of their lives. The author, however, desired to conclude the story of Abraham before moving on to a discussion of the lives of Abraham's children and grandchildren.

Verse 8 says that Abraham died in a state of contentment. It adds that "[he] was **gathered to his people.**" Initially we might take that to mean that he was buried with his ancestors. But the next verses tell us that he was buried in the cave of Machpelah. The only relative buried there was Sarah his wife. So "gathered to his people" must mean something else. The implication is that Abraham's people are somewhere else and that Abraham joins them after death. This points to an early understanding that there was life after death.

Ishmael joins Isaac in burying their father in the cave of Machpelah (HEBRON TOMB), which is known and recognized to this day. Two thousand years ago Herod the Great built this fortress around the site. It is in Hebron to the south of Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

Despite being sent away by Abraham Ishmael still has love and an attachment to his father. Ishmael joins together with his half brother Isaac to perform this solemn task. (PROJECTOR OFF)

In v. 11 two things are noted about Isaac. First, God blessed him. This is evidence that the Lord's promise of blessing and of a great nation and of possession of the land have passed to Isaac. Second, Isaac lived at Beer-lahai-roi. (BEER-LAHAI-ROI) The exact location of that place is uncertain. It was somewhere to the southwest of Beersheba. God had appeared to Hagar at that well or oasis. She had named it "the well of the Living One who sees me." Last week we saw in #24 that Isaac was probably praying there for a wife shortly before Rebekah came. Now we are told that Isaac settled down there. Later in this chapter it is revealed that Isaac would pray for Rebekah to be able to bear children. That prayer would also be made and answered at Beer-lahai-roi--- the well of the Living One who sees me.

## III.

We come then to Roman numeral III in the outline as we consider THE LEGACY. (III. THE LEGACY) Abraham left the next generation a legacy. Part of that legacy was material; part of it was spiritual. We believers also ought to be concerned about the legacy that we leave to future generations

A.

The starting point, it seems to me, in consideration of leaving a worthwhile legacy to future generations comes with realizing THE BREVITY OF OUR EARTHLY LIVES. (III. A. THE BREVITY OF OUR EARTHLY LIVES) We are not going to be around in this earthly life forever. When special promises were first given by the Lord to Abraham, I suspect that he hoped to see the fulfillment of many of them in his lifetime. I imagine that he hoped to have a lot of kids and that he hoped to begin to take control of the land of Canaan. It did not happen. As he neared the end of his life, it became clear to him that these promises would not be fulfilled in his lifetime.

Most of us have things that we would like to see and do and accomplish in this lifetime. Many of us would like to accomplish things for the Lord that have lasting significance. Probably we will not be able to accomplish all of those things. It is important for us to realize that our earthly lives are brief. They end, sometimes, sooner than we expect. Such was the case with Malcolm Forbes, whom I described last Sunday.

B.

Secondly, we need to realize THE VALUE OF A GOOD LEGACY. (III. A. B. THE VALUE OF A GOOD LEGACY) From one perspective Abraham never accomplished all that much. He was not a writer or an artist or a musician or a king. He won one battle, but he is hardly remembered as a great military man. He was a tribal leader, but he could hardly be remembered as a great political leader. The only land that he ever owned was a burial plot.

Yet one Christian writer by the name of F. B. Meyer points out, **“No human name can vie with Abraham’s for the widespread reverence which it has evoked among all races and throughout all time.”** The Jews regard him as the father of their faith. Paul, James, and the author of Hebrews all commended him. Abraham was the only Old Testament saint canonized by the medieval church. In Islam he is second in importance only to Mohammed.

The reason for this respect is that Abraham left a legacy as a man of God. We remember him because of his character. That character was rooted in his faith in God.

William Carey also left a good legacy. We know him today as the Father of Modern Missions. That legacy is also rooted in a faith in God. It does include specific achievements. It includes a book that describes the church’s responsibility to foreign missions. It includes translation of the Bible into several languages, the founding of several schools, the establishment of missions stations in India, Burma, and Bhutan, the stopping of infanticide and widow burning in parts of India, and the introduction of the gospel in the Indian culture by one who valued the positive aspects of that culture.

One missions historian (Ruth Tucker) writes, **“More than any other individual in modern history, he stirred the imagination of the Christian world and showed by**

**his own humble example what could and should be done to bring a lost world to Christ.”**

William Carey initially came to Calcutta, now called Kolkata (KOLKATA MAP), in eastern India. He spent much of his ministry in a city nearby called Serampore, which was originally a Danish colony. There Carey established a missions station and built a printing press. He also was involved in founding Serampore University, the first degree granting institution in all of Asia.

After Carey’s death his Christian influence expanded outward from this part of India. One place where it especially took root was in the far northeastern Indian state of Nagaland. (NAGALAND) There are about two million people in this state. Over 90% of them identify themselves as Christians. Sixty per cent of them happen to call themselves Baptists.

About sixteen or seventeen years ago the church was looking for a youth pastor, and one of the first resumes that we received for our youth pastor position was from a fellow from Nagaland. Because their state was already evangelized, his church wanted to send him out to the United States. This fellow had a number of college degrees, including a Masters Degree from Serampore University. In his resume this fellow declared: **“My ministerial motto is ‘Attempt great things for God; expect great things from God.’”** William Carey’s legacy has clearly lived on.

C.

Consider then THE POSSIBILITIES FOR OUR LEGACY. (I. A. B. C. THE POSSIBILITIES FOR OUR LEGACY) What can we do to ensure that we leave behind a good legacy? Abraham took specific steps to make sure that he left behind a good legacy. He gave gifts to his children, and he sent all but Isaac away to the east because he wanted to make sure that God’s program of special blessing would be carried on through Isaac. What is it that we can do to leave a positive legacy? In a minute I would like to give you an opportunity to suggest ideas.

There are two general areas that come to my mind. The first is our example of living the Christian faith. The example of our lives has value as a legacy. It has value to our children, to new believers, and to all who observe our lives.

Actions do speak louder than words. People, including children, notice the priority that we place on prayer and Bible study and Christian activities and service to others. They watch how we spend our money. They examine our integrity. They look for evidence of a living faith. A godly example is a good legacy.

The second area which comes to my mind is how raising kids and grandchildren impacts our legacy. The upbringing that we have given our children and grandchildren is a vital part of the legacy that we leave to them. In my way of thinking a balance of love and discipline are the two most essential elements to that training process.

Psychiatrist Scott Peck in *The Road Less Traveled* says, “...**children who are loved and cared for with relative consistency throughout childhood enter adulthood with a deepseated feeling that they are lovable and valuable and therefore will be loved and cared for as long as they remain true to themselves.**” Consistent love shown to our children will develop in them a proper self-esteem. It will also mean that usually they will accept our values as their own. So it is that the Bible teaches us to love our children.

Our friend Alfred didn't have children. He didn't identify as a Christian. Some historians claim that he was affected by the premature obituaries printed about him which called him “the merchant of death.” Alfred was responsible for the development of a particular explosive with which we have some familiarity. It was dynamite. (ALFRED NOBEL) Alfred Nobel had 355 patents and was involved in establishing a number of factories. He ended up with a significant fortune. He decided that he wanted to leave a positive legacy. So he set aside in his will the bulk of his estate to go toward annual prizes, the most famous of which is the Nobel Peace Prize. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Contemporary History* it is “**the most prestigious prize in the world.**” The Norwegian Nobel Committee gives out over a million dollars for the prize winner each year. Such is the positive legacy which Alfred Nobel has left to the world. (PROJECTOR OFF)

What are other ways in which we can leave a positive legacy to future generations? Perhaps you have been influenced positively by some kind of legacy that someone has left you--- a coach, a parent, a grandparent, a teacher. Now is an opportunity that you have to share a story or thoughts that you might have about leaving a positive legacy.

...

The legacy which Abraham has left us is a legacy of faith. Abraham was a model of faith. So let me close with the words of the New Testament writer of Hebrews: “**By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. 11 By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.**” (Hebrews 11:8-12)

“**By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, 18 of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” 19 He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.**” Thus Isaac became a type, a forerunner who was to find completion in the death and resurrection of Jesus.