

Family Life

BRACE YOURSELVES

Genesis 25:19-34 Lessons from Isaac, Rebekah, Esau and Jacob

Genesis 25:19-34 ¹⁹ *This is the account of the family line of Abraham's son Isaac. Abraham became the father of Isaac, and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram and sister of Laban the Aramean.*

FAMILY DRAMA IS COMING



Exodus 3:15 (NIV) ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' "This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation."

"The lives of Abraham and Jacob stand out prominently in the (Genesis) record. Of Isaac much less is said. His life was practically devoid of striking incident, his character was quiet and passive, and except as a link in the chain of fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise, he is of no special importance in the patriarchal history."

Q Agree or Disagree? What do we know of Isaac or what he did? How many of us are Isaacs in the story of God's tapestry?

²¹ Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was childless. The Lord answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant.

Isaac was experiencing a great disappointment by this time. It had been 20 years since he first saw God bring Rebekah to be his wife and until now they have had no children. Year after year there had been no clear fulfilment of the Divine promise that was given to his father Abraham, and to him. This would have certainly been a trial and a testing of Isaac's faith. The training of faith and the development of character were in play. Perhaps God delayed the fulfilment of His word in order that all human hope which rested on natural powers should be given away, and God's action might be made known clearly. To show that the promise to Abraham was by grace and not by nature.

During this trial and tribulation Isaac did the very best thing possible; he took it to the Lord in prayer.

Isaac prayed for his wife and for having his future heirs. One should not forget though that Isaac's highly effectual prayer occurred somewhere within a 20-year timeframe. One could well imagine years of unanswered prayers before Rebecca finally conceived. She was barren for 20 years. Twenty years of failure, shame, and frustration.

Q Why does God wait sometimes to answer our prayers?

Perhaps He may decide to withhold his answer for a while in order to deepen our insight into what we really need. Or to broaden our appreciation for his answer. Or to allow us to mature so we can use the gift/answer more wisely.

22The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the Lord. The Lord said to her,

***"Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you will be separated;
one people will be stronger than the other,
and the older will serve the younger."***

Isaac's prayers were answered. Rebekah's struggles now began. The pregnancy became difficult and she experienced distress and bewilderment. Like her husband, she did the very best thing. She turned to God and inquired of the Lord.

Here was Rebekah's answer to her prayer: 1) the two sons to be born will be the founders of two separate nations; 2) they would be of unequal strength; 3) the one born second would be over the firstborn.

"How often it has occurred since that day that God's children have received answers from Him very different from what they expected and have experienced perplexity as to the meaning of the Divine discipline! Sometimes in the pathway of duty, when the soul is sincerely conscious of uprightness and whole-hearted consecration to God, there is trouble, trial, difficulty and anxiety. A man believes he has been right in following a certain pathway, only to find himself surrounded by almost overwhelming anxieties and difficulties. The forces of evil seem more active than ever, and he begins to wonder whether he was right, after all, in doing what he has done. Like Rebekah, he must again resort to God and seek out the Divine will."

Q Have you seen this happen in your life or the lives around you who are trying to do God's will?

Rebekah's trouble had nothing to do with her individually but was part of God's greater plan which was to be worked out for His own glory.

24 When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them. 27 The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was content to stay at home among the tents. Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

The sons were different in appearance. They were different in their pursuits. They were different in their paternal affection bestowed upon them. God seemed to destine two brothers to live a life of conflict, and moreover that the older (stronger) brother will be subordinate to the younger (weaker) brother.

Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the open country. His father loved him because of his own taste for wild game. Thus Esau's nature and occupation were favored by Isaac because of the satisfaction of his palate. Both Isaac and Esau made choices because of this.

Jacob was loved by Rebekah, partly because of the known prophecy which she probably mentioned often. This divine revelation may explain why Rebecca would later side with Jacob; the one who before his birth already had been chosen by God. He was a quiet man, staying among the tents. But ironically Jacob was the craftier hunter, baiting his trap for the hungry "animal."

²⁹ Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom.)

Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright." "Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?" But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright.

Q If Jacob knew what God had told Rebekah about the younger serving the older, why go through all the deception and trickery to obtain the birthright and God's promise?

Q Is this a classic collision of God's will and man's choice?

Q What lessons can we learn from Jacob and Esau's interactions?

Esau was the oldest son of Isaac and, according to law and custom, was in line to inherit a double portion of Isaac's possessions, including the covenant promise of God. This was his birthright: his right by birth.

But one day after a hunting trip Esau came home hungry. Jacob was boiling a stew of lentils, and Esau asked for some. Seeing his chance, and knowing his brother well, Jacob demanded Esau's birthright in return. The Bible tells us that Esau "despised" his birthright and swore it to Jacob as the price of the pottage.

What a picture! Esau weighed the promise of God's continual presence and blessing against a bowl of soup—and valued the soup more highly. What a revelation of Esau's character. He was a man who valued the present rather than the future, the material rather than the invisible. The momentary satisfaction of physical desires seemed more important to him than the approval of God. The body, not the spirit, dominated his scale of values.

I can look at Esau's act and be amazed by it. But what I need to realize is that this act of selling the birthright was an action that is in character, not out of character. It was the result of a long process of character formation, a long history of choice after choice which shaped Esau's personality.

Right now, I may look at Esau with wonder and say, "I'd never do that." Instead I ought to look at the action as an expression of character, and wonder: In what direction are my daily choices leading me? Do I so value my present experiences that I fail to discipline myself to wait when waiting is best? Is God high enough on my priority list to cause me to spend time with Him, or do other things push Him out of my thoughts?

I can shake my head in wonder at Esau, but I had better realize that unless I make a daily habit of rejecting Esau's values, I might someday be faced with a similar choice—and make the wrong one!

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Agree or Disagree?

How do our daily choices and decisions make up the character/personality of who we are?

Some lessons in the story of Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Esau.

In times of difficulty or perplexity let us wait and pray. Isaac and Rebekah experienced the real difficulty of not knowing how God's will and purpose were to be fulfilled. They did the best thing; they handed their troubles over to the Lord and prayed.

In the face of deep problems of life, it is best to trust and pray. Rebekah could not understand the state of her bareness and then difficult pregnancy. Even after God telling her what was to come it would seem impossible for her to fully comprehend. Our greatest wisdom in all such circumstances is found in simple trust and earnest prayer. Isaiah 55:8 **For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. God's ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts.**

You don't have to take Jacob's devious road to blessing. Instead, always trust God and commit yourself to do the right thing.

Truth, not lies, will serve you far better. God's Plan will still be done, and you'll be able to live in harmony with those around you.

Commit your way to God, confident that as you daily do His will, His good purposes will be performed. Know that God intends good for us. How much better to simply obey His will and receive the good without all the pain that actions like those of Jacob bring.

We need to pray for our spouses.

We need to pray for our children.

We need to continue to develop our character so we can properly fulfill our role in God's Plan.