

ISAAC AND REBEKAH'S FAMILY

Genesis 25:19-34

Lesson 12a

Key Verse: 25:23

"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.'"

The first part of chapter 25 records the conclusion of Abraham's life. After Sarah's death nothing of spiritual significance happened in Abraham's personal life. Abraham missed his wife so much that he took another wife. But he was careful to prevent the children of Keturah from becoming a threat to Isaac. Of the children of this union, Midian is worth noting, because he became the ancestor of the Midianites.

Abraham died at the age of 175. His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah where Sarah was buried. The writer of Genesis concludes the history of Ishmael with a short genealogy, "the account of Abraham's son Ishmael ..." Then he turns to the account of Abraham's son Isaac. This account begins with a narrative--not a genealogy.

1. Isaac and Rebekah pray (19-23)

Isaac grew up knowing and trusting the Lord. He was fully aware of what was happening when his father took him to Mount Moriah and offered him to God. He had a quiet and gentle nature, and did not fight for his own rights--he was a man of great patience, a man who waited on God. God gave him Rebekah, who comforted him after the death of his mother. She was an able and active woman who loved Isaac and cooked delicious food for him (27:9). She was also a woman of faith. When she discerned the will and direction of God, she could take decisive action. Her decision to leave her family and go to an unknown country to marry a man she had never seen was one such decision of faith.

Isaac's family had a problem similar to that of Abraham and Sarah. Rebekah was barren. But Isaac did not even consider taking a concubine. He simply prayed and waited on God. He had learned a great spiritual lesson first hand: The Lord will Provide.

Abraham had waited only 10 years before taking Hagar and giving birth to Ishmael. Isaac waited and prayed for his wife for 20 years. How many families could be spared the tragedy of divorce or the sorrow of becoming a battlefield of frustrated expectations if men could pray for their wives instead of trying to use some human method to solve their family problems. Isaac's patient faith was rewarded. Rebekah conceived twin sons.

Rebekah did not know that she was carrying twins. Her twin boys were

so different in character that they fought and struggled in the womb even before birth. Rebekah didn't know why she was having so much trouble in her pregnancy. She couldn't go to a doctor or have an ultra sound check-up--so she inquired of the Lord. She prayed. She could have complained to Isaac and blamed him for her discomfort; she could have become fearful and sought Isaac's sympathy. But she had personal faith in God. She did not depend on weak Isaac for help or comfort--she went to the Lord in prayer.

God blessed Rebekah's prayerful faith. He revealed to her his special plan and purpose for her family. Especially, he revealed to her that the younger twin would be the man whom God would bless and use. "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.'" This prophecy concerned not only the two boys in her womb; it also concerned God's future history--his redemptive plan to bless the world through the descendants of Abraham and Isaac. Rebekah remembered this promise of God.

2. Jacob and Esau (24-34)

The two sons of Isaac and Rebekah were as different as day and night. First, they were different in appearance: Jacob was smooth and Esau was red and hairy. Second, they were different in character: Esau was a sportsman. He liked to hunt and fish and play around with women;

Jacob was a quiet man who liked to stay at home and hang around his mother in the kitchen.

But Jacob was born with ambition. He entered the world grasping his brother's heel, as if to pull him back and get there first. Jacob was a man of struggle. His struggle began in the womb. He struggled with his twin brother to come out first, and he lost. So he struggled for honor. He wanted honor of being the firstborn. He didn't like being number 2. Once, he was in the kitchen cooking red bean stew when Esau came in from the open country, famished. Esau asked him for some stew. Jacob agreed to give him some in exchange for his birthright as the eldest son. Esau readily agreed--"you can't eat a birthright!" So Esau "swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob." Then Jacob gave Esau some stew. He ate and drank, then got up and left.

In this way, Jacob achieved the honor of having the birthright of the firstborn. Later, he would struggle for love, then he would struggle for wealth, and finally, he would struggle with God. He was definitely not a dead fish, drifting downstream with the flow! He was alive, and he was swimming against the current.

Isaac loved his manly, happy-go-lucky eldest son. He enjoyed the wild game he brought home. But Rebekah loved Jacob, partly because he stayed at home and helped around the house--but mostly because she remembered God's revelation to her concerning these two sons. She knew

that the younger son was the son whom God wanted to bless and use as the covenant son.

The event in verses 20-34 gives a clue as to why God chose Jacob and did not choose Esau. The writer of Genesis comments, "So Esau despised his birthright." Esau lived on a physical level; he could see no practical value in his birthright. He was a pragmatist. Such a man does not know what it means to be faithful. He lives by his feelings and acts according to the demands and needs of the moment. He could not be entrusted with the covenant, for God's covenant rests on God's promises. God's covenant people must know that God is faithful and they must be faithful. At this point, Jacob was not a spiritual man, either. But Jacob had a sense of honor. He wanted to be first, not second. He knew that the covenant blessing was important, even though he didn't fully understand why. He was not a pragmatist. He knew his brother's weakness and perhaps he took unfair advantage of him. But the writer of Genesis puts the blame on Esau, who despised his birthright. Hebrews (12:16) says that he was a godless and immoral man. God cannot bless such men.

Jacob could have asked Esau for many other things in exchange for the bowl of stew, but he asked for the thing that was most important from God's point of view. The birthright carried with it the covenant blessing and promises. The covenant bearer was the man who would stand in God's redemptive history. Jacob became that man.

May God restore a sense of honor in the young men of our times, and may he teach young people the value of spiritual things. So many people are eager to get clothes and food and cars and stereos and houses. May God raise up men and women who want God's blessing above all else.