

"Abraham and Isaac – God Repeats His Promise"
Genesis 23:1-26:35
Chuck Mihlbauer

In chapter 23, we find the death and burial of Sarah recorded. The messages from these verses are not so much about coping with the death of a loved one, or how to engage in business practices, as it is about where Sarah was buried. It took great faith from Abraham to bury her in a foreign land, yet that was the land that God had promised. The land of Canaan, or as we know it, the Promised Land was going to play a major role in the future events within the history of the Jewish people. What was important for Abraham, but equally important for us today is the faith in God's promises for the future. Yet there is no running around the fact that Abraham had just lost his wife.

**It was a time of farewells:
the sadness of separation,
the sting of sorrow,
the strength of steadfastness.**

**It was a time of faithfulness; where Abraham
declares his identity, and
demonstrates his integrity.**

**It was a time of faith in:
in the promises of God,
in the plan of God,
in the power of God.**

In this way Abraham serves as an example to Christians today who have also been given very great and precious promises that we must wait to inherit.

The main lesson in this text can be summarized as follows: God's promises to us are primarily future realities.

Chapter 24 begins, "Abraham was now old and well advanced in years, and the Lord had blessed him in every way." (NIV) Notice that Abraham understood the passing of his generation and the coming of a new generation. This is what we experience as we look back and see that perhaps our grandparents have passed away, or our parents have passed away, and maybe we're the senior generation.

Abraham was now concentrating on the Lord's blessings through a lifetime of walking by faith. These circumstances in God's providence, that included the burial of his wife, brought Abraham to the realization that the days of his generation were fast coming to a close, and he was concerned about his offspring.

Isn't that true of you and me? As we become older and realize that we are the generation passing on and our children are coming up, do we not have concerns for our offspring? What will be their future and their end, because we see how fast one generation comes and another one goes. We see that concern for the future in the charge Abraham gave to his servant Eliezer concerning his son, Isaac. Vs. 3 "I want you to swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living." (NIV) Why? Because he didn't want to see his son go back into idol worship from which the Lord had delivered him. We will certainly read soon enough that the Canaanites were going to be a major enemy for some time to come.

What is of more grave concern for aging godly parents than to see that their children do not enter spiritual poverty or get settled into the things of this world and die spiritually bankrupt. Abraham didn't want to see that holy seed polluted, or see Isaac fall into the snare that he fell into when he married the Egyptian, Hagar. The seed of Hagar wouldn't gender the true seed, the Messiah. Instead, the seed of the bond woman had to be cast out, and he understood that. (Of special note: Ishmael and the children of Abraham through his concubine were sent off to the East. This was the beginning of the Arabian people, who would be enemies of Israel to this day). Knowing the misery that union brought into his life, now Abraham's concern was that Isaac would not fall into the same trap. Abraham understood the principle that we must interact with the people of this world in the things of this life, while we are still to live separate onto the Lord.

As Eliezer prepared for the journey and expressed his concern for his success, Abraham assured him of God's faithfulness and that an angel would go before him and prepare the heart of his son's bride. Abraham wasn't concerned about riches, honor, or beauty in the flesh, but only that the bride was from the family of God.

Eliezer proceeded with presents, but he didn't proceed presumptuously! We must be so careful that even though we may believe circumstances are all according to God's will, we still do nothing without prayer. Eliezer came to the well and prayed. Even though God knows what we have need of, **prayer is so necessary to generate expectancy, to prepare our hearts to receive God's blessing.** Prayer expresses our faith that God will do what He has promised. We pray expectantly knowing that God is pleased when we ask Him in a childlike way for help in a time of need. He is faithful to His Word and to His promises. Daily He supplies all our needs.

Eliezer is a beautiful example – his mission was to find a wife for Isaac and God answered prayer. Eliezer not only came to the Lord in his need, **but he returned to the Lord with gratitude.**

The Lord is not only glorified in answering our prayer in a time of need, but the Lord is also glorified when we return back to the Lord with gratitude. The Lord was very

pleased not only in the fact that Eliezer laid his need before Him, but that he confessed the wonder of the answer to that prayer before the household of Rebekah.

When it comes to the marriage union, the bride also makes herself ready. In making herself ready, she doesn't do it by having a big party and a farewell to her old friends; she does it by way of submission. This is so important.

As Isaac was out meditating in the field, he rejoiced to see the camels coming, and the bride making ready. Preparing for marriage is the **work of sanctification**, the **work of submission** to the will of the bridegroom. It is submission to the will of God. It is the **work of grace**, working in the heart to bring us into subjection to the Spirit of Christ.

Genesis 25 moves us ahead 20 years. Abraham remarried and had more sons giving them gifts before his death and then leaving his full inheritance to Isaac. The life of Abraham teaches the electing love of God and the symbolic work of regeneration. In the deadness of Sarah's womb, we saw the symbol of the quickening of the dead through the conception of Isaac.

The barrenness of Rebekah's womb points us to the spiritually dead state of the church by nature. We see the similarity between the dead womb of Sarah and the barrenness of Rebekah's womb. Spiritually, the Church is totally barren outside of the work of grace. In GEN 25:21, we read, "Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant." (NIV) This is a very beautiful illustration of grace in the Church.

We notice in our own children that, by nature, there is such spiritual barrenness. By nature, we need the quickening of the Spirit, that conception of the Holy Spirit, the work of regeneration before we'll see any spiritual life in our children or any of our loved ones. Before there is any work of regeneration in any heart, there needs to be the quickening of the Spirit. As Isaac prayed for his offspring, we have Christ as our intercessor. The barrenness of His church is perpetual, but the Lord hears the prayers and intercession of Christ and His people and grants fruit. It is the quickening of the Holy Spirit that begins the new spiritual life, and that leads to a new birth. Many people say they were converted at such and such a time. I like to ask, "When did the Holy Spirit quicken? When did we see the first signs of the work of grace in the heart?" It leads from there to the new birth.

In Genesis 25:22 we read, "The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me? So she went to inquire of the LORD." There was conception followed by a struggle. A spiritual warfare began.

When the work of regeneration begins, there's a struggle between the power of the Spirit and the power of sin. That internal struggle that begins with conception only

intensifies until there is deliverance. When a woman conceives, as that conception matures, it turns into travail. When it becomes true travail, there must be deliverance, or there will be death. It comes to a life and death struggle, and in that struggle, we have birth.

This is true spiritually. When the Holy Spirit begins His work of quickening in the heart, that struggle against the power of sin begins and intensifies until it turns into spiritual travail. It comes to the point that there must be deliverance, and the Lord delivers. When the deliverance comes, the child is born. There's been a new birth, a deliverance from the power of sin, but even then, there is a spiritual warfare throughout the entire Christian life.

Scripture clearly teaches that these two people, Jacob and Esau, are types of two totally different classes of people. Not only does it symbolize spiritual warfare, but we want to understand what the Lord means when He says that He "hates Esau and loves Jacob." Both Jacob and Esau were brought up by the same parents. They were both witnesses of the times of deliverance that God had given Abraham and I'm sure we needn't question that Isaac had trained his children well and brought them up in the nurture of the Lord.

Both Jacob and Esau had, we'll say, a godly upbringing. The one had the work of grace in his heart, and the other did not. So how was the difference between the two manifested? Esau is the type and symbol of the old man of sin against which every Christian has to struggle. Every time we talk about Esau, we are talking about that old nature. We read that Esau had much remorse. **What does it mean to repent? You and I can have much remorse and never know repentance.** Esau had much remorse because it cost him his right to the temporal blessings, but there is no record that he had remorse over his sin against God or the loss of the spiritual blessings. Notice in HEB 12:16 - 17: "See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears." (NIV) Esau had pleaded with Isaac to reverse the blessing, which he had given to Jacob, and give it back to him. In other words, Esau wanted Isaac to repent. He didn't seek repentance for himself. He wasn't a person who had remorse over having sinned. He had no remorse over having sold his birthright because he had profaned the Word of God and despised his birthright. That wasn't his source of sorrow . . . his source of sorrow was that his brother got the blessing. He was grieving over the consequences of his sin, not over the sin itself. He had no sorrow over having offended God. His sorrow was strictly over the consequences of his sin. It was a legal repentance. The old nature is not motivated by the desire to serve the Lord out of love, but out of pride and lust. Esau symbolizes the old nature within our hearts.

Desire verses Love: Desire devours, but love cares for. The true church has suffered much more at the hand of the broad road of the Esau church than from those who make no profession of God. Those who make absolutely no profession of God are not the ones who persecute Jacob. It is Esau because he sees the difference, but he is not willing to make the sacrifice or humble himself. Therefore, the testimony, the salt of the earth, the light of the world becomes a condemnation to Esau because his wickedness reveals itself in what he sees in Jacob.

Jacob by nature was no better than Esau. The Lord didn't love Jacob because he was better than Esau. The name *Jacob* means trickster, liar, cheat, or supplanter. See this in GEN 27:36, which is speaking of Esau as he was pleading with Isaac: ". . . Isn't he rightly named Jacob? He has deceived me these two times: He took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing." In other words, Jacob was a conniver and a manipulator. But . . . God saw the heart. Esau was "godless" but Jacob, faults notwithstanding, had a heart for God.

Although Isaac lived the longest of the four great patriarchs of Genesis, yet, the least is recorded about his life. There are twelve chapters devoted to the biography of Abraham with a similar number given to the life stories of Jacob and of Joseph. Except for a few brief mentions before and after, the history of Isaac is recorded in one chapter. There are brief mentions of his name in conjunction with the lives of Abraham and Jacob, but as far as being devoted to the life of Isaac, we have only the one chapter.

Isaac, became the heir, not only of all that Abraham had in a literal sense, but also in a spiritual sense. In GEN 17:19, we read, "And God said, Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him." (NIV) Isaac had the promise but now he had to go through the trials of faith to accomplish that promise. It's good for us to remember what Paul wrote in Romans 8:17, ""...the heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ," must also "...suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." If you and I are going to be glorified together with Christ, we are also going to suffer with Him. In this lifetime is where the Lord separates the sheep from the goats. He does this by bringing trials of faith. Under these fiery trials, are we going to serve the Lord or are we going to serve self? Are we going to desert the things of the Lord, or are we going to walk in the ways of the Lord, which He has ordained, even in the face of our fiery trials?

Isaac's trail is recounted in Genesis 26:1, "Now there was a famine in the land – beside the earlier famine of Abraham's time – and Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines in Gerar." The very first thing recorded in the life of Isaac is a trial. As the children of Abraham, we will find, as we enter our life's journey, many riddles that only the Lord can answer. You and I will learn as we go through life that the Lord places these riddles into our life to bring us into dependency upon the Lord. When you and I

can solve our riddles ourselves, we are likened unto the church of Esau, who builds in its own strength.

Isaac received the blessed assurance of the Holy Spirit in his own heart, **that "in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."** Isaac received it personally for his own soul in a time of trial. You and I may be able to talk of the blessings that **our fathers** have received. Notwithstanding all Abraham's slips and falls, all his ventures without prayer, all his foolishness, and all his human reasoning, we see that obedience was the basis for all God's blessings. This is something that you and I need to learn and learn well. If we are going to learn to live "by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD," we must learn that we need to seek obedience. The Lord wants our hearts reconciled unto God, and it is obedience wherein the Lord is so pleased. Genesis 26:5 "**because** Abraham **obeyed** me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws" – note the honor that God places upon obedience.

As the saying goes, "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree." Isaac repeated what he saw Abraham doing – he lied to Abimelech about Rebekah being his sister, yet before it went too far, God showed Abimelech the truth and Isaac moved out of the land. In verse 25 Isaac built an altar and called on the name of the Lord. How often we're saved from our folly if we have a heart for God.

So, what can we learn from this week's lesson? We need to keep heading toward that city that captured the hearts of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. One day we will take our last step here and set foot on the shores of true home. Until then:

Keep looking to Him for your **Provisions**.
Keep trusting Him through all the **Problems**, and
Keep thanking Him for all the **Privileges** you enjoy as His child.

God Bless.