

The Birthright 8-12-07

Genesis 25:19-34

In our journey through Genesis, we have come to a focus on the life of Isaac. Though we have been studying him as a youth, the text now gives us a clue that the focus has shifted from Abraham to Isaac in the words, "this is the account of", which in Hebrew is the word *toledot*. There are ten in the book of Genesis, five before the flood and five in the patriarchal section. From the account of each of the characters in Genesis, we should be learning spiritual lessons to live by. Though they are characters from the distant past, the heart of man remains the same today. We face the same struggles and challenges that they faced. We have the same weaknesses. If we do not learn from their failures, we are likely to end up repeating their mistakes.

Our Scripture portion today begins with a brief review of Isaac up to this point. He is the promised son of Abraham. We have seen the miraculous birth that was the result of faith. We know this man is the heir of the promises to Abraham. (Genesis 17:21) He is the lineage of the promise given to Eve. That promise stated that a male heir would crush the authority of the serpent. (Genesis 3:15) Now the hope of the world lies with this one man and his heirs.

Two weeks ago we saw the providence of God at work as the servant of Abraham went to get a wife for Isaac. We saw the will of man and the sovereignty of God intersect in ways we cannot comprehend to cause Rebekah to become Isaac's wife. Now there is hope for the lineage to continue and the promises of God to be fulfilled. She was a strong woman and had the blessing of fruitfulness pronounced over her by her family. (Genesis 24:60) But then we learn that Rebekah has the same challenge that Sarah had. She was barren. To some, it would appear that there is a spiritual battle that is manifest in the physical, attempting to keep the line of promise from being born. But another way to see this inability is that flesh and blood cannot bring to pass the promises of God. It must be the miraculous work of God. (John 15:5)

There is an important lesson for us here in how to deal with things beyond our control. For twenty years Isaac and Rebekah tried to have children. We don't see Isaac coming against the "spirit of bareness" or rebuking Rebekah for her lack of faith. He took his concern to the LORD. The LORD is the One who can deal with our problems, whether the source is physical, spiritual, emotional, or whatever. He is LORD of all. (1Peter 5:7) *21 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.* He took it to the LORD in prayer, and the LORD answered because it was His will to do so. Sometimes God is just waiting for us to ask. (Matthew 7:7)

In the last few decades there have been numerous books written on spiritual mapping and identifying the names of spiritual powers. I'm not sure where the authors are coming up with these ideas, because I don't see Jesus or the Apostles teaching or employing those methods. Perhaps the authors were directed to do so by the Holy Spirit. I just don't see it in Scripture. The Biblical characters took their situations to the LORD in prayer and trusted that the LORD would have His way. In fact, Jude warns us

Commented [notes1]: 21 But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year."

Commented [notes2]: 15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

Commented [notes3]: 60 And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, "Our sister, may you increase to thousands upon thousands; may your offspring possess the gates of their enemies."

Commented [notes4]: 5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

Commented [notes5]: 7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Commented [notes6]: 7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."

that even angels don't confront the devil. Angels pray for the LORD to rebuke him. (Jude 1:9)

A few weeks ago I was talking with a brother in the LORD and he told me that a young woman had a revelation of the name of the oppressing spirit over Sedona. It was strange because the day before another person from the same group told me it was a different spirit. I suppose it could be both, but it really doesn't make any sense to me. Have we not been given authority over the enemy through the name of Jesus? (Luke 10:19-20) Do people have free will yield to or resist any influence or don't they? The problem in any city is not the oppression of a demonic spirit; it is the wicked heart of man. If we will call out to God, we can tap into a power that is greater than any evil spiritual power in the heavenly realm. (1John 4:4) Remember, we are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms at the right hand of God Almighty. (Ephesians 2:6) That is a place of power. You ask, but what about the unsaved, can't the demonic spirits be hindering them? If angels are sent to assist those who will be heirs of salvation (Hebrews 1:14), those angels can deal with any spiritual power that is holding them back.

Some argue that we must be attacking spiritual forces because Ephesians 6 tells us that is where the fight really is. (Ephesians 6:12) But Ephesians 6 doesn't tell us to find out their name and map their backbone. It tells us to put on the armor of God and pray. (Ephesians 6:18) This, the clearest of all spiritual warfare passages, doesn't tell us to pray against spirits, but to pray for individuals. If you know of anywhere in Scripture that a person was praying against a spiritual power over a city, please instruct me. In fact, the only place I know of where a power over an area is mentioned is in Daniel. Daniel was not praying against the Prince of Persia (Daniel 10:12,13), which I presume is a demonic power, but the angel that was bringing the answer to his prayer had to deal with the resistance of that spiritual being.

David prayed, "My heart is not proud, O LORD, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me." Psalm 131:1 (NIV) When it comes to spiritual beings, we should simply employ Jude's reference of the angel confronting the devil with, "The Lord rebuke you." I have wonderful fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ who disagree on this point and I would not think it necessary to argue over this issue. Whatever our stand is on this point, we should base it on God's word. The main message here is that Isaac brought the burden of his heart to the Lord in prayer. That is where we need to take our burdens.

Isaac prayed for his wife to conceive. That was a prayer in line with God's will. His descendants were going to inherit the Promised Land, and One of them would crush the Serpent's head and bless the world. If we pray anything according to God's will, He hears us. (1John 5:14) It is a promise. God wants us to participate with Him in bringing His will into the earth through prayer. Not only did she conceive, but she had twins in her womb.

²² The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. The Hebrew for this passage literally says the children smashed themselves inside her. These little guys were duking it out in the

Commented [notes7]: 9 But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"

Commented [notes8]: 19 I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. 20 However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Commented [notes9]: 4 You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

Commented [notes10]: 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,

Commented [notes11]: 14 Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

Commented [notes12]: 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Commented [notes13]: 18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Commented [notes14]: 12 Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. 13 But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia.

Commented [notes15]: 14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

womb. She was desperate to find out what was happening within her now that she was finally pregnant.

Abraham's faith has been caught by Isaac and his wife as well. Remember, chronologically, Abraham is still alive and surely being a witness of the greatness of JHWH. So when Rebekah had a question in her life, she went straight to the God of Abraham and Isaac. She went to inquire of YHWH, which may mean she asked Isaac or Abraham to seek an answer from God. To inquire of JHWH will later mean to consult a prophet or the Urim and Thummim, but we are only into the second generations of the Hebrews. Rebekah simply inquired of YHWH, "Why is this happening to me?"

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 liveliness of the babies in her womb was a picture of the future generations of these two. Israel and Edom – the blood feud would only intensify over the years. Notice our previous theme of separation is repeated again in regards to these children. In the time of Jesus, the oppressive Herod the Great was an Edomite who married a Jewish woman. Edom would merge with Ishmaelites and the sons of Lot to make up the Arab people. The hatred is so intense almost 4000 years later that they each want to annihilate the other. If you ever had any doubt about the truth of Scripture, this should help you resolve it. The trouble we see in our world today is focused on these two people groups. No wonder Rebekah cried out, "Why is this happening to me?"

Part of the struggle was to be firstborn. Firstborn was the heir. Firstborn inherited the bulk of the father's estate. In this case, you might wonder if firstborn would be the promised line. What forces were at work in the womb of Rebekah? But God wasn't going to work according to the culture's order. He will have the older serve the younger, just as He chose Abel over Cain and Isaac over Ishmael.

Two weeks ago we saw how Rebecca was a picture of the bride of Christ. The analogy continues with the struggle within her. We all experience the intense struggle within us, the struggle of flesh and spirit. *¹⁷ For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other...*Galatians 5:17a The flesh is older as the birth of your spirit came long after you were born physically. Thank the Lord for the promise that the older will serve the younger. Amen? Yes, your flesh will serve your spirit by the power of the Holy Spirit within you. (Romans 8:9,10) Amen? That is the victory in this spiritual battle in which we find ourselves.

The following chapters will have this play out in a fascinating way, certainly not in a way one would imagine. But the fulfillment begins in this chapter with the sale of the birthright. First let us look at the birth and naming of the children. *²⁵ The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau.* *²⁶ 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.*

Commented [notes16]: 9 You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. 10 But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.

Esau was firstborn, but God had already chosen the younger. Esau was a redhead, and had hair over his whole body. I had a friend like that, but he was a sincere man who loved the Lord. Esau would grow up to be a free spirited person who loved to hunt. His father would favor him. Jacob came out holding the heel of Esau. Jacob means to grab the heel. That can mean a protector or rear guard. In a negative light it can also mean an overreacher or deceiver. Jacob's quiet contemplative nature was what made him his mother's favorite.

We can't address this portion of Scripture without remembering the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 9:10-13. ¹⁰ *Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac.* ¹¹ *Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad--in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹² not by works but by him who calls--she was told, "The older will serve the younger."* ¹³ *Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."* Paul was writing about the sovereignty of God. God can choose whom He wills. It had nothing to do with merit because they weren't born when the prediction of the older serving the younger was made.

The quote from Malachi of God loving Jacob and hating Esau was about their descendents. One group was the chosen people of Israel, the other the Edomites who were for many years were subjugated by the Israelites. The term "hate" has troubled many people. It is used here and by Jesus in a relative contrasting sense. God loves all people and is not willing that any should perish. (2Peter 3:9) Jesus said that if we wanted to follow him we had to hate our mother and father. (Luke 14:26) Obviously he was using the term comparatively. One love must be so far above all others. Later we will see in the lives of Jacob and Esau that both are far from being perfect enough to have earned God's love, and so we are reminded again that God's blessings come through mercy and grace.

²⁹ *Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished.* ³⁰ *He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom.)* Esau had been out on a hunt and came back home with hunger pangs. Jacob was cooking some lentil stew. Have you ever smelled a pot of lentil stew when you are hungry? It just makes you even hungrier. You can taste it! Esau was the kind of man that sought immediate satisfaction. He wasn't what we'd call a long-range planner. The stew was red, and he was a redhead so he also became known as Edom, the Hebrew word for red. He was forever associated with this rash decision.

³¹ *Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright."* ³² *"Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?"* This appears to be a plot by Jacob to get what he had wanted from their very birth, position of firstborn. I wonder how many times Esau had come in from an unsuccessful hunt with the same hunger and pleaded for whatever was cooking. Cunning Isaac had decided the next time it happened, he would ask for the birthright. The birthright means all the privileges that come with the position, double inheritance, the father's position as head of the clan, etc.

Commented [notes17]: 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Commented [notes18]: 26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple.

Esau wasn't really about to die. He just felt that way. Funny how temptations get us to overstate our situation. I'm sure you've seen or even experienced that. We call it "making a mountain out of a molehill". The flesh demands instant gratification. (Romans 8:5a) Tomorrow is unimportant. The high today is more important than the hangover tomorrow. The purchase today outweighs the future burden of debt tomorrow. The fling at hand seems more needful than a stable and happy home. We make some rash and often ridiculous statement like Esau did; "What good is a birthright if I'm dead." And with that unreasonable expression as our banner, we yield to the flesh, cross the line, and sell our soul. The price of sin is always so much more than we ever imagine. (Romans 6:23)

Commented [notes19]: 5 Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires;

We can't hold Jacob blameless in this. If he heard his mother reiterate the promise that the older would serve the younger, he should have let God bring that to pass instead of taking matters into his own hands, like his grandfather Abraham did with Hagar. This scheming young man took advantage of his brother's weakness. He may have not been able to out do him physically, but he could con him into doing something he would later regret.

Commented [notes20]: 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

³³ But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴ 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. Belly full, satisfied for the moment, he rose and left. That is it. The flesh can only satisfy for a moment. It promises so much more, but can never deliver. It only demands more and more, while delivering less and less. (Ephesians 4:19) In the end, one finds they have despised the things that were lasting and meaningful while valuing that which was destructive and fleeting. The lesson of Esau is brought up in Hebrews 12. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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.

Commented [notes21]: 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

An Esau like lust for the temporal often ends in sexual immorality, and some Jewish exegetes ascribe that fault to Esau. The passage calls him godless. This high prize of being the heir of the promise meant nothing to him. Are you seeking that which can satisfy you for the moment? If that is all that life is to you, Esau's end is guaranteed to be yours, seeking the blessing with tears.

What do the promises of God mean to you? What does it mean to you that you've been adopted into God's family (Ephesians 1:5) and that you are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms? You have a born again birthright! Aren't those promises the birthright of your rebirth? Do you value them as treasure to guide your life, or would you trade them for some temporal pleasure? We are making that decision everyday by how we spend our time. If we have no time for the Word of God and the direction of His Spirit, we are demonstrating our lack of valuing our born again birthright.

Commented [notes22]: 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will--