



Lesson 17

The Blessing of Jacob by Isaac

In our last lesson we saw the patience and prayerfulness of Isaac and the way in which his two sons led quite different lives. Jacob was interested in the purpose of God but Esau was not.

Isaac and Abimelech (26:2-6)

In chapter 26 we learn more about the character of Isaac. There was a famine in the land of Canaan and Isaac had to find food and water for his flocks. He went into the territory of the Philistines, to Gerar, a place ruled over by a king called Abimelech. Perhaps he intended to move further south into Egypt, as his father had done in a time of famine, but God stopped him.

"And the LORD appeared to him (Isaac) and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you.

Sojourn (stay) in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father.

I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws. So Isaac settled in Gerar."

Genesis 26:2-6

God repeated to him some of the promises made to his father, Abraham. But He also added something new. He told Isaac; 'I will be with you'. This is the first time in the Bible God said this to anyone and it must have given Isaac a great deal of comfort. He had been told to stay in a land where food and water were very scarce. He had to stay amongst people who did not share his faith and who became hostile to him yet he gained strength to do this knowing that God was with him and would guide him.

Notice that God did not take away his problems. Indeed for a while they got worse; Abimelech's men tried very hard to ruin Isaac's life. They quarrelled with his herdsmen and spoiled the wells he dug so that water for his animals was scarce. However, through all of this Isaac did not retaliate but quietly went about his life trusting in God and showing his faith by the example of the way he lived. Eventually this so impressed Abimelech and his men that they said:

"We see plainly that the LORD has been with you... You are now the blessed of the LORD."
Genesis 26:28-29

Once again in the lives of these men we see lessons for our lives. Sometimes we cannot choose where to live. We might have problems because it is difficult to earn money to feed our families or we live amongst people who do not share our beliefs and are hostile to us. Yet if we truly believe in God's promises then He will strengthen us to cope with life's difficulties. The writer to the Hebrews sums this lesson up for us in these words.

"Be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"
Hebrews 13:5-6

Isaac and the Blessing (chapter 27)

Many years pass; Isaac is now old and thinks he is about to die. He asks Esau, his oldest son, to prepare him a meal of bush meat that they can share together and then he will bless him. This was a very important family occasion. This blessing was a kind of 'last will and testament'. If Isaac blessed his son he was publicly declaring that Esau would be his heir and inherit all the family wealth when his father died. As Isaac did not yet own any of the land, his wealth consisted of the great flocks and herd of animals he had gathered. Once this formal blessing had been given it could not be altered and the son who was blessed would definitely become the heir.





However, Rebekah, the mother of the two sons, heard what Isaac planned to do and told Jacob about it. She persuaded him to trick his father. He dressed up and pretended to be Esau and went in to Isaac. Because Isaac was old and nearly blind he gave the blessing to Jacob thinking that he was Esau.

When Esau returned he was furious with Jacob.

"Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob."

Genesis 27:41

From these events we learn more about both sons. Esau had despised the birthright. This was the privilege of leading the family's worship of the one, true God. Esau was not interested in this and so was willing to give it up for a bowl of stew. However, when he was tricked out of his father's will and realised that Jacob would now inherit all of his father's wealth he was very cross.

Esau is an example of a man who would like material blessings from God but does not wish to worship and serve Him in his life. When the Lord Jesus Christ returns there will be many people like this. They are people who expect to be invited into his kingdom to share the great rewards that God has shown us in His promises but they have not been true disciples of the Lord in this life. The Lord will send them away saying 'I never knew you, depart from me'. What a shock they will get!

Jacob really wanted to inherit God's promises and was prepared to use deceit to gain them through Isaac's blessing. He wanted right things but he was wrong to try to get them in this way. He should have waited patiently for God to show him the way to go about it. His name, Jacob, means a 'deceiver' and this is what he had become. He had not learned the value of prayer like his father did and we shall see in the next lesson that his life will suffer because of this.

Finally we should think again about Rebekah. She wanted the best for Jacob, her favourite son, and she was prepared to help him to deceive Isaac, her husband, to achieve her aims. She told Jacob that she would take any punishment that might come from doing this. Jacob had to be sent away to escape Esau's anger and she never saw him again. She tried to force God's hand so that her favourite son could inherit the blessing. However, she died before he came back and she never saw him again. She never met his wife or her grandchildren.

One of the great lessons for us all in our lives is that God forgives us our sins if we ask him through the Lord Jesus but we always have to live with the consequences of what we have done.

SUMMARY

In this lesson we have learned:

- God does not always take away the problems of the lives of believers. However, if we pray about them then He will give us strength to cope with them.
- When people become our enemies and perhaps try to harm us, the example of Isaac is a good one to follow. He did not retaliate but quietly lived his life trusting in God.
- We have to live with the consequences of what we do when we go against God's teaching as did Esau and Rebekah.

