



Lesson 16

Jacob and Esau

In our last lesson we saw the humility of Abraham. God had solemnly promised him the land but he owned none of it in his lifetime and had to buy a burial plot to bury his wife, Sarah, and he humbled himself before the owners in order to buy it. He sent his servant to find a bride for Isaac, his son, from amongst his own tribe.

Learning to be patient (25:21)

Isaac's wife, Rebekah, was barren and could not have children. Once again it seemed that God's promises about a great nation descending from Abraham, and his son Isaac, could not be fulfilled. We read what Isaac did.

“And Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren. And the LORD granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived.” Genesis 25:21

We can learn lessons for our own prayers from this. Isaac did not just ask God once. He pleaded with Him – asked Him many times for help. He knew that what he asked for must be part of God's purpose because of what God had promised him and Abraham. He did not ask this just for his own sake but because he wanted God's plan for the earth to be fulfilled.

When we pray to God we should be careful what we ask for. God does not promise that He will give us material blessings in this life just because we are disciples of Jesus. But He knows what we need in order to be faithful disciples of His Son. The things we ask for must agree with His plan and purpose. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he taught them first to ask for the kingdom of God to be established.

“Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Matthew 6:8-10

God can answer our prayers in three ways: 'yes', 'no' or 'not just yet'. He did not allow Rebekah to become pregnant immediately, the first time Isaac prayed. They were married when Isaac was 40 years old but they had to wait 20 years before children were born to them. Sometimes God makes us wait for His answer so that we really think hard about the matter and take it to Him in prayer many times.

Jesus taught his disciples a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart (Luke 18:1-8). So prayer is a test of faith in our lives, as we wait for an answer from God we learn to be patient, continuing to trust in Him and always remembering that, whatever happens to us, God's kingdom will come.

Rebekah has twins (25:24)

Rebekah had a difficult pregnancy and asked God why this was happening. She too was a person who knew that she could take every aspect of her life to God in prayer. The Lord told her:

“Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger.” Genesis 25:23

So she bore twin boys. The first was called Esau. He grew to be a skilful hunter who spent his time outdoors in the bush. The second was called Jacob. We read of him that he 'was a quiet man, staying among the tents'.

This seems a strange thing to tell us but we are helped by a comment from the Letter to the Hebrews.

“By faith he (Abraham) went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.” Hebrews 11:9



We know that Jacob was 15 years old when his grandfather, Abraham, died. These words from Hebrews help to explain to us the great difference between the two boys. One, Jacob, was interested in God's promises and learned about them from his father and grandfather. The other, Esau, showed little interest in them and spent his time on other things that were not at all connected with the promises of God.

The Birthright (25:29-34)

One day Esau returned home very hungry, his hunting had been unsuccessful. He found his brother, Jacob, cooking some stew. He asked him for some of it but Jacob gave him a very strange reply.

"Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright now."

Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?"

Jacob said, "Swear to me now." So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob.

Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright." Genesis 25:31-34

The 'birthright' was clearly something that was very important to Jacob but totally unimportant to Esau. It belonged to the eldest son of the family; it was something that was his by right as the first born male child of his parents. A careful look at the Bible suggests that it was a great privilege; in the days of Abraham it was the right of the oldest son to lead the family in worship of God - to act as a kind of priest.

Esau was not interested in this at all; he despised it and sold it for a plate full of stew! But Jacob wanted it so badly that he was prepared to try and bargain with his brother to buy it.

This might seem to us an unimportant story but God felt very strongly about Esau's rejection of His ways. Later in the Bible we read this about him.

"Yet I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated."

Malachi 1:2-3

"See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God... that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal.

For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears." Hebrews 12:14-17

Esau rejected the privilege to have a relationship with God; he despised it. So God rejected him, He hated him for it! Because Jacob wanted this privilege very much, God loved him. However, Jacob was not a patient man like Isaac, his father. Instead of taking the matter to God in prayer and waiting patiently for God to work things out in his life, he tried to force matters himself and this led to very great problems in his life later as we shall see in the next lesson.

SUMMARY

In this lesson we have learned:

- We should take all of our problems and concerns to God in prayer.
- However, we must be careful to pray that God's will not ours be done in our lives.
- We need to pray continually and to be patient. Sometimes God waits before answering us.
- God accepts people who are interested in His ways and want a relationship with Him. He will totally reject those who reject Him. They will have no part in His plans for the fulfilment of His promises in His future kingdom.

