

Open Heart, Open Bible

Genesis and Luke's Gospel

Linking Theme: Covenant

Passage for weekly reading (week 7):

Genesis ch. 's 25 – 30.

The Covenant continues – Isaac and Jacob

One of the best-known prophecies in the Book of Isaiah says this:

**For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called Wonderful, Counsellor,
Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.
(Isaiah 9 vs.6,7)**

In last week's readings we looked at the oath of God in Genesis 22 v.16 to bless Abraham with countless descendants. This takes the promise beyond something that is conditional upon human response, and into the realm of absolute inevitability. The thing that we get stuck on repeatedly is the time factor – we don't see it happening, we don't feel it, and we can, at worst, stop believing it. Abraham and Sarah gave up on God's promise to give them a child (Gen. 16), and did it their way, at much cost to themselves, and to their descendants. Nevertheless, the same Abraham keeps his heart open to God, even to the extent of his willingness to sacrifice the child of promise, believing that since the Lord gave Isaac to him (supernaturally – he had produced offspring naturally enough on other occasions – he knew the difference), He (the Lord), could also give him back again (Hebrews 11 vs.17 -19). It is this that calls forth the oath of God, and the oath makes the promise unconditional, hence my quotation from Isaiah – the zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. No human failure or faithlessness will affect the Lord's intent in any way. The role we can play is to influence the timing of the Lord's intervention. A faithful generation can "speed" God's activity, an unfaithful one can delay it (2 Peter 3 vs. 11,12). Hence, whilst we gladly acknowledge the sovereignty of God as believers, there is no room for fatalism in our lives. Prayer changes things!

Before we are given the “account” of Isaac, beginning in v.19, we read that Abraham took another wife after Sarah’s death, and had other sons by her (as well as other “concubines” – v.6). God seemed to tolerate this rather than bless it, but it is still **“through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned”** (21 v.12). The brief detail of Ishmael’s sons illustrates the hand of God in his lineage as he fathers the twelve rulers of prophecy (17 v.20), all of whom “lived in hostility” to their brothers. The significant thing that we read of regarding Isaac’s life (vs. 19 – 34) is the birth of the twin boys to Rebekah, and the later significant incident of the stew. Straightaway, we see the difference in character between the boys – Esau, active, outgoing and impulsive; Jacob, introverted, thoughtful and scheming.

In ch.26, Abimelech must have had a strong sense of déjà vu when he realised that Rebekah was Isaac’s wife. Is there anything trustworthy about these wayfaring Arameans? The entire chapter is like a repetition of similar incidents in Abraham’s life, for Isaac is having to learn the same lessons as his father. He is, after all, heir to the same promises (vs. 3,4 and 24). Beersheba becomes, for Isaac, his place of divine encounter, just as it had been for Abraham years before (21 v.23). Ch. 27 is all about human conniving and family intrigue, with Rebekah being seen in the worst light, operating in the realm of deception. Again, it is a case of human effort to achieve that which is believed to be of God, since she has been told that “the older will serve the younger”, and she prefers Jacob anyway! Paul puts it down to the sovereignty of God in Romans 9 vs.10 – 13. It is amazing how the Lord can allow this sort of dishonesty, and actually use it to further His purpose.

In sending Jacob back to Haran, Rebekah tells him that Esau is after his blood, but justifies this to Isaac by her disgust with the Hittite women married to Esau. He should find a wife from his own peoples, just as Isaac himself had done, at Abraham’s instigation. The old man has no problems with that, and affirms the blessing on Jacob’s life before he departs. The dream at Bethel confirms Jacob’s continuation of the covenant line. He is moved by this encounter, but not radically changed. The journey is full of uncertainty for Jacob, and he promises to make God “his God” – if he returns safely!

The story of that journey, and the meeting with Rachel, is quite similar to that of Abraham’s servant in ch.24. It differs insofar as Jacob is involved himself here, not merely a family representative, and in that Laban is now the father that Jacob will be dealing with. He is almost as astute a con-man as Jacob himself! The first agreement is that Jacob will serve for seven years for Rachel’s hand, and he readily does so. After all that, he is given the wrong woman! Another seven years will be necessary before he can leave with Rachel! (v.27)

During this period, Jacob fathered 11 of the 12 sons who would become the heads of the tribes of Israel. The names of those sons, and their respective mothers, are worth summarising:

1) Leah	Reuben	2) Bilhah	Dan	3) Zilpah	Gad
	Simeon	(Rachel's servant)	Naphtali	(Leah's servant)	Asher
	Levi				
	Judah				
	4) Leah	Issachar	5) Rachel	Joseph	
		Zebulun (Dinah)			

The birth of Joseph is Jacob's cue to ask for his release, but Laban tells him to "name his wages" – he feels he will lose his blessing if he loses Jacob! Jacob comes up with the suggestion to take all the speckled or spotted animals from Laban's herds as his wages, so Laban removes them all before Jacob can take them. He underestimated his nephew, however, and Jacob's ploy of placing the striped branches in front of the herds when they watered worked in a remarkable manner. He "grew exceedingly prosperous" (v.43).

Food for thought / discussion / prayer

- 1) It seems that Isaac encountered God in a powerful way at Beersheba (26 v.24). He is told not to be afraid. There must have been fear in his heart to this time, but he now worships in response to the vision (the altar v.25). Interesting that water is found after peace terms have been agreed upon. This speaks to me of blessing coming after reconciliation. We are Christ's ambassadors, and have a ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor.5 vs.19,20). Could we pray for an increasing realisation of this ministry amongst us, and a multiplication of God's blessing as a result?
- 2) Genesis 27 is all about the Lord using human fallenness in the outworking of His will. He would rather use our obedience, but He'll turn anything round for good if He has to. He is actually working through human fallibility all the time, since none of us is perfect! The chapter makes quite unedifying reading, but it shows us something of the determination of the Father to work with us as His chosen ones in the hotch potch of a sinful world. For me, this is the main encouragement I gain from this passage. What do you gain from it?
- 3) Perhaps impulsiveness is a word which sums up much of Esau's behaviour, whereas Jacob knows almost instinctively how to bide his time. Can you see more of Esau, or more of Jacob, in yourself? How would you like to change?

Next week's passage: Genesis 31 – 36