

Gleaners Bible Studies B 10

THE FOUNDATIONS OF A CHOSEN RACE (CONTINUED)

Study 1

ISAAC – Son of Promise

Read

Genesis 21: 8-21; 26: 1-5 and 18-33

The four principal characters who form the basis of our present studies are like four pillars upon which the Nation of Israel was built. We have already considered Abraham – the friend of God, who was outstanding in his character and faith. To all Jews, even to this day, Abraham is remembered as the great Founder of the Chosen Race, the Father of the Faithful. Whatever may have been the misfortunes, disappointments, tragedies and failures of the Nation of Israel down through the centuries, we can be assured that it had a great beginning in Abraham. The two qualities of FAITH and OBEDIENCE shine out in this remarkable personality.

I don't know what your assessment of Isaac is, but somehow I cannot think of him in the same way as I do Abraham. Undoubtedly he, too, was a great man and followed very closely in the steps of his father. But he did not rise to the same heights as Abraham. This is partly because he did not play the same role in the foundation of the nation, as did Abraham. He had a different experience of God. You see, for a long time, possibly for his entire lifetime, God was to him the God of Abraham his father. Isaac was the SON OF PROMISE. All his life he was conscious of this fact, that his very existence was proof that God keeps His promises. Without him, any possibility of the formation of the nation would have died with his father. Think of the importance of this. In Isaac, God confirmed His promises to Abraham. It is good to pause here and remember for how long Isaac was awaited. Yet eventually, in God's time, he came. God is always faithful to His promise, but He fulfils it in His own time, not ours. Note how **chapter 21: 1 – 7** gives us the wonder of the birth of Isaac – Sarah could laugh with joy.

What would you think was the PURPOSE of Isaac's life? We must remember that these ancient records that we are studying were written for a definite reason. There is much more of Isaac's experience that could have been given us. Therefore, we must study carefully those events that are recorded in the Bible. **1 Corinthians 10: 11** says that they are given for our learning. Isaac is portrayed as the one in whom the purpose of God in calling Abraham was CONFIRMED. **Genesis 12: 3** tells how God promises Abraham that in him all families of the earth would be blessed. This is repeated and enlarged in **13: 14-16** and in other places. Thus when Isaac did come, he was the first development in the process through which all nations would be blessed through God's CHOSEN NATION, Israel. The Lord Jesus Christ is the personified climax of the promise of God for this chosen nation. In Him, as the Messiah, the whole world will eventually find peace and blessing. Can you wonder therefore at Abraham's impatience when Isaac did not come? Ishmael was born through Abraham's failure to wait. But God had said, **"In Isaac shall your seed be called."** (**Genesis 21: 12**) Think about this carefully. Look at **Galatians 3: 16**.

Now I want you to think of the POSSESSIONS into which Isaac entered. You see, Isaac was not only the promised SON, but he was the promised HEIR as well. All the wealth of Abraham was passed on to Isaac and he entered into his inheritance. **Genesis 25: 5** tells us that Abraham gave ALL that he had to Isaac. This means that the wealth of the family was not lost and became the basis for a rich nation. If you study the history of Israel you will find that this was true throughout the generations. And you should always remember that to Jewish people the sign of God's blessing was not only that He was their God but also that He showered wealth and prosperity upon them. Read **Genesis 26: 1-5** and notice how much was given to Isaac because he was Abraham's son. God never forgot that Abraham obeyed His voice and did what He asked him to do; and He rewarded him with material prosperity.

Finally, I want you to notice the POSITIONS which Isaac and Ishmael held. Ishmael was the son of a bondwoman – a slave. True, Abraham had married her, but Hagar was still 'the bondwoman'. When a crisis came, Sarah demanded that Hagar and her son should be cast out. Isaac was the true son and heir and his was a position that could not be shared. He held a position of freedom and dignity. Notice **Genesis 21: 8-13**. Sadly, this conflict between the descendants of Isaac and Ishmael is still with us today. Jews and Arabs are bitterly opposed to one another. (Remember that Ishmael was the beginning of the Arabs.) There is no meeting point between the two. They appear unable to resolve their differences - only as they believe in Christ is this possible.

Christians, or "believers" today are sons; that is, children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. **Romans 8: 15-17** tells us that as sons we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. Thus we share in the great blessings of God's family. We are free – no longer slaves to sin and a broken law – we have the liberty of the children of God. This is wonderful and it reminds us of God's great love to us. Let us complete this lesson by looking at **Galatians 4: 1-7** – it is thrilling to look carefully at these passages which tell of Christian freedom. Are you enjoying freedom through Christ?

Study 2

ISAAC – Seeking a Wife

Read

Genesis chapter 24

No study in the life of Isaac would be complete without a look at **Genesis 24**. This is one of the loveliest and most beautifully told stories in the Old Testament. It reflects the traditional Eastern 'arranged marriage'.

Time had passed by and Isaac had grown up to young manhood. His mother and father were getting old. Isaac was not married and Abraham was conscious that he needed a wife. Abraham realised that God had richly blessed him in everything. (**verse 1**) He stands before us as an example of the fact that a life of obedience to God is

a life of real blessing. Now Abraham wants to see the son whom he loves set on the right path before he himself dies. He does not want him to take a wife from the Canaanite people, for he knows that this would spoil God's purpose and certainly be a wrong association for Isaac. He thinks of his own kinsmen and family and decides to send his trusted servant back to them to seek a bride for Isaac.

We pause here for a moment to notice at this early stage in the history of God's people how SEPARATION from the surrounding idolatrous nations was essential. This principle threads its way through all Jewish history. When Israel failed in this and mixed their marriages with nations outside of God's promises, trouble came and for the time being they lost their identity. The bride for Isaac was to be of God's choosing and would be free of the influences of godlessness and idolatry that characterised the surrounding nations. We can think of the Jewish people today. Although they are scattered throughout all nations, yet they are still a people apart and perhaps we can say that there is no other nation in the world that has kept its identity so clearly. They have, however, failed miserably to realise God's ideal; but in this early Bible story of Isaac and his bride we see what God's intention was for His people.

Having considered the reason for the journey of Abraham's trusted servant, let us look at some of the features of this beautiful story. Notice the serious words of Abraham to him as he went, **"If the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be released from this oath; only do not take my son back there."** (24: 8) The union of Isaac with this woman, who was to become his wife, was designed so that she should share the inheritance in the place where God had promised. Everything was centred there. Think about this – the LAND and the INHERITANCE were the possessions of Abraham and Isaac, and the generations who should follow after them.

We notice the PATH of the servant as he went his way to fetch the bride. How would you have felt? He was deeply concerned that his master's wishes should be fulfilled. It is obvious that there was a deep understanding between Abraham and this chief servant of his house. He wanted to please and to obey his master to the last degree. He also knew that his master believed God, and no doubt he had seen many proofs of God's guidance in Abraham's path. Although the servant did not know quite where it would end or what would be the outcome of his journey, he committed himself to Abraham's God. His was a committed pathway. This is so much like serving the Lord today. If we are willing to go the way He wants us to go, and to the place where He sends us, we shall not be afraid to trust Him to guide us in the right way. This servant, at the end of his journey, was able to say, **"Being on the way, the Lord led me."** (verse 27)

We must now look at the servant's PRAYER. He arrives at the place where Abraham's relatives live. **Verses 10-14** tell us how he arrived and what he prayed. What would happen? How would he know who the woman should be? His action was to PRAY. It was to the **"Lord God of my master Abraham"** that he commended his way. Prayer removed the clouds and made the way clear. He had not even finished praying before things began to move and the beautiful Rebekah appeared (verse 15) and every detail of his request was satisfied so that he was able to worship and praise the Lord. (verses 26-27) Let us say here that in all service for the Lord, prayer must play a prominent part. God is big enough to meet all our needs. Only His supplies are sufficient to satisfy the demands of our service for Him.

We notice now the sense of PURPOSE in the servant's pathway. He comes to Laban's home and is made welcome,

(verses 31-32) We shall meet Laban again when we study Jacob's life, but here he makes the servant welcome. Notice that before the man would even eat, he had to deliver his message. I want you to mark how often he said **"my master"**. He was wholly absorbed with his master's business and at the end, when Rebekah had promised to go, he wanted to get away without delay. (verses 56-59) Here is a perfect example of a dedicated servant. I wonder if we are willing to serve the Lord Jesus like this? He must come first in everything if we are to serve Him faithfully.

We end this lesson by noticing the way in which Rebekah was PRESENTED to Isaac. Isaac walks in the field at evening. The procession approaches and the meeting takes place. The servant tells Isaac of all that he has done. It is a 'mission accomplished' - Isaac and his bride are united. It is a fitting conclusion that God, who has so clearly guided at every stage, should set His seal on this marriage, in the deep love that Isaac had for Rebekah.

Thus another chapter in the founding of the great Nation of Israel is written and what a vital part the work of this servant played in its success. One day our service for the Lord Jesus will end and we shall meet Him. I wonder if we shall be as happy to do this as the servant was to meet Isaac. Will the Lord Jesus be able to say to us, **"Well done, good and faithful servant"**? (Matthew 25: 21) If we obey His COMMANDS we shall receive His COMMENDATION.

Study 3

JACOB – Blessing at any Price



Genesis 25: 19-34, and chapter 27

God is often known in the Bible as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. In using these descriptions we are taken back to the origins of the nation – to its founders. Someone has said that they can quite understand how God could be the God of Abraham or the God of Isaac. There was that about their characters which made this seem fitting. But the God of Jacob? Who would think that He could be this when we remember the character of this man? Jacob was one of the most unattractive characters imaginable. Scripture does not attempt to hide what he was really like. It gives a faithful account of all his deeds – both good and bad. This is the way God is. He is always faithful in His recording of what He sees in men.

Right from the start then we are prepared to find a different character altogether in Jacob to that which we have found in Abraham or Isaac. Because of this we shall see a different pattern in God's dealings with him. God's way with Jacob took into account his nature – all that he was. To me, this is what makes the Bible so fascinating. God works individually. He is not a 'mechanical' God dealing with 'mechanical' people, in carrying out His work.

He is THE LIVING GOD and He works through LIVING personalities. In spite of all Jacob's failings God accomplished through him what He could not really have done through anyone else. This brings into our 'story of foundations', a new principle altogether – the principle of GRACE.

In many ways Jacob was a rogue and a twister. We would be justified in saying that he deserved none of God's blessings. Yet God blessed him and carried on the line of blessing through him. This principle of grace was thereafter never omitted from God's dealings with the nation of Israel. How wicked, wayward and unworthy they often were, yet

God blessed them, time and time again, in spite of their failures. He will eventually make them a great nation in the future, all because of His grace, which we see displayed so clearly in the life of Jacob. Remember this!

I want you to think of two words in connection with the life of Jacob in its early stages. The words are BIRTHRIGHT and BLESSING. In the two Scripture readings for this lesson you will find how, by his cunning ways, Jacob obtained both of these from his brother Esau.

Genesis 25: 19-34 - The Birthright

Esau and Jacob are born and they seem to come into the story in a strange way. They are twins, but Esau is the elder of the two. Before birth, a struggle takes place. Notice then the prophecy comes concerning the shaping of future events. ***"The older shall serve the younger."* (verse 23)** Whatever happened, this was God's purpose. Of course the boys knew nothing of God's activity behind the scenes. Neither do we; but God DOES work His plans out in secret, and they are for our good. So the boys are born and grow up very differently. Esau becomes the rough man of the field, wild and strong. Jacob is the quiet, deep, home-lover, secretly planning in his mind what he wanted and how he could attain it. I suppose today we would have said Esau had an extrovert personality and Jacob an introvert one. If Jacob was planning to possess the family-rights, circumstances favoured him one day. Esau comes home from the field almost fainting from hunger. The mouth-watering smell of cooking food causes him to demand from Jacob a meal. I believe Jacob could have given him the food unconditionally, but instead he cunningly uses the occasion to gain that which was not rightly his. ***"Sell me your birthright."* (25: 31)** With Esau's birthright went all the privileges and rights of the first born son. To a Jewish family, this was a vital part of the title to the inheritance. Jacob virtually took over all the RIGHTS that were Esau's. Notice Esau despised his birthright – he sold it for a feed! Yet ask yourself at this point – 'Did Jacob need to resort to such sharp practice to get what, in God's plans, would have been his anyway?' Think about this as we look at the other passage.

Genesis 27 – The Blessing

As this rather unsavoury story is told, we listen to the cry of Esau concerning Jacob. ***"Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, now look, he has taken away my blessing!"* (verse 36)** Dishonesty and deceit gained possession for Jacob, of the blessing. I am sure you will agree with me that Esau was justified in complaining so bitterly about Jacob's treatment of him. No wonder he threatened to kill Jacob! Yet now Jacob was in possession of the BIRTHRIGHT of the family and the vital BLESSING of his father.

Now God did not approve of, or condone the cunning methods of Jacob. But He DID approve of Jacob's valuation of God's blessing on the firstborn. Scripture openly censures Esau's attitude. He was worldly minded.

(Hebrews 12: 16-17) He sold his birthright for a single meal. Thus Esau showed how little he valued his birthright. And this is where God's GRACE came in. Through the experience of his life, God taught Jacob that there was no need to get the blessing of the inheritance through his own efforts. GRACE and DISCIPLINE worked together to produce the kind of man God wanted.

Not ONE of the family comes out well in this story. Isaac's plan ***(27: 1-4)*** goes against what God revealed before the boys were born. ***(25: 23)*** Jacob and Rebekah, although in the right, make no reference at all to God, but cheat and lie in order to achieve their ends. Isaac relies completely on his

own senses, each of which lets him down – even the sense of taste on which he prided himself. When his ears tell him the truth, he will not listen. The blessing is Jacob's, as God always intended – but at a heavy price. Esau is ready to do murder. The relationship between Isaac and Rebekah is spoilt. Rebekah will never see her favourite son again. And Jacob, the home-lover, goes into exile.

What can we learn? This above all things: God is more willing to bless us with His love and His provision than we can ever imagine. But He must bless us in HIS way and in HIS time. We are like Jacob. Our natures are spoilt and twisted by selfishness and sin. Only the grace and kindness of God in saving us and blessing us in the Lord Jesus Christ can change us and make us what we ought to be. God's grace blesses us in spite of our failures. But God's grace will not over-rule if we fail to take His way of salvation.

Study 4

JACOB – Blessing through Experience



Genesis 28: 10-22, 32: 22-32 and 35: 1-15

We thought in our last lesson of the blunders of Jacob in trying to obtain the best of God's blessings. What an awful mess he had made of things! But we can say that he wanted the best. This is where he differed from Esau. If you read again ***Hebrews 12: 15-17***, you will see that Esau is called ***"a profane person."*** For a meal he sold his most valuable possession – his birthright! It was his own fault that he lost the blessing. Probably in later life, he bitterly regretted his youthful indifference to his birthright and his assessment of its value. We never read of this, but at least Jacob prized what Esau despised. This was why, in spite of all his cunning ways and dishonesty, God was able to bless him. Remember, God is able to help and bless those who value rightly the things He has freely given. For us, as Christians, these things are spiritual – the true qualities of eternal life. Those who are not Christians can never enjoy what believers in the Lord Jesus find to be full of joy and satisfaction. Look at ***1 Corinthians 2: 9-16***. What Jacob prized was worth having, but the way he went about obtaining it was utterly wrong.

In this lesson we are going to follow Jacob in some of his journeys and notice how God dealt with him. At the end of his life, after all its tragedies and troubles, when he was with Joseph in Egypt he realised, as he looked back, that God had been kind to him. He speaks of God as, ***"The God who has fed me all my life long to this day, the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil."* (Genesis 48: 15-16)** By this time he had seen his family established. The heads of the twelve tribes that formed the structure of the Nation of Israel emerged from the family of Jacob. We learn from this development in early Bible history that through Jacob, the EXPANSION of the chosen people took place. Just look back now and see how matters had progressed. One man, ABRAHAM, is called out for God and FAITH begins. Then one man and his son, ISAAC, continue the line and the PROMISE of God is confirmed. Then follow the movements of JACOB, the man of GRACE, through whom the nation EXPANDS and the foundation of the twelve tribes is laid. Genesis is the 'Book of Beginnings'. Notice these 'beginnings' in your studies. They are very important.

Let us look at some of the movements of Jacob as he fled from Esau. Of course, much of Jacob's later life is interwoven with the life of Joseph and we shall notice this later in our studies. But as Jacob left his father and mother, he must have felt very much alone. His scheming led him into a lonely path. Yet God soon became involved in his life.

We notice three such involvements.

1. BETHEL – Companionship, Genesis 28: 10-22

The story of Jacob's ladder is very well known. **Genesis 28** tells us about the dream which Jacob had as he slept in the wilderness. I like the way in which the angels ascended and descended on the ladder. Earth was linked with Heaven, **(verse 12)** – the life of Jacob and a caring God were bound up with each other. Poor Jacob did not realise this! Perhaps he had even forgotten that the God who watched over him was the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac. **(verse 13)** He did not know that the land on which he slept was his possession and the possession of his families after him. **(verse 13-14)** How faithful God was! I think **verse 15** is one of the finest in the Bible. ***"I am with you", God says, "and will keep you wherever you go."*** Jacob had to confess that God was there and he did not know it. It was to him the very gate of Heaven! For lonely Jacob, Bethel became the House of God. Study this passage carefully. We, as Christians, owe so much to the companionship of God. Sometimes, when possibly we are not even thinking about Him, Jesus Himself draws near and walks with us, just as He did to the disciples on the Emmaus Road. **(Luke 24)**

2. PENIEL – Conquest, Genesis 32: 22-32

We see how God is working with Jacob through His encounters with him. Jacob wanted to go his own way, but he found at Bethel that God was going to be with him. Later just before he meets his brother Esau, again, he is full of fear and he schemes afresh how to deal in his own strength with this danger. It is here that God shows him where his strength really lies. In this vision at Peniel a conflict takes place. Jacob wrestles with a man until daybreak. Eventually, he is subdued and from wrestling, he turns to clinging. ***"I will not let you go unless you bless me", Jacob says in 32: 26.*** We notice that it was as Jacob clung and claimed the blessing he prevailed. Notice how God makes him confess to his name 'Jacob' – the scheming supplanter. Then He changes it to 'Israel' – a prince with God. Through submission he prevailed. Again, read this passage carefully. We can learn, with Jacob, that it is only as God conquers and controls us that we can have power with Him, especially when we seek to prevail in prayer. Submission brings victory in Christian experience.

3. BETHEL again – Commitment, Genesis 35: 1-15

"Go up to Bethel and dwell there."* (35: 1)** Much had taken place in Jacob's life. He had suffered under Laban's stern treatment as his master. Cunning had battled with cunning in this association. But God had kept Jacob and 'enlarged' him as He has promised to do. Now with his wives he faces the realisation that he must clear out of his life all his strange gods and be pure and holy. He must go back to the place where he first vowed to serve God. The next altar he erects will not be to the God of his fathers, but to ***"God, the God of Israel." ***"El Elohe Israel"***. **(33: 20)**

Our study therefore ends with this thought that God keeps us to our promises to follow Him. Sometimes we get away from Him and wrong things come into our lives. It is then that our commitment fails. When this happens, let us see to it that we are willing to put wrong things away. God will always keep His promises – we must honour our commitment to Him.

Questions

Study 1 - ISAAC – Son of Promise

1. Give a brief description of the character of Abraham.
2. In what way is Christ's coming to earth related to God's promise to Abraham?
3. What did Jewish people believe was the sign of God's blessing?
4. Ishmael and Isaac were both sons of Abraham. Why were they treated so differently?
5. What is the great privilege and blessing of "believers" today?

Study 2 - ISAAC – Seeking a Wife

1. Why did Abraham go to such lengths to 'arrange' this marriage for Isaac?
2. Name two qualities that characterised Abraham's servant.
3. Which one verse from this chapter sums up the reason for the success of the servant's mission?
4. As Christians, what should be our primary aim in life?
5. What lesson (if any) have you learnt from Abraham's servant?

Study 3 - JACOB – Blessing at any Price

1. Why was the birthright so important in the Jewish family?
2. In what way were God's dealings with Jacob different from His dealings with Abraham or Isaac?
3. Explain the meaning of **Romans 9: 13** in the light of today's lesson.
4. What were the two principle errors Isaac made concerning the giving of the blessing?
5. What important lesson can we learn so far in the life of Jacob?

Study 4 - JACOB – Blessing through Experience

1. When Jacob looked back over his life how did he describe God's treatment of him? Give a reference.
2. Why do you think Jacob was so afraid when God appeared to him at Bethel? **(Genesis 28)**
3. What was the result of Jacob's encounter with God at Peniel? **(Genesis 32)**
4. What does Jacob's erecting an altar to ***"El Elohe Israel"*** tell us about this stage of his life?
5. What have you learnt through this study about the meaning of commitment to God?