



## ***This Week in the Word***

*Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Ps 119:89.*



### **A Troubled Birth** **Study Scripture: Genesis 25:19-24**

**Lesson 10, November 3rd, 2018.**

#### **Key Verse**

*And the Lord said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.*

*Genesis 25:23*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Our lesson Study is in a chapter of Genesis which is most informative for parents, of crucial significance for father and for mothers. It really is a study of people and families who struggle as they live through their lives. It speaks of a disappointing home, a distressed home, and a divided home this is of course the kind of struggle that many of our parents have and so it teaches some very instructive lessons in this chapter.

As we study therefore let us realize that life is often full of disappointments and challenges. It teaches us that when we face challenges we should exercise real faith which really means we should not just simply expect to get everything we want when we want it, but instead trusting God to give us what is good in His timing. We therefore see one woman's faith which teaches us about perseverance throughout times of disappointment.

It also teaches us of a man that did not make the mistake of his parents seeking to force the hand of God. For him it was a real test of faith, for many years passed and he remained childless, being faithful to his wife not wanting to execute his human devised plan to save his people by providing a promised heir God would reject. Unlike Abraham and Sarah he was prepared to wait for God, accepting that God's delays were for the good. May we learn from the example of these people who had real faith for they knew that real faith works for the glory of God.

We should note that sometimes people face tests that are very similar to those faced by their parents. They know they should not repeat the mistakes of their errant parents, understanding that they must pray to God and wait on God for God is sovereign and He is going to do things His way. When God promises things to people in a covenant with Him these covenant promises do not come because of your will. God makes His choices. All that happens are based on God's choices.

It is also very interesting to note that the passage speaks of the characteristics of second-generation believers. Are they as bold and daring as they continue their parents' faith? How do they face their difficulties when they realize that promises from God are not always realized when they want. How do parents react when they do not understand their children and how does their knowledge of their children's nature make them able to help the children? Should parents try to change the children, or simply let them do what they want?

Do children have the same kind of characteristics, are they generally very different in character, in tastes, and in the choices they make, always prone to fight with one another? What is in the spirit of a person that determines what he or she likes to do? Why do parents tend to have an affinity for one child over another based on their personal and different reasons? Why is it very important for parents to examine their parental partiality for does this determine a lifelong pattern in their behavior? Why do some children make decisions to immediately fulfill their needs and their dominant word is "now", while other children make decisions on the long-term view?

One writer points out that God uses different personalities of children for His purposes so we should be very careful with how we treat them and how we grow them up. The warning is that there is nothing trivial in even the apparently simple or very modest activities they like to engage in. He summarizes some lessons we can take away from our Study:

- “1. Prayer by parents makes a difference.
2. Choices by children make a difference.
3. Partiality by parents makes a difference.
4. Personality of youth makes a difference.
5. Parents must love them all, pray for all, guide all into God's will. God has a plan for each child”.

Remember therefore that we are formed by nature. We are born in sin and shapen in iniquity according to David in Psalm 51: 5. We are all unique, born with unique personalities, abilities, and inclinations. We are born in this broken and corrupted world with inherited traits, attractiveness, intelligence, health or physical challenges, temperament and personalities.

But we are also formed by nurture, for parents are to nurture personality and character instead of reinforcing the natural differences between children as was done in the case in chapter 25. In this case sibling rivalry begun before birth but parents are not wise to allow this to continue. It will not be good for parents to allow rivalry to continue after birth and into adulthood.

We are of course also formed by our choices, not just by nature and by nurture. The environment

and the circumstances of life in which we are also shape us. So therefore note that friends as well as enemies, communities, teachers, coaches, bullies and abusers as well as church brethren also contribute. The choices that we make are made because of all kinds of matters but it is most important for us to encourage each other to make the right choices, to make the right choices even when there are simple decisions to be made. Simple choices, choices that appear simple, can develop into grave consequences.

#### THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Abraham and Sarah finally had the promised son Isaac after waiting for very many years. The son of promise was born after another son Ishmael was born because Abraham and Sarah had tried to force the hand of God to provide posterity for Abraham. But this son was not the son of promise. Finally the son of promise was born and when he was about 40 years old Abraham sent his faithful servant to the land of his family where there was still some knowledge of Yahweh to obtain a wife for Isaac.

Abraham before his death gave the chief part of the inheritance to Isaac, the son of promise. He gave a portion of what he had to his other sons so that they also were wealthy. Abraham sent them away to the land of the East, evidently Arabia, so that they would be far away from Isaac and jealousy and antagonism would be minimized.

Abraham died at 175 years of age and his first sons Isaac and Ishmael as well as the other children joined together and buried him. Abraham died when his grandchildren Esau and Jacob were 15 years old and so they had access to him and would learn of his experiences.

Now the story shifted to focus on the son of promise.

#### THE TEXT

Verses 19-20. To introduce us to the birth of Jacob and Esau we are given a genealogy of Isaac and told that he was the son of Abraham and that he was 40 years old when he married Rebekah the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian who lived in Padan-Aram. She was the sister of Laban the Syrian. Jacob would later on in life would have much to do with his mother's brother.

Verse 21 It now appears that Isaac's life was almost a repetition of the life of Abraham and what had happened to him. We gather from this that the writer of Genesis intended to teach us about the faithfulness of God in the past to His saints, in the present to His saints, and to His future saints. What God had done for Abraham he would now do for Isaac.

Isaac's wife Rebekah was unable to have children for 20 years. In this respect it resembles the experience of Sarah who was barren for a long time despite her expectations and Abraham having been promised that he would be the father of many nations.

In those days infertility was a terrible reproach for a couple, but especially for the woman. Their

inability to have children would be a real test of the faith of both Isaac and Rebekah for God had promised Isaac that the promised seed would come through him.

Rebekah's family had blessed her when she was leaving home with the blessing that she would have many children (Genesis 24: 60) and now she would have been feeling very miserable for she had believed the divine promises about many descendants.

But despite the pressures Isaac did not make the mistake of Abraham and Sarah in getting another woman apart from his wife to have a child for him. He trusted and waited for God to carry out His plan.

We should ask ourselves at this stage how we would respond when things don't seem to be progressing as we would like or even how God might have promised us. What do we do when difficulties only seem to get worse? Do we learn from past mistakes made by ourselves or by others and remember what we should do to avoid falling into the same trap as others before us?

Let us note that there is a reality in motherhood and parenthood for it involves struggles, conflicts, and pain. But we know the story of God's faithfulness even when things seem to be going wrong and this story therefore encourages us and cause us to, as one writer said "be awed in the wisdom, workings, and Majesty of God" We are therefore looking at how the saints of God struggled successfully.

We were told in the genealogy of Ishmael that he lived for 137 years and that Abraham had blessed him. Twelve princes had come from him before he was gathered to his people.

One can imagine how Isaac felt when he saw that Ishmael kept having son after son why he the promised seed had no children for 20 years. He must have felt that it was unfair that God had blessed Ishmael with many children though God had rejected that son of Abraham saying that he was not the promised son.

So Isaac entreated the LORD. Remember that this word used here is the covenant keeping name for God. This word entreated was a strong word which meant that he pleaded with LORD for his wife because she was barren. One writer comments that "even the son of promise does not come into the promise easily. It only comes through waiting and prayer. But the prayers of a husband for his wife have a special power".

Note that this was not a simple kind of prayer for Isaac did not simply wait for 20 years before he prayed. We are told that he kept an ongoing and continuous praying for 20 years before God answered that prayer with a "yes" Before that God answered the prayer with a "wait".

The LORD listened to Isaac's entreaties and Rebekah conceived. She became pregnant.

Verse 22. This was no normal pregnancy for there were twins in her womb and the children jostled and struggled against each other in her womb.

Verse 23. Their sibling rivalry started even before birth and so aggravated Rebekah that she prayed to God asking why her two boys seemed to be fighting for position all the time. She might have thought that this commotion inside her was an evil omen. She was clearly puzzled. One writer tells us about some Jewish legend about this fighting in the womb:

“Jewish legend say that Jacob and Esau tried to kill each other in the womb. Also, every time Rebekah went near an idols altar, Esau would get excited in the womb, and when she would go near a place where the LORD was worshiped, Jacob would get excited”.

We do not believe those legends for there is no basis in fact for them. What we do know that she went to inquire of the LORD and God spoke to her about what was happening inside her womb.

God told her simply that she had twins inside her. Two separate nations would come from these two children. One nation would be stronger than the other. God had chosen the younger and weaker child through whom He would accomplish His intention and through whom He would bring blessing.

Verse 24. It happened precisely as God has said. When Rebekah gave birth twins came out of her.

Note that this theme of struggle between brothers and family and conflict between brothers is not a new idea in Genesis. Cain and Abel foreshadowed the most serious of such conflicts. We read of the conflict between the sons of Noah, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Laban, and Joseph and his brothers. But remember that in every case though some intended to harm others, God used the struggle for good and accomplished His will despite the conflict.

We see in this verse also the sovereignty of God for God brought His blessing to those who have no other claim to it. There is this recurring theme of God's sovereign plan of grace. God brings His blessing and this is not a natural right. God for example rejected the offering of Cain the older brother and accepted the offering of the younger brother Abel. Isaac was chosen over the older brother Ishmael. Rachel was chosen over her older sister Leah. Judah was chosen over his older brother.

The revelation of the divine will was clear from the start, and everybody knew it. Obviously it was not a secret and we should examine what happened afterwards in the life of this knowledge by both of Rebekah's children and both of the parents.

This prophecy from the LORD is a prophecy of the history of some nations as well as the prophecy of the relationship between two brothers.

Notice that despite the wait with Isaac looking at Ishmael producing children, one, two, three, four and up to 12 while he had none, God rewarded him by giving him two large nations.

It does give rise to several important disagreements over the doctrine of election and

predestination. Apparently the LORD decided before the children were born of their history. Jacob, the devious and tricky supplanter who was hell-bent on receiving the promise of God became Israel, a Prince with God, and he gave his name Israel to the nation Israel. He was therefore regarded as the father of the Jewish people. This is a person who has the characteristics that we would not like and we would normally choose his brother Esau but he had characteristics which made him unlikable as far as God was concerned. So God's decision was "Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated".

We might in fact wonder how God could have loved a man such as Jacob for he was a wily and smart trickster. He would do anything no matter how unpleasant to achieve his goal. But the fact is that he went after what God had and thought that the promise of God to have a seed for God was the most important thing in the world while the pleasant human behaving like us Esau despised or thought little of the things of God.

There are several comments on this event in the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the Old Testament Hosea who is called the prophet of unconditional love in chapter 12:2-3 in exhorting the nation of Israel not to seek agreements and alliances with foreign powers but rather to trust in God disputed with Judah saying that God would punish Jacob according to his ways and according to his deeds. In commenting on the incident with Jacob the prophet revealed in verse 26 of this chapter 25 some interesting information. One writer comments:

"The prophet looking back over the life of Jacob appeals to two incidents, one of which is this one. And he makes a point. One of his points seem to be just like Jacob was a person who longed to know God and longed to be in the center of God's will as expressed in his wrestling with the angel and his grasping of the heel of Esau in order that he might ultimately have the right of the firstborn, the birthright, so Israel should seek after the Lord and not seek after the foreign alliances in order to find a protection from those that were troubling them.

But also one of the commentators and students of the prophecy of Hosea have made another point. It seems evident too that he appeals to the grace of God. One of the commentators writes that Jacob did not by choice or design lay hold on the heel of his brother in his mother's womb, but it was an extraordinary thing. Infants don't think like that while they are still in the mother's womb. It was then God who guided the hand of the infant and by this sign, testified that his adoption as the promised one was by the grace of God. So here in Hosea the prophet looking back at this incident finds an illustration of the sovereign grace of God. He sees God working before Jacob is even born to indicate that his future is a future in which he is blessed by God".

The writer then refers to the prophet Malachi who begins with the word of the Lord to Israel: "I have loved you", sees the Lord, "you say how hast thou loved me".

"Now the Lord answers his own question, "was not Esau, Jacob's brother" declares the Lord, "yet I have loved Jacob, but I hated Esau".

So in order to strengthen Israel's sense of the love of God, he appeals to their past history. He says just take a look at Jacob and take a look at Esau and take a look at the descendents of these two, Jacob's descendants, the nation Israel, Esau's, the land of Edom. And you will see by the way in which Edom has been treated and the way in which Israel has been treated that Jacob I love, but Esau I have hated. And so the commentator finds in this an illustration of the sovereign electing

love of God.

It was a love of Jacob that was prenatal before he was born. It was a love incidentally that was disciplinary.

The fact that God chooses us and makes us His own does not mean that we are not exposed to discipline. As a matter of fact, the saints of God are those who are especially exposed to discipline for our Father is a kind of father who wants to bring us and determines to bring us to maturity, and consequently he is not like so many human fathers who don't care enough for their children to discipline them. He disciplines his children because he is bringing them to a certain stage of maturity. Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated just look at the history of the two and you will see how I have loved you the Lord says".

We note also how this writer sees what the apostle Paul says in Romans 9:11 where he points out that the choice of God does not rest on anything that the children do in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand.

God chooses not because of works.

"In other words, his purpose is determined by his election, not because of works, but because of him who calls it was said to her the older shall serve the younger just as it is written Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. Now it is plain Paul makes two points. Number one, the sovereign choice of God Jacob. Look at the 11th verse again,

"For though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand".

So sovereignty, the sovereignty of the choice or election of God. You don't like that when you have not the spirit of our great triune God.

Notice the second thing, the particularity of that choice. It's not simply a choice of nations. It's a choice of nations and individuals. He says it was said to her the older shall serve the younger just as it is written Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated. And the fact that the apostle cites only that last line, 'the elder shall serve the younger', is evidence that he wants to lay stress upon the particularity of the choice of God".

It is obvious to us that salvation is a gift of God and everything depends on God's sovereign will. We cannot explain why some are saved and some are not for we know that God's Holy Spirit speaks to every human being that has ever lived warning them of sin and its effects, pointing to righteousness, and pointing to judgment that will come. We are also told that God does not take any pleasure in the death of the wicked so we know that ultimately there is a good reason for the things that God does.

We are therefore fully aware that most people on this earth do not like any doctrine that speaks of the sovereignty of God. If you decide to speak on this matter you would suffer as many others before you have suffered and bitterly hated. People do not like any idea that the only good One is God and they rage against any idea of the grace of God. But remember always that whoever will call him the name of the Lord will be saved

There are angels who rebelled against God and there are men who have rebelled against God. But remember that God did not die for angels that sinned. He passed them by. But Jesus did not pass you by for He died for you taking on Himself the seed of Abraham. He was slain before the foundation of the Earth, before you were even born. He therefore chose you, and He now calls on you to call on the name of the Lord and be saved.

## CONCLUSION

So recognize your sin and your inability to save yourself. Jesus does not pass you by. He knocks at the door. So open the door and invite Him in. It is your choice. Esau had his choice. He knew what God told his mother and father but yet he chose his own way regarding the important things of God as of no value and things therefore that were to be despised.

We therefore plead with you not to despise the things of God.

Much later on Esau repented of what he had done and he begged for repentance. But it was too late for him to obtain the birthright. That had been given to Jacob as God had said before. He could have behaved himself and his people and be blessed even if he did not have the birthright. But he and his people of Edom hated Israel and did all they did to destroy Israel.

You now have been offered your birthright. Do not treat it as a despised thing. One writer explains God's language of love and hate so that you have no excuse for not coming to God:

“Is it fair for God to love one and hate another, and to choose one and not choose another, before they are even born? We should regard the love and the hate God speaks of here as having to do with His purpose in choosing one to become the heir of the covenant of Abraham. In that regard, God's preferences could rightly be regarded as a display of love toward Jacob and hate toward Esau. The real thought here is much more like “accepted” and “rejected” more than it is like our understanding of the terms “loved” and “hated”.

Our greatest error in considering the choices of God is to think God chooses for arbitrary reasons as if He were sort of an “eeny-meeny-miny-moe” chooser. We may not be able to fathom God's reasons for choosing, and they are reasons He alone knows and answers to, but God's choices are not capricious”.