

JANUARY 11

Genesis 24:52-26:16

This section gives a lot of historical information in summary form, and it's not all in order. This history is meant to convey background and reasons for events that Israel in the wilderness would need to understand in becoming a nation and in fulfilling its ministry as God's ambassador. Note in all of this, that the promise, which is a promise of redemption, is still present; but its meaning is certainly being forgotten. That's just like what we do. We make churches and do programs, and somehow lose what the main goal of every disciple and church is on this planet: love Christ, reach the lost, make disciples, who make disciples.

Genesis 24:52-67

Vs. 52-61 Note the worshipful attitude of Abe's servant. Note also that as Rebekah's family blesses her, there may be a sense in which they knew something of the promise to Abraham. On the other hand, this could have been just the normal wedding blessing you gave a woman.

Vs. 62-67 Isaac was heir to this vast community that had grown up around Abraham. He wasn't just wandering around the countryside. He was probably visiting one of the places they were grazing livestock. All we have recorded is the meeting of Isaac and Rebekah and the account is very condensed. The account almost makes it look like he saw her, took her into a tent that was standing there and they consummated the relationship. Not so. He put her in Sarah's tent, not his. This was a place of privilege in the community. They would have a new leading lady. He "took her," that is, accepted the arrangement of being married to her. He could have refused. They would have been separated before they were married and there would have been a formal wedding. And apparently there was enough time in all of this for Isaac to fall in love.

V. 62 My German one-year Bible helped me here. Unless you have a great memory you will not remember that Beer-lahai-roi is from Genesis 16:14. That is where the angel of the Lord met Hagar when she ran from Sarah. The full name is "The Living God, who sees me." It is interesting to me that Isaac was here. Maybe he was seeking God. In Genesis 25:11, after Abraham's death, this will become home for Isaac.

Genesis 25

Vs. 1-6 There are a couple of names here that are notable, one in particular. Can you figure out which one? If you read year after year, this people will come up on your radar on a couple of important occasions as enemies of Israel. You can figure, if one of these men has his genealogy shared, it is because God/Moses wants the people to know where that particular nation came from. Moses hid in their land. His wife was one of these people, and this people figures big in the wilderness wanderings of Israel from Numbers 22-31. Gideon even hid from them.

Very realistically, Abraham's life and relationship to Sarah wasn't some romanticized fiction. When she died, Abe grieved, but still needed a wife to be complete.

Vs. 7-18 This section is narrative housekeeping in order to get to the continuation of the progress of the promise of redemption.

First, Abraham's death is recorded and he passes out of the narrative. So, reading his age, why is this interesting that you hear no more of Abraham? Obviously, you might say, because the story is no longer about him. But his age is an interesting factor and the absence of any mention of him is very strange.

Then, Ishmael's lineage is presented and he is gone.

Vs. 19-26 Look how old Isaac was when they were married. He was no spring chicken. Then, the Lord made it difficult for Rebekah to have children, thereby making their births and the progress

of the promise more significant for them. How long did God make them wait? It's there in the text. Can you imagine waiting that long for a child and knowing that the continuation of the promise was dependent on having kids?

So, we are only this far in the Bible. You might conclude that "waiting" is not a strange thing in God's leading. God forges faith in waiting. So many people wash out as disciples for this reason alone.

Isaac prays and God hears. Immediately at their births, God overturns the normal process of blessing and inheritance by stating that the elder will serve the younger. Note that the Lord states this to Rebekah in answer to her seeking. She should have rested in this promise/prediction to her. Instead, she'll try to work God's plan in her own cleverness.

Living in the reality of the promise could have been constantly communicated because of how God had arranged things. From Abraham to Adam there are only three/four relationships. Abe might have known Noah and certainly could have known Seth. Seth knew many of the men behind him and almost all of those men had known Adam.

Given the age of Abraham, how old would the twins have been at his death? How long would Abe have known Rebekah before she had the kids? All of this is to say that Abraham, firsthand, would have passed on the importance of the promises to Rebekah and the two boys.

As disciples, our relationship to Christ, to reaching the lost, and to making disciples, who make disciples has to be firsthand. Jesus said that a disciple is not above his teacher. As Howard Hendricks used to say, "You cannot impart, what you do not possess." If we are distracted by life and not living the reality of being close to the Lord, in His Word, reaching out and making disciples, then what hope do we have of passing that on? If it is theoretical to us, it will be theoretical to those we influence also.

Vs. 27-34 Losing the clear focus of what the promise meant might explain what was happening in the family and between the two boys. This fractured family was not healthy. It will get exponentially worse with Jacob.

This contest between the boys was the result of the parents. Jacob was a rat, but you might say at least he was a rat who had faith in the promise. And Esau was worse, despising the reality of the promise. God is simply gracious here, furthering His will and plan in spite of ungodly behavior. Later, Jacob, who at least had faith, will pay dearly for this. The fact that there is no "justice" here doesn't mean it won't come. As a friend of mine once told me, "God doesn't always pay on Friday."

As disciples, to presume on God's grace, to further our own agenda and desires, even if it is "for God," is a very dangerous thing. Jacob didn't escape and Solomon didn't escape. We have a Master and we have to reflect Him, submitting to His will, His way and His timing. I know I've hurt myself forgetting this. God is sovereign, and also, He's the boss. It's His work, to be done His way.

Ironically, the Lord has already told Rebekah that Jacob would be the receiver of the promise. In faith, all of this and what follows was unnecessary.

Genesis 26

Vs. 1-16 I'm assuming Abraham was dead by this time, otherwise Abimelech would have come to Abe as the head of the clan, especially since he already made a covenant with Abe.

Isaac receives confirmation of the promise directly from God, but like his father, he fears for his life in Gerar and does the "she's my sister" thing. Although for Isaac, this was a total, 100% lie. Treasure in earthen vessels?

Canaan was a large, long land, north to south; and since Abe and Isaac were herdsmen, they would always have been looking for fresh land to use for grazing. Overgrazing ruins the land, so they would have had to move from time to time. By this time, Abimelech may not have had dealings with Abe for years and didn't know Isaac. If Abe was dead here, you can figure out how many years ago it was that Abimelech probably made that covenant with Abraham. Apparently Abimelech was a much younger man at the time of that covenant, and although older now, still had an eye for good-looking women to add to his harem. So he looks out the window and sees this new guy with his sister, and they were doing what????

The ESV falls down in v. 8. I like the word the KJV uses, "sporting." Were they playing badminton? Throwing a football? The RSV is to the point, "fondling." There was no mistake that Isaac was doing that which only a husband ought to do; and the poor guy was so desperate, he was doing it in the open, maybe hidden, but not hidden enough.

V. 11 So again Abimelech warns his people to stay away from these pesky Hebrews. Both Abe and Isaac brought these people into jeopardy because of their lack of faith in God's promise and provision. As disciples, we can do the same. Everything we do following Jesus in the harvest is so much better if we will just trust.

Vs. 12-16 Isaac was rich, and everyone knew it was the Lord who had done this for him. They were jealous, but also afraid of him. Remember, this is that same thing that happened after Abraham's stay with Abimelech. By this time, Isaac's holdings might have necessitated a community of thousands, making him vaster, richer and more powerful than many of the neighboring cities. This section should have really been included in tomorrow's reading. Abimelech will again make a covenant. This time he makes it with Isaac.

Matthew 8:18-34

It is hard to understand the method behind Matthew's writing here, but he is focused on showing that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah. Matthew didn't always include events chronologically. In this section, he was more focused on showing that only a heart of faith could understand that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

Vs. 18-22 As a result of His rising popularity and His miracles, many wanted to follow Jesus, but were not willing to pay the price of commitment. In these two examples of half-heartedness, what do you think kept these people from following Jesus? This is the same today. It is easy to go to church, but it is difficult to follow Christ. In following Christ in the harvest, issues of security and our true love and allegiance have to be set to rest. He is our security and our first and greatest love. He is the mission of each disciple and every church. This is the reason you don't recruit every warm body to become a part of a discipleship cell or project. Jesus Himself brought "would be" followers to the place of understanding the cost. Popularity attracts lots of warm bodies, but not always devoted followers of Christ.

Vs. 23-27 Luke lets us know that Jesus had just had a very long day of teaching and was exhausted. The Father and Spirit must have designed this little voyage on the lake. The disciples' words to Jesus are, first, an accusation, and second, a scream; that is, "Master, wake up, don't you care? Master, master, save, Lord, we're perishing." They were terrified of dying. They marveled, but Luke says they were now afraid of Him.

Just like Abe and Isaac and Rebekah above, if God says something, you can rest easy. Jesus told the disciples to go to the other side, with Him, the Creator of the universe, in the boat. He didn't say, "Let's go to the middle and die." As disciples we are no better. In order for Him to impress on our hearts His ability to help, to save and guide and care for us, He has to take us out on the sea, to the very brink of disaster. How else, like the psalmist, do we learn to trust and sing His praise for His power and deliverance? We are no better than the Twelve and we learn the same way.

So, Matthew shows that Jesus, as Messiah, was the Ruler over nature.

Vs. 28-34 Matthew now shows Jesus' rule over the spiritual world.

I imagine the poor disciples were relieved to finally be safe on land. Then they see these two naked, crazy guys start running at them from the tombs. The demons recognized Jesus as God the Son in a human body. Matthew's purpose here is only to show Jesus' authority over the spiritual realm. Isn't it interesting that the people's reaction was to beg Jesus to go away? In Luke, one of the two healed men desired to follow Jesus.

Psalm 10:1-15

V. 1 I wonder what this "song" would have sounded like. Was the first note a scream? In any case, the events behind David's writing must have been pretty distressing.

Vs. 2-4 In the time David ran from Saul, it must have seemed like Saul could do whatever he wanted with no result. Saul destroyed a family and city of priests and God did nothing. Even though Saul "believed" in God, his actions showed what he really felt about God's existence and presence.

Vs. 5-11 This section expresses how this "practical atheist's" actions are guided by his thought that God doesn't care or see. You can follow each thought by underlining *he* and *his*.

Vs. 12-15 David knew that God's justice would roll. He might not have understood God's waiting and he might have been pressured by the circumstances, but David knew that God would be true to His Word and call these men to account.

Understanding why God waits and does not apply instant justice in this world is something that a fully trained disciple should be able to deal with and explain. It doesn't feel good, but we know it is part of this history on earth. We see what happened to Jesus Himself, and the Father allowed it. We see what happened to different apostles in Acts, and God allowed it. The psalm itself shows that God is understanding and compassionate with our emotional distress and desperate wondering. He wants His followers to trust Him and patiently wait. We, of all people, should know that the earth is not a good place and that this is only a small, tragic portion of the whole of reality.

Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. (Rev. 14:12)

Proverbs 3:7-8

Great words for us as disciples. If you "turn this around," it means that if you think you have it, if you only "so-so" *fear the Lord* and if you play fast and loose with things, your flesh will wither and your bones will get tired.

I think I've had days and months like that. It is time to get wise, as a disciple of Jesus.