

JANUARY 12

So how is faith shown? Abraham showed great, visible faith, seen particularly in 25 years of waiting for God to give him and Sarah a child. If all we knew about Abe was condensed, we might only have a couple weeks of recorded action. Abraham was given a promise that required believing, obeying, moving to a strange land, and living completely in God's hands. That was great faith and I have to believe that Abraham knew that the promise he was living for was connected to the promise given to Adam and Eve, the promise that a deliverer would be born.

Then you have Isaac, who inherited everything, the promise, the cattle, and the wealth. He doesn't seem to do much. In a way, this might be a picture of many churches and believers today, who kind of grasp what we are living for and are supposed to do, but are lost in daily life in the land. They have been given their local church, but didn't have to strain to see it come into being. Even with Isaac, living a sort of drifting life, there is still faith and still a clinging to the importance of the promise. Things work best, of course, if we as disciples keep the focus sharp on our purpose here, following Jesus in the harvest.

Genesis 26:17-27:46

Genesis 26:17-35

We have two events that show that Isaac was a man of faith. It might have been faith with a fuzzy focus, but it was still tough faith.

Vs. 17-25 Isaac had a very large camp. He didn't have to be this meek, but it was his strength in faith. He had been promised the land, but he understood that God would lead him to a place of peace. He could have destroyed these other herdsmen, but in faith he waited for God's leading.

Vs. 26-33 Notice here that Abimelech and his advisors take the initiative to make this covenant. They realized with the abuse Isaac was taking, if he got mad, he could wage a war (especially with God's help) that would defeat Abimelech and take everything.

Isaac's faith is seen in his strength/meekness, waiting for God to fulfill the promise without taking the matter into his own hand and defeating the opposition that rose against him. The land was his by promise, but he would wait on God and suffer abuse until God Himself fulfilled the promise.

Vs. 34-35 Esau will appear as a tragic figure; but in all, I don't think he was any worse, as a person, than Jacob. Here, the mention is made of something he did to make life miserable for Isaac and Rebekah. It is setting up what comes later when Rebekah suggests sending Jacob to Laban. It is very probable that if Isaac had sat down with Esau and told him not to marry Canaanite women, he would have complied. Even at 40, Esau was a daddy's boy. This little scene might suggest the effect that living among the Canaanites was having on the family.

Just as an interesting memo here, can you figure out how old Isaac was at this point? This will add a lot of depth to the following events, especially when you see how old Isaac is when he dies. Sometimes people get old in their heads long before they die. Imagine a tombstone that read, "Died 1988 -- Buried 2068."

Genesis 27

Vs. 1-46 This story is pretty straightforward and is sad from one end to the other. Of note here for us as disciples is that none of this anxiousness and trickery was necessary. Ironically, it brought great and tragic results to Jacob. Even when Jacob and Esau meet again later, notice which one of them has the ulcer. A loving and sovereign God, having made His promises to us, can fulfill His will without us having to help with lies and deceit. God is utterly faithful and will fulfill His promises, but He is never mocked.

Isaac must have been having some poor health issues and thought that death was near. This might have happened shortly after Esau married the Canaanite cities and therefore the time marker regarding Esau's marriages is given and is important to notice. Isaac was a young man of _____. Ironically, he would live another 80 years! How sad that he didn't talk to God more and have a better grasp of God's working. He was right in wanting to pass on the blessing, that is, the blessings of the promise of God to Abraham. As the firstborn, it was natural to have this go to Esau.

Vs. 18-26 The lying here numbs the mind.

V. 29 This is the actual part of the blessing that God gave to Abraham.

Vs. 34-40 Esau's grief does show some faith, though too late. He must have believed that he had truly lost something.

There is no perfection on earth and all families struggle, but if we have to struggle, we at least have to struggle well. Isaac and Rebekah do not appear to have made the promise a focus of their lives and family. The promise of redemption was lost in the dust of living life on earth. They don't appear to have tried to unite the boys in the specialness of what God was doing in the world and through their family. Reading this, I can't help but feel bad. I think they were, like so many Christians and would-be disciples, drifting, content with daily life, and lost on earth.

Vs. 41-46 Although we don't know a lot about Rebekah, we see that she was decisive and manipulative. Verse 46 is an example of her work. She is setting up Isaac to send Jacob away without telling him the real reason. When we meet Laban in the next chapters, we'll see that he was the Duke of "manipulative and cunning." Jacob would more than meet his match in Uncle Laban. Unknown to Rebekah, in doing this, she would never again see Jacob.

Bill Shakespeare said, "Oh what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive." True. But I like what Jesus said, *Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him...If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.* (John 14:21-23)

Matthew 9:1-17

This is a great portion for disciples.

Vs. 1-8 In healing the paralytic, Jesus faced off against the religious "right" and made a bold claim. The claim was not only that He could forgive sins, but that He was the Son of Man. Jesus was saying He was the King who would reign eternally, from Daniel 7. Even under pressure, Jesus showed compassion to the paralytic and his friends. This event has an interesting link to what happens later in John 5. If you notice the words Jesus uses here, they are repeated by the Pharisees in John 5:12. There is great significance in the question the Pharisees ask the healed man, knowing that the healing of the paralytic happened just before the events of John 5.

As disciples, we have to speak the truth. Jesus did not change God's message to attract the masses or to please the religious establishment. His focus was pleasing the Father and doing His will. That makes you think about all the lying going on in the OT portion for today.

V. 9 I think this shows the cause-effect dynamic of disciple-making. If you are authentic and firm on the truth and are willing to accept all men in the love of Christ, people get brave and follow. So how did what happened in 9:1-8 make what happened down the street, a couple days later in 9:9, possible? What finally gave Matthew this resolve? Realize too, that Jesus had done other miracles and had taught in Capernaum, so Matthew's decision was a process. Matthew had already heard Jesus teach and had seen His miracles. Now, when Matthew saw Jesus was willing to stand against the religious leaders who had scorned men like Matthew, he knew he would be accepted. He immediately dropped everything and followed.

Vs. 10-13 Why did Matthew have this party? (Luke 5:29) What was he trying to accomplish? He was a new disciple, wanting to see his friends get saved and become disciples.

Notice that the Pharisees didn't go to Jesus. They tried to divide the disciples against Him. Verses 12-13 are a key statement to the Pharisees that Jesus will refer to again. I remember reading this after I began following Jesus, and catching the irony in v. 13. No one was righteous before God. The Pharisees were the sick ones because they couldn't see their own need.

So, Jesus is in trouble, first with the Pharisees, and then with John's disciples.

Vs. 14-17 I'm not sure, but I think this friction with John's disciples was helped along by the Pharisees. But notice that Jesus was very gentle in dealing with John's followers. If you look at the parallel passage in Luke 5, you will see that Jesus' first ever use of a parable was in gently trying to give an explanation to teach John's disciples. Unlike Andrew and that other guy (probably the apostle John), not all of John the Baptist's disciples followed Jesus. Jesus is smoothing this situation by using the illustration of the bridegroom that John himself had used with his disciples in John 3:26-36.

It's hard to say how deep this division went between Jesus' and John's disciples. As you can see reading the OT and Matthew, we don't always get a lot of information. Here is some interesting trivia. The last recorded use of tongues in Acts is in Acts 19:6. There, Paul finds a group of John's disciples who were still holding to John's message and didn't know about Jesus' resurrection or the coming of the Spirit. Tongues is always used as a sign to bring unity to the Jews, showing them that God was reaching out beyond them with the gospel. The gift was necessary to break down Jewish prejudice and to bring unity, as in Acts 11. It is significant that this gift was used with John's followers, all of whom would have been Jews.

V. 17 There is great wisdom in allowing the old wineskins to be filled with old wine only, because some "skins" (churches) prefer remaining as they have always been. Mature leaders should encourage the planting of new churches or give younger people their own service. I understand the issues, but Jesus gave this wisdom, not some church growth expert.

Psalm 10:16-18

These are great words in this psalm. It is almost a summary of the book of Revelation. And, Jacob and Rebekah would have benefited from holding this confidence in a quiet heart.

When this history is over, all the nations will be gone and the tyrants will be removed. All that will remain is the Lord, who will show steadfast love, faithfulness and kindness to those who love Him.

Proverbs 3:9-10

These are words to be held and heeded, but not abused by those following Christ. Your Father knows what you need and will reward you, though not always with gift cards and cash. Toward the end of His ministry, when Jesus was telling His disciples to ask, seek and knock, the reward He promised them was the Holy Spirit. Who of us is really wise enough to tell God what we need? But we always need the Spirit's peace, joy and guidance. I'll take those any day over an iPad, a new car or a full bank account.