

10 The Life of Isaac

This lesson looks at a man who lived about 4000 years ago. Isaac was the son of that famous man, Abraham. Abraham was the start of the Jewish people. Like Abraham, the life of Isaac is found in the first book of the Bible: Genesis. If you are not sure who Abraham was, see the previous lessons "Abraham - Father of the Jewish People" and "God's Promises to Abraham".

God promises Abraham a son

Abraham and his wife Sarah were very old; they had no children. God had promised that many people would come from Abraham's family. But as the years went by, it seemed that God had forgotten His promise. God had not forgotten!

God Keeps His Promise

Three messengers from God, called angels, told Abraham and Sarah that they would soon have a baby boy. This baby was called Isaac, a Hebrew word which means "laughter". Sarah was 90 years old. Read Genesis 21:1-7. Even in those times when people lived longer than they do today, it was amazing. It was a miracle. Abraham and Sarah had to learn that God will keep His promises. We must learn the same thing!

Isaac was to be the forefather of God's chosen people Israel (Isaiah 44:1-5) and of His own son Jesus. If we follow Jesus, we can be Abraham's children and receive all the good things God promised. Galatians 3:6-9, 3:26-29 tells us more.

Isaac grew up as Abraham's special son, as we would expect. But one day God tested Abraham to see how strong his faith in God was. God told Abraham to offer Isaac as a human sacrifice! God never intended that Isaac should be harmed, but He was teaching Abraham and us a lesson. Jesus was the special Son of God, and many years later, Jesus was sacrificed for all the evil things that men and women have done. Jesus gave up his life to obey God. Many years earlier, Isaac and his father

were ready to do the same thing - to obey every command of God. You can read about this in Genesis 22:1-19. For a summary, you can read Hebrews 11:17-19.

Isaac marries Rebekah

In those times, marriages were "arranged", that is, parents chose whom their children would marry. Abraham knew that the people living in the land at that time did not worship God in heaven - they worshipped statues and idols. So Abraham sent a servant back to Abraham's family in Haran, and found a girl there who would marry Isaac. Her name was Rebekah, a very kind and loving woman. If you want to read the full story, you can look at Genesis 24. We read that Isaac loved Rebekah very deeply (see Genesis 26:7-8). In those days, it was common for a rich man like Isaac to have two or more wives, as his father had done. But Isaac was different. He had seen the trouble that came to his father, and so he wanted a simple life. Isaac and Rebekah wanted to live in peace.

Isaac and Rebekah lived in tents in the land of Canaan. They moved about to find grass to feed their sheep, goats and cattle. God had promised the land to Abraham and his children. But Isaac did not own any of it.

Two times, some of the people in Canaan took by force the water wells that Isaac had dug. But Isaac did not fight back - he moved somewhere else and dug again for water. See Genesis 26:17-25. Jesus taught that we must not fight anyone, but keep away from violence (Matthew 5:39).

Children for Isaac

Isaac and Rebekah had been married for some time, but they had no children. Would God keep His promise? Isaac knew that God would keep His promise, because he himself was a promise! Isaac prayed to God, and finally Rebekah fell pregnant.

It was a difficult pregnancy - there seemed to be a fight in her womb! What did she do? She prayed to God about the problem, and God answered her. She would have twin boys! But there was more! The words of God were a prophecy. God was telling Rebekah what would happen in the future. The younger son would be God's chosen one, not the older. In those times, the oldest son would receive all his father's property when his father died. But God said it would be different, and God's rule continued for many years in the family of Abraham, as we shall see in future lessons.

Like Rebekah, we should pray to God and ask for His help when we have trouble. God loves us and cares for us - He is our Father.

Look at Genesis 25:24-26 and read about the birth of Rebekah's twin boys. The older, by a few minutes, was Esau, the younger was Jacob. From the day they were born, there was trouble between them. Although Isaac was a peaceful person, his sons were not!

Esau and Jacob

Esau and Jacob were very different kinds of people. Esau liked to be free outdoors - he was a good hunter who could catch wild deer. Isaac loved Esau the most because he liked the special meals that Esau made. Jacob was a quiet person who liked to stay indoors, and Rebekah loved Jacob the most. He worked around the tents where the family and all the servants lived. Jacob must have been a good manager of people. You can read about the boys in Genesis 25:27-28.

The Birthright and the Blessing

These were the two things that Esau, as the older son, should have received. The Birthright meant that the oldest son received all his father's wealth when his father died. The Blessing meant that the older son received God's promises to Abraham, as Isaac had received. The prophecy had said that the younger brother would be greater than the older.

But how would this happen? God would have made it happen, if Jacob had waited. But he did not. You can read how Jacob took the birthright from Esau in Genesis 25:29-34. We can see that Esau did not take the birthright seriously.

The Blessing was far greater, and this was what Jacob really wanted from Esau. It seems that Jacob loved the God of his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham more than Esau did.

Rebekah, Jacob's mother, also wanted her favourite son to receive the Blessing. The prophecy from God said this would happen, and God would have made sure it did. But Jacob and Rebekah decided that they would do it themselves.

Isaac was now an old man, and he was blind. Rebekah and Jacob tricked Isaac into giving the Blessing to Jacob. Jacob put on Esau's clothes, and covered his smooth skin with goat hair, so that he would feel like hairy Esau. The trick worked, and Jacob received the Blessing, and Esau missed out.

But the entire family paid a heavy price. From that day there was hatred and anger in the family. Esau was furious and wanted to kill Jacob. So Jacob had to leave the family and travel far away to his mother's family in Paddan Aram (Haran). Esau would have hated his father and mother, and in time, he moved away.

What happened to Jacob? He moved to Paddan Aram, and we shall look at him in another lesson. But as he had tricked his father Isaac, so Jacob's sons deceived Jacob many years later. We find that Jacob's life was mostly sad and difficult.

Conclusion

Isaac lived 180 years, and we presume he was blind for many years. While he had tried to live in peace, he must have been sad to see the trouble between his sons. But we can look at Isaac and his wife Rebekah and see a couple who believed the promises made to Abraham, and did their part to be faithful servants of God. Please read Hebrews 11:20.