Lesson 4 Study Guide: Isaac’s Family: Bearing God’s Blessing by Faith

God began his redemptive history by calling one man, Abraham to be a source of blessing to the world. According to his covenant promise, God continued this history through Abraham’s son Isaac. In this way God became the God of Abraham, and would also become the God of Isaac. God himself established Isaac’s marriage with Rebekah, a woman of faith.

At first glance Isaac and Rebekah might seem like perfect role models, but upon closer examination we find that they too had weaknesses and faults, which we should not emulate. However, God was working in and through them to accomplish his own purpose. In their story we learn how God could use them: they each had a personal prayer life and personal obedience to God (25:21,22; 26:6). Also, they did not fight with envious people who harassed them, but instead, persistently held onto God’s promise and kept digging wells (26:17–22). Finally, at a moment of weakness when Isaac was about to make a serious mistake, Rebekah helped him to pass on God’s blessing successfully to Jacob, according to God’s will (27:1–28:5). In spite of their weaknesses, God used them as ancestors of faith when they lived by faith in God. Tragically, in human history so many people failed after being blessed by God. The greatness of Isaac and Rebekah is that they bore God’s blessing by faith.

\* Prayer life and waiting on the Lord

After marrying Rebekah by faith, Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death (24:67). But that was not the end of the story; it was only the beginning. In his deep love God began to train this couple through childlessness (25:21a). The training continued not for a few months or even for several years, but for twenty years. In attempting to solve this problem Isaac did not fall into the mistake of his father and take a concubine (1Pe1:18); he quietly and patiently prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife. Here we learn that faith is learning to wait on God (Ps27:14; 37:7a). Also, we learn from Isaac’s patient prayer for his wife about how to love (1Co13:4a).

After twenty years the Lord opened Rebekah’s womb. When she began to experience some unusual difficulty with the pregnancy, she also came to God personally to inquire of him in prayer (25:22). In some families only the wife or only the husband takes time to pray, but in this case both spouses had a personal prayer life. During her prayer, God revealed his will to Rebekah regarding the children within her. Through personal prayer they each learned to depend on God, and they each could grow in knowing God and his will. Prayer became the foundation of their being able to bear God’s blessing.

\* Personal obedience to God

Though God wanted to bless Isaac because of Abraham’s obedient faith, his blessing could not come automatically; God required Isaac also to obey his calling to live by faith by personally accepting God’s promises and following his direction (26:1–6). Isaac could not presume upon his father’s faith (Jn1:13); he had to make his own decision. Initially Isaac wanted to leave, but despite the famine in the land, he stayed in Gerar in obedience to God. God blessed Isaac a hundredfold unusually during that time of famine (26:12). Then the people of the land became jealous and hostile. Still, Isaac continued to obey and trust God by staying there and living among them. His personal obedience to God’s word became another part of the foundation of his bearing God’s blessing.

\* Not fighting with people; digging wells in dependence on God

For Isaac, bearing God’s blessing did not come easily. To do so, he could not fight with people humanly; he had to fight spiritually. During the famine, water was crucial to survival. When Isaac tried to reuse the wells his father had dug, the Philistines stopped them up, filling them with earth (26:15). Out of envy they asked him to move away. Whenever God blesses, there is a tendency for people to start fighting. But Isaac did not fight; he moved into the valley, reopened more of his father’s wells and dug some new wells. But the Philistines came and demanded them. Isaac yielded each time, but he did not give up; he dug new wells, holding only onto God’s promise to bless him. He also depended on God to lead him to a place where he could flourish (26:22). When his desperate struggle for water was finally resolved, God appeared to Isaac personally and confirmed his covenant promises. Then Isaac built an altar to God and called on his name (26:25). His faith grew, and he found that God was his real security and source of victory.

Isaac’s family was weak and vulnerable, but they struggled to live by faith in God among ungodly, hostile people. Because of this, God continued to bless them wherever they went. Eventually, it became clear to the people around them that God himself was with them, and they began to respect them (26:29). God himself blesses his people when they live by faith persistently, refusing to fight with people. He makes them a good influence and gives them victory over the world (1Jn5:4–5), and thus, they can render glory to God. What are the wells we should be digging in our time of spiritual famine? (Am8:11–13) They are the wells of hearing the words of God. God gives us spiritual victory when we focus on digging out his word.

\* Passing on God’s blessing

God’s blessings are so wonderful to enjoy, but we human beings have a tendency to squander them without any regard for the future. God’s blessings should be passed on to the next generation, and to the right person. This is really not easy to do, and Isaac almost failed miserably in this regard. But with his wife Rebekah’s help, Isaac passed on God’s blessing to the right person, Jacob. The couple’s seeming lack of communication and Rebekah’s deception of Isaac is not at all exemplary or normative for Christian couples. But one thing is clear: in the end Isaac and Rebekah followed God’s will by giving the blessing to Jacob (25:23).

And even in the midst of their failings, we have some good things to learn from them. Rebekah exemplified faithfulness to God’s revealed will to her, as well as courage, wisdom and self-sacrifice. And after being deceived, Isaac woke up spiritually (27:33) and humbly recognized that Rebekah was right, and so he did not rebuke Rebekah for her deception, and he intentionally blessed Jacob with the blessing given to Abraham (28:1–4). In all these things God was working to accomplish his own sovereign purposes (Ro9:11–13).

In this particular story God would pass on his covenant blessing to only one of the two sons, the one God had chosen. But this does not mean that God limits his blessings in Christian families to only one child. We do, however, find in Isaac and Rebekah’s story some important spiritual principles. God is sovereign in his redemptive work and history and in his choosing of people. So in our families and ministries, we need to surrender our human expectations and attachments and follow what God is doing. And in Rebekah’s coaching of Jacob we can learn the importance of teaching our children and the young people in our ministries to value their spiritual heritage. May God help us to bear and pass on his blessings successfully to the next generation.