

What we are after

Although we are in a study of the life of Jacob (and although telling us the story of his life would appear to be the thrust of Genesis 25-35), we take a short break and turn our attention to Isaac, Jacob's father. It would seem that the inspired author intends to leave us with a picture of Isaac, to serve as a contrast to the stories of his two sons—Esau and Jacob—that we are following.

Talking to your group

There are a number of “clues” in the text itself that help us understand why these stories about Isaac fall in the midst of the accounting of Jacob's life.

Genesis 25:34 and 26:34-35 form something of “bookends” for this chapter; and both highlight for us something of the troubled heart and life of Esau. Genesis 26:1 notes that the famine (we are about to read about) is similar to the one that Abraham (Isaac's father) had faced. These kinds of clues suggest that the author intends for us to see Isaac as a contrast—both to his father and also to his sons.

You may want to prepare for your group discussion by reviewing the events in Abraham's life that parallel what Isaac encounters. (You can find the parallels in Genesis 12:10-20, regarding the famine, and Genesis 21:22-34, for Abraham's treaty with Abimelech, the father of the Abimelech mentioned in our account of Isaac.)

Clearly, there are distinct parallels. Both Isaac and Abraham faced serious famine. Both sought to leave the land to provide for their own. But Isaac responded differently than his father did. Why?

When both are concerned about their safety because of the

“In the face of the impending famine, the Lord promised to be with Isaac, to bless him, and to bring about all that had been promised to his father, Abraham.”
John Sailhammer

beauty of their respective wives, they both resort to the same subterfuge. But Isaac's wife was not in quite the same jeopardy as Abraham's, and the way the deception plays out is a bit different. Apparently, Isaac was not in as serious a situation as Abraham had been (seeing as his wife had not been *taken* by another man as Sarah had been). Nevertheless, Isaac still followed his father's bad example.

As the chapter draws to a close, Isaac strikes an agreement with Abimelech—apparently the son of the man with whom Abraham had also struck an agreement. So, throughout the chapter, strong parallels between Abraham and Isaac can be found.

What are we to make of all of this? Why interject this account into the story of Jacob? Clearly it is to drive home a point. And just what might that point be?

A couple of things come to mind:

1. Isaac will have to step into a life of faith in God for himself. Although Abraham had a rich, faith-based friendship with God, Isaac still needs to establish his own.
2. Isaac apparently has learned from his father—some good and some not-so-good. No one develops a life of faith on his or her own. We all model after others. No one is entirely original.
3. God reiterates His promises to Isaac. In spite of the trouble that we can anticipate will come through Jacob and Esau (having been introduced to these two troubling young men in Genesis 25), it is an important reassurance to hear God reaffirm His plans and promises. And, in spite of the somewhat shaky walk Isaac is carrying out with God, because of grace and because of God's faithfulness, Isaac can rest in God.

These are some of the ideas that can be drawn out in your discussion about the portrait of Isaac.

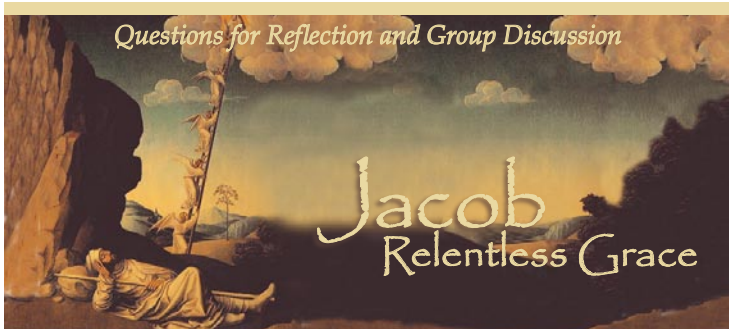
How can we take this home?

There is not a one-size-fits-all application to be drawn from this account. The big ideas anchored to this text have to do with coming into one's own “first-hand faith” and the influence of others on our grasp of the life of faith. Hopefully, those big ideas will generate some fruitful discussion about owning our own faith and being intentional about finding the best possible examples of what it means to walk in faith in relationship with the God of all grace.

“The fundamental issue at stake here is a familiar one: Can God be trusted to fulfill His promises and protect Isaac? God had promised to be with Isaac, giving him offspring, lands, and blessing (Gen. 26:4). So there was no question as to God's commitment to him. The question was whether Isaac has the faith to believe God and let the chips fall where they may or adopt a strategy to give God a little assistance.”
Iain Duguid

Questions for Reflection and Group Discussion

Jacob
Relentless Grace



June 22, 2008

Genesis 26:1-35

Thinking . . .

Who has influenced your understanding of what it means to walk in a relationship with God?

What do you think has made the greatest contribution to your life in faith?

Reflecting . . .

Keep the idea of influence in mind as you read Genesis 26 and the snapshots it provides us on the life of Isaac, Abraham's son.

What patterns of behavior or thinking do you see in Isaac that could also be seen in his father Abraham?

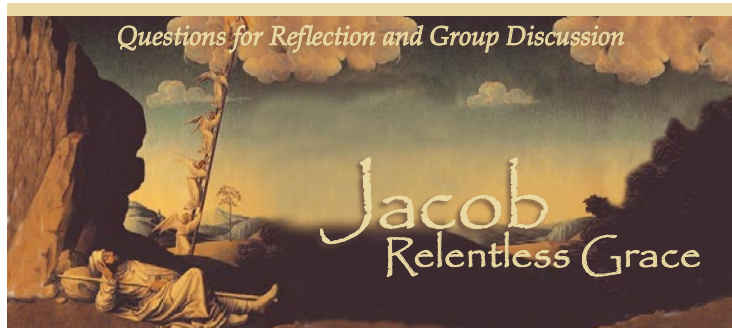
Where do you see Isaac acting or living differently than his father?

What indications do you have, from the accounts in Genesis 26, that Isaac has embraced faith in God for himself?

Responding . . .

No matter how good (or how poor) one's spiritual upbringing might have been, every individual has to come to embrace a "first-hand-faith" in God. Even Isaac had to step into a life of faith for himself. What insights has the discussion provided you for pressing forward in your own journey in faith with God?

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