

For Better or For Worse - Lessons From Old Testament Couples

Isaac and Rebekah: Rearing Rivals

Lesson #3 for July 21, 2007

Scriptures: Genesis 24-28.

1. What were Satan and his angels doing during the time of Abraham and Isaac? The population of the world was rapidly expanding; apparently, almost all the people were pagans and blatant sinners. Does that suggest that Satan's main focus for that period of time was on this one family of Abraham and Isaac? How do you think you and your family would stand up if Satan's main focus was on you?
2. Compare the covenants given to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) and to Isaac (Genesis 26:4) and to Jacob. (Genesis 28:3,4,13-15) Were there any significant differences in the three promises?
3. Both Abraham and Isaac took steps to assure that their "covenant sons" would get wives from among their relatives back in Haran. Was that an attempt to maintain racial purity? That is what the Nazis were trying to accomplish! Hindus also make similar efforts so as to preserve caste distinctions. But what happened in the next generation? Where did the sons of Jacob find wives?
4. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived virtually all their lives in tents. When they moved to a new area, they would build an altar, pitch their tents, and dig a well. (Genesis 26:25) Why do you suppose they did not try to purchase property and settle down? Weren't they wealthy enough? Did God want them to continue that type of nomadic life?
5. Much of the story of Sarah and Abraham was repeated in the experiences of Rebekah and Isaac. 1) Both Abraham and Isaac claimed the same covenant promises from God. 2) Both Sarah and Rebekah were barren for many years and then gave birth only once and both had sons. 3) Both families lived as nomadic shepherds and had disputes over property and wells and owned no real property except a burial plot! 4) Both families traveled to a foreign country to survive the ravages of famine. 5) Both Abraham and Isaac had beautiful wives, and each felt it was necessary to lie—claiming that their wives were their sisters—in order to protect their own lives. 6) Both families had serious sibling rivalries that resulted in one son being sent away!
6. When the names of Isaac and Rebekah are mentioned, what sticks out in your mind? Even though Abraham was married twice—and had a concubine between the two wives—and even though Jacob ended up with four wives, Isaac remained monogamous. Why do you think Isaac prayed to God to give his wife children rather than seeking a second wife? Did Abraham ever do that?
7. Abraham was 140 years old and Sarah had already been dead for three years when Abraham began to arrange a marriage for Isaac who was 40. Why do you think he waited so long? Esau and Jacob also apparently married in their 40s. Was that a typical age for young men to marry at that time?
8. Since Sarah had apparently been dead for about three years before the search for a wife for Isaac took place, who was caring for the home of Abraham and Isaac? Was it Eleazar? Did Isaac spend a lot of time traveling while caring for his father's flocks?

9. Why do you think Isaac waited patiently until the age of 40 for his father to make plans for his marriage? Was he afraid to think for himself? What do you think Isaac thought about the plan to send Eleazar to Haran to find a wife for him? Did he request permission to go himself? Did he understand what the mission was about? Clearly, Eleazar was a godly man and did whatever he could to find an excellent wife for Isaac.
10. How did Abraham know that there might be appropriate women back in Haran for Isaac to marry? How do you suppose Abraham learned about the family of Nahor back in Haran? (Genesis 22:20) Did God instruct Abraham step-by-step through this whole process?
11. Was Isaac willing to leave things in God's hands in this case? Or was this God's plan? How often do we get into trouble by trying to rush ahead without patiently waiting for God's guidance?
12. Isaac and Abraham had already seen what happened when members of the family married "outside the faith"! Had Hagar fully espoused the Abrahamic covenant? What do we know about Lot's wife? Where were Lot and his daughters at this time? Did Isaac consider marrying one of them?
13. Given what Eleazar discovered about Rebekah from a one-day visit, what characteristics do you think qualified her to be a good wife and mother? Is there any evidence that Isaac was ever disappointed by her?
14. How would you compare the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah with a typical Adventist marriage in your community? Was it better, about the same as, or worse?
15. After Isaac and Rebekah had waited about 20 years, Isaac began to pray to God for a son. Or did he pray for a son earlier than is recorded? We know little about the lives of Isaac and Rebekah between the birth of their twins and the time when the twins were 40 years old.
16. There is good evidence that the events recorded in Genesis 26 actually happened before the events recorded in Genesis 25. Why do you think these two chapters are given in the wrong order? Does it really matter?
17. Review carefully God's promise to Rebekah before the birth of her twins. Contrast Malachi 1:3.
18. Were all the members of the family including the two sons aware of the prophecy given to Rebekah during her pregnancy? Was that prophecy ever actually fulfilled? Was Esau ever "dominated" by Jacob? Did the descendants of Esau (the Edomites) ever "serve" the descendants of Jacob?
19. As we know from the subsequent story, a lot of difficulties arose because Esau was technically the one born first and thus, the one considered to be "firstborn." Why didn't God just circumvent all those problems and arrange for Jacob to come out first? Does birth order really matter?
20. Read Genesis 25:19-34. Why do you think Jacob was favored by Rebekah while Esau was favored by Isaac?
21. The one story we know about regarding the younger years of Jacob and Esau was on the occasion when Esau bartered away his birthright for a bowl of lentils! Could we ever make such a mistake? Did Esau really think he was dying? Or was he just living for the present moment? How many of us have lives which are primarily oriented to the present?
22. Apparently Isaac thought he was dying. He had become blind before the age of 100. How long did he live? Did God impress him that he was dying so that he would bestow his

blessings on his sons? Why do you think Isaac—or God—made that move at that time. We know that Isaac lived another 80 years.

23. The story of the deceit of Isaac by Rebekah and Jacob is a familiar one to Bible students. Clearly, Jacob did not want to lie to his father. What was it that Jacob wanted so much that led him to cooperate with his mother's suggestions? Even though Rebekah and Jacob were successful in deceiving Isaac, is a promise binding when it is made under deceit? Would such a promise hold up in a court of law in our day?
24. At around the age of 40, Esau married two Hittite women. Was he tired of waiting for his parents to do something? Why do you think he married Hittite wives instead of Canaanite wives? Did Esau's wives fit nicely into the family? (Genesis 26:34,35) Why do you suppose those young women caused strife in the family?
25. Did the two young wives of Esau provide just the right excuse for Rebekah to send Jacob away to Haran to look for a wife? Why do you suppose Isaac didn't send a servant to Haran to find a wife for Jacob?
26. Jacob apparently believed that if his father died, Esau would try to kill him. Since Isaac did not die for another 80 years, why did Rebekah and Jacob think it was necessary for Jacob to leave the home? Did they also think Isaac was dying?
27. Why do you think God gave Jacob the vision of the ladder (Genesis 28:10-22) at Bethel? Was that God's way of confirming the covenant to this third-generation son? Right at that moment, it seemed like Jacob had no means of inheriting anything!
28. When Rebekah was helping Eleazar at the well, one would have to be impressed by her kindness and industry. How would you characterize her later in her marriage? Did she become cunning, scheming, and a player of favorites? Why do you think there was such a change? Or was it a change?
29. This is one of the stories in the Bible that always raises the question, "What if?" What if Jacob had refused to lie to Isaac? What if Rebekah and Jacob jointly had exercised faith in God to take care of the birthright? What if Jacob had been born first?
30. How often do we get into trouble because we are in a hurry and we are not willing to follow God's guidance? Have you ever been reluctant to wait for God? Why did God so often seem to make things difficult for His children? Was that on purpose? Does God make things difficult for His children today?

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