

Genesis 26:1-12

In last week's lesson, Rebekah inquired of the Lord concerning the struggle going on within her.

Genesis 25:23 **"And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger."**

God's answer was significant, not only in the physical sense, but as a spiritual lesson.

Rebekah is a type of the bride of Christ, and the struggle in her womb pictures

the struggle of the two natures that dwell in the Christian.

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Well, the day finally arrived when Rebekah was delivered of twin sons.

From the beginning they were as different as night is from day.

Jacob minded spiritual things, and was the favourite of his mother.

Esau was his father's choice, a man's man, and a hunter that provided venison for his dad.

But the book of Hebrews calls Esau a

"fornicator" and a **"profane person."**

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Being the eldest son (and that by only a few seconds) Esau would normally inherit a double portion of his father's goods.

But what was far more important to Jacob and to his mother was the fact that Esau would inherit the Abrahamic Covenant. Yes, Jacob and his mother longed for the rich heritage contained in that wonderful covenant, a covenant by the way, that was of no particular value to Esau.

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However, God is not obliged to honour the claim of the eldest son.

He is free to give His blessings to whomsoever He pleases, and He had already told Rebekah that this particular blessing was to be Jacob's.

Yes, at the time of their birth, He had assured Rebekah that "**the elder shall serve the younger.**"

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God's proclamation should have settled the matter once and for all.

After all, Isaac was a godly man, and I'm sure Rebekah had told him about God's plan.

But Isaac's love for Esau had closed his mind to her words.

Yes, even godly men can get off the track sometimes.

So in spite of God's absolute promise to Jacob, he was getting worried.

Winning was important to him, and he was not so sure any more that things would go his way.

Certainly he should have waited for God to act on his behalf.

But just like his grandfather and grandmother before him, he was now convinced that *he* must help God out.

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Then one day opportunity knocked at his door.

Esau came struggling in from the hunt, empty handed, and weak from hunger.

As Esau neared home, the most delicious aroma you could imagine floated out on the air.

Jacob was cooking "**pottage of lentiles.**"

I don't know what Esau's favourite food was, but on that particular day, "**pottage of lentiles**" was at the top of the list.

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Unlike some in this class, I have never known what it is like be without food for any length of time.

The closest I ever came to that experience was when I was about eight years old.

I was in the hospital to have my tonsils out.

Of course, I couldn't have anything to eat before or after the operation.

That meant that I was without food for about one day and one night.

Now, that's not really too bad, but even that was a new experience for me.

However, the night after the operation, I had a problem.

That day I had been quite sick because of the ether that had been used to put me under.

I guess the whole process was a little too hard on my throat, so that night I began to hemorrhage in my sleep.

Fortunately for me, my mother had been allowed to sit by my bed all day and all through the night.

So when I began to have trouble, although I could not get myself fully awake, my mother became aware that something was wrong.

Well, the doctor was called out of bed, and eventually stitches were put in to stop the bleeding.

Everything turned out all right, but the bottom line was, I had to go *another* day without food.

Well, I can tell you this. When I finally was allowed to eat, even things that I had never liked tasted real good to me.

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So Esau had thoroughly convinced himself that he *must* have that pottage at any cost--"**I am at the point to die.**"

Now I don't really think he was all that bad off, but he *thought* he was.

Yes, he was the kind of man that was used to getting what he wanted, and getting it now.

So Jacob, being a bit of a schemer, and seeing his brother at a distinct disadvantage, jumped at the chance.

V 34 **"Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright."**

Now that was rather a heartless trick to play on his own brother, but, surprisingly, the Holy Spirit only comments on Esau's actions, not Jacob's.

He did not even mention the fact that Esau had been taken advantage of, but He plainly says **"thus Esau despised his birthright."**

So the real problem wasn't Esau's hunger.

It was his absolute *disregard* for
spiritual values.

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There is an old saying, *You can't make a
silk purse out of the pig's ear.*

And that was Esau through and through.

He was an unregenerate, ungodly, unspiritual
man; a man ruled by the appetites of
the flesh.

Even Jacob was surprised when he found out
how easy it was to dupe him.

I'm sure he expected to get an argument when
he said, "**Sell me this day thy
birthright.**" But Esau agreed
immediately.

It was like taking candy from a baby.

**"Behold, I am at the point to die: and what
profit shall this birthright do to me?"**

So for Esau, it was an easy decision.
He was hungry, and the birthright was
useless to him.

Esau had worked himself up into such a state
that he would have given *anything* for
food.

And as it turned out, it didn't cost him
much at all.

Yes, to this foolish worldly man, a mess of
pottage was worth more than the title
deeds to Canaan!

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But Jacob was far from blameless.

Oh, he was right in putting a high value on
God's blessings, but the end never
justifies the means.

Jacob should have waited for God to move on
his behalf, but, instead, he resorted
to trickery.

Yes, both men were wrong, but at least Jacob desired what God desired, while Esau had no thought of God at all.

So **"Esau despised his birthright"** and became the father of the Edomites, while Jacob entered into the Messianic line, and became the father of God's Chosen People.

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As we enter Chapter 26, the Holy Spirit turns His attention to Isaac's affairs.

V 1 **"And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar."**

Other than Isaac's trial of faith on Mount Moriah, and, of course, the ongoing

problems in his home, his life had been amazingly free of any great crisis.

However, this was soon to change.

A great famine, unlike anything he had ever experienced, now threatened his entire livelihood.

Yes, it was a financial trial, but primarily it was a trial of his faith.

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But before we continue with this particular chapter and this particular famine, I think it would be profitable to consider God's use of famines and other natural disasters.

Famines are dotted throughout the pages of history and the pages of God's Word.

And although we would rather not think about a famine, let alone experience one, it does have a message for us.

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Today, only the insurance company classifies a natural disaster as an act of God.

Yes, even many believers don't seem to make the connection between natural disasters and the possibility that God may be judging sin.

Of course, we shouldn't look at every flood and every tornado as an act of God's judgment, but neither should we rule out the possibility that God does judge His world.

And certainly in the past, God has used famine both to judge mankind, and particularly to judge Israel.

For instance, we read about a famine in the book of Ruth.

Ruth 1:1 **"Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a**

famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons."

Actually there was no reason given for this famine, but obviously it was a test of Elimelech's and Naomi's resolve to stay in the Promised Land.

However, they forsook Israel and fled to Moab.

It was a bad move that ended in disaster. Here, we have only assumed that God was using famine to test Israel.

However, there are other examples in scripture in which God definitely used famine as a means of judgment.

In the case of King Ahab, God sent famine to punish his wickedness.

1 Kings 17:1 "And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word."

Again in 2 Kings, God definitely sent famine.

2 Kings 8:1 "Then spake Elisha unto the woman, whose son he had restored to life, saying, Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for the LORD hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years."

And in the book of Deuteronomy, famine is described as a judgment upon Israel.

Deuteronomy 28:23-24 **"And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron. 24: The LORD shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust: from heaven shall it come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed."**

And in the book of Haggai, God withheld His blessings because Israel had left His temple in ruins.

Haggai 1:7-11 **"Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.**

8: Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD.

9: Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD

of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.

10: Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit.

11: And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands."

Then in the book of Amos, God brought famine because His people had forsaken Him.

Amos 4:6 "And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places:

**yet have ye not returned unto me, saith
the LORD."**

And in the Millennial Kingdom, God will
withhold rain from any rebellious
nation.

Zechariah 14:17 **"And it shall be, that
whoso will not come up of all the
families of the earth unto Jerusalem to
worship the King, the LORD of hosts,
even upon them shall be no rain."**

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So aren't we fortunate that God doesn't do
that anymore, or does He?

Certainly there is a general disbelief in
God's judgment by any means, and great
indignation against anyone who would
suggest that God would judge sin by the
means of a natural disaster.

Well, I have made quite a detour, so we
better get back to the lesson at hand.

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Of course I don't know what God's reasons
were for the two famines in Abraham's
day, but certainly they were a test of
Abraham's faith, a test, by the way,
that he failed.

And in today's lesson, we're not told of any
specific reason for this famine.

However, it is entirely possible that God
was judging the wicked inhabitants of
Canaan.

And we know that it was a great trial for
Isaac, and a test of his resolve to
remain in Canaan.

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Isaac was particularly vulnerable to this
type of calamity.

Most of his wealth consisted of livestock,
and livestock has to have a good supply
of water and a good supply of grazing
land.

So, as is usually the case, temptation came
in the areas of his greatest weakness.

I'm sure Isaac was familiar with Abraham's
failure, which was the result of
forsaking Canaan during a famine.

However, when famine became a reality in his
life, he followed in his father's
footsteps.

V 1-3 **"And there was a famine in the land,
beside the first famine that was in the
days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto
Abimelech king of the Philistines unto
Gerar.**

**2: And the LORD appeared unto him, and
said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in**

**the land which I shall tell thee of:
3: Sojourn in this land, and I will be
with thee, and will bless thee; for
unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will
give all these countries, and I will
perform the oath which I sware unto
Abraham thy father;"**

No doubt this was not the same Abimelech
that his father had encountered.

That unhappy experience had occurred many
years ago before Isaac was born.

This man may have been the son of the former
king, or perhaps the name Abimelech was
commonly used for the kingly line.

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So probably this was not the same man, but,
certainly, this was the same area that
had caused Abraham's downfall.

So of all places, why did Isaac go to Gerar?

Well, he may have moved his flocks to Gerar because, being close to the seacoast, it may not have been as affected by the famine as the rest of Canaan.

However, a more likely explanation is that Gerar was on the way to Egypt.

Yes, in spite of the fact that Isaac was well aware of his father's failures, he was probably on his way to Egypt himself.

However, by the time Isaac got to Gerar, God stopped him in his tracks.

"Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of."

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In scripture, Egypt is a picture of this present evil world, and Gerar, although not quite as bad as Egypt, is very similar.

Yes, their appeal is much the same.

They offer relief from the problems and pressures associated with staying in God's Promised Land during a famine.

And as far as Christians are concerned, the world always stands ready to offer refuge from the trials and tribulations connected with a godly walk.

But we must remember that these friendly outstretched hands are stained with the blood of Christ.

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Although both Egypt and Gerar picture the world, they are a little different.

Egypt was further away from Isaac's home, and, of course, Egypt was not in Canaan.

Yes, to reap Egypt's benefits, one must leave the Promised Land altogether.

However, Egypt will supply the natural resources, which supposedly make us independent of God.

But Egypt offers its benefits at a cost.

When the Christian plunges into Egypt, when he forsakes God's will and God's word, he loses his testimony and his fellowship, both with God and with God's people.

But Gerar is not without its costs either.

In fact, Abraham committed the very same sin in Gerar that had cost him his testimony in Egypt.

In both places, he put his confidence in lies rather than God's provision.

So in the end, although Gerar was in the Promised Land, it had the same influence on Abraham that Egypt had.

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And so often the Christian, who would not think of going to Egypt, will go to Gerar.

Yes, to avoid the reproach of Christ, he will get as close to the world as he can, while maintaining his fellowship with other Christians.

Today this attitude manifests itself in look-alike clothes, look-alike music, look-alike deportment, and so on.

Why does he do this?

Well, for the same reason that Isaac chose Gerar.

Because he is afraid that God cannot keep him in famine.

He doesn't go to Egypt because God has commanded him to stay in Canaan, but he still feels the need for a little help from the world.

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Isaac's choice cost him his testimony.

In Gerar he chose to lie about his
relationship to Rebekah.

He was afraid that God would not overrule
the consequences of telling the truth.

Yes, Isaac chose Gerar because he had been
forbidden to go to Egypt.

It was the place of compromise, but in the
end, the effect was just the same.

If he hadn't gone to Gerar, he would have
never fallen into sin.

But, like Peter, who warmed himself at the
enemy's fire, he ended up denying his
Lord.

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But someone will say, didn't God tell Isaac
to "**Sojourn in this land**"?

Well, yes He did, and Gerar was definitely
in Canaan.

But I don't think we can assume that God
told him to dwell in Gerar.

True, Gerar was probably not as badly
affected by famine, but surely Isaac
realized that it was a most ungodly
place.

So, although God had not specifically
forbidden Gerar, as was the case with
Egypt, it represented God's permissive
will, not His choice.

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And sometimes God does permit what He hasn't
chosen.

Because of our lack of growth in spiritual
things, sometimes God will allow us to
take second-best in order to avoid the
worst.

And we can see several examples of this in scripture.

Let's look at Numbers 13:1-2 **"And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 2: Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel---."**

Yes, God definitely told Moses to send spies into the Promised Land, but was that His choice, or only His permissive will?

Certainly God had no need of that information.

He already *knew* what was in Canaan.

And as far as the people were concerned, the very fact that God had already chosen this land should have been all the information they needed.

No, faith does not need **"to spy out"** God's promises to see if they are suitable. But God permitted, even commanded them to--

"search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel."

Why did He do that?

I think God, being well aware of their carnal condition, knew that He could only expect them to enter the land by sight rather than faith.

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And then there was the time when Israel wanted a king like the nations around them, a king that they could see.

In 1 Samuel 8:7, God said to Samuel "--
Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have

**rejected me, that I should not reign
over them."**

God's direct rule, through the judges, was
by far the best way.

However, being fully aware that Israel would
only walk by sight rather than by
faith, He gave them a king.

It wasn't His first choice, only His
permissive will.

And I think Gerar falls into that category.

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V 3-6 **"Sojourn in this land, and I will be
with thee, and will bless thee; for
unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will
give all these countries, and I will
perform the oath which I sware unto
Abraham thy father;**

**4: And I will make thy seed to multiply
as the stars of heaven, and will give**

unto thy seed all these countries; and
in thy seed shall all the nations of
the earth be blessed;

**5: Because that Abraham obeyed my
voice, and kept my charge, my
commandments, my statutes, and my laws.**

6: And Isaac dwelt in Gerar."

This is the first time that God spoke
directly to Isaac concerning the
Abrahamic Covenant.

In these promises, Israel's future was
absolutely assured, and consequently
Isaac's future was assured.

Oh, the famine was devastating, but the
bottom line was, he could have stayed
anywhere in Canaan and God would have
taken care of him.

However, Isaac felt that compromise was the
only answer.

Having been denied Egypt, he must at least live in Gerar.

But it wasn't long before that choice got him into a lot of trouble.

V 7 **"And the men of the place asked him of his wife; and he said, She is my sister: for he feared to say, She is my wife; lest, said he, the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah; because she was fair to look upon."**

These are the two inevitable "F's" in our life.

If you don't live by *faith*, you're probably going to live by *fear*.

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And if Isaac was so convinced that **"the men of the place"** would kill him for his wife's sake, he should have never gone there in the first place.

However, his lack of faith had pressured him into going.

Rather than relying upon God's promises which had just been so graphically re-emphasized, Isaac felt compelled to go to Gerar.

He needed the resources Gerar offered, as well as God's promises.

It was a bad choice, but, you know, for a while his little scheme worked quite well for him.

He was reaping the benefits of Gerar, and seemed quite safe personally, and his wife was not molested either.

Yes, it was a win-win situation!

However, the one problem with lying is you have to *live* a lie, and eventually Isaac got careless.

V 8-11 "And it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out at a window, and saw, and, behold, Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife.

9: And Abimelech called Isaac, and said, Behold, of a surety she is thy wife: and how saidst thou, She is my sister? And Isaac said unto him, Because I said, Lest I die for her.

10: And Abimelech said, What is this thou hast done unto us? one of the people might lightly have lien with thy wife, and thou shouldest have brought guiltiness upon us.

11: And Abimelech charged all his people, saying, He that toucheth this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."

Isaac didn't have a leg to stand on.

He couldn't even make the lame excuse that
his father had.

No, Rebekah wasn't his half-sister. In
truth, she was his second cousin.

And, like his father, his actions were a
reproach to the name of Jehovah.

In spite of the fact that Abimelech's people
were very sinful, he didn't expect
Isaac to lie.

Yes, even though the world doesn't agree
with our beliefs, they don't expect
Christians to lie.

Nothing is so incongruous.

Our Leader once said, "**I am the way, the
truth, and the life:**"

And our Guide, the Holy Spirit, is called
"the Spirit of truth."

Also the Bible speaks about "**the truth of God.**"

No, the world expects Christians to tell the truth, and Abimelech had expected Isaac to tell the truth.

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No doubt, because of this deception, Abimelech had lost all respect for Isaac.

However, I'm pretty sure he had heard all about the previous king's narrow escape from God's judgment.

So, in spite of what he really thought about Isaac personally, he wasn't about to offend Isaac's God.

V 11 **"And Abimelech charged all his people, saying, He that toucheth this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."**

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So what can we learn from Isaac's
experience?

Well, actually we can learn a lot of things,
but one fact is most apparent.

Isaac could have avoided a lot of trouble,
and the loss of his testimony, if he
had only *trusted God* for his safety.

His lie wasn't right, and his lie wasn't
necessary.

As it turned out, Abimelech's natural fear
of Isaac's God was more than enough to
protect him.