

September 13/14, 2003

## Study Questions

*Fear or Faith (Part 1): A Study in the Life of Isaac & Jacob*

### A Fragile Faith

Genesis 26:1-33

#### Opening Discussion

1. What is the basis by which God blesses us? Is it based on our performance or His faithfulness?
2. When thinking about God's blessings on you, do you tend to focus more on your worthiness or unworthiness or on God's character and faithfulness? Why?
3. Our tendency is to fix our eyes on our performance rather than God's promise to complete us (Philippians 1:6) and on our failures rather than God's faithfulness. How does this affect our daily walk? How might this explain why we are often discouraged?

#### Bible Study

1. Read Genesis 26:1-33.
2. Read Genesis 12:10-20. How are the two stories alike? How are they different?
3. Genesis 26:1 not only distinguishes the famine of Isaac from the famine of Abraham but in so doing forces a comparison between the two stories. What does the writer say about Abraham in 26:5? How does that line up with 12:10-20? Was the basis upon which Abraham received the promise his faith or his performance, according to Genesis 15:6? Therefore was Abraham made righteous because he obeyed, or did he obey because he was made righteous by faith?
4. It seems the writer wants the reader to know the blessings promised to Isaac were based on God's promise to Abraham. But he also wants the reader to know that the basis of the promise to Abraham was God's faithfulness not Abraham's performance. This is why he reminds us that Abraham was no more perfect than Isaac in his faith walk. How does this compare with what Paul said in Galatians 3:1-9?
5. What motivated Isaac to lie about Rebekah in 26:7? Can faith and fear coexist? Is your life more controlled by faith or by fear? Why?
6. How does God get Isaac back to Beersheba? Does He do this because He wants to punish Isaac or bless him? What does this teach us about why God may allow and even bring trials into our lives? What might have happened if Isaac had never gone to Gerar but simply stayed and trusted God to keep His promise? Is it possible that greater faith might actually help us avoid trials and difficult circumstances? Is it also possible that fear may result in more trials than faith?

7. Is Genesis 26 about the greatness of Isaac's faith or God's faithfulness? Isaac became a 'hall-of-famer' (see Hebrews 11), because God was faithful not because Isaac was such a great man of faith. The New Testament tells us that as believers in Christ, we too are children of Abraham and enter into his promises by faith (see Galatians 3:7,29). In other words, like Isaac we are blessed *not* for our performance or great victories but because of God's faithfulness to His promise.

Read:

Galatians 3:3

Ephesians 1:7-14

Ephesians 2:1-10

Philippians 1:6

According to these texts, what is the basis for our salvation? Who is going to complete it? Who gets the glory?

A great key to becoming a person of faith is to focus our attention on God's promise rather than our performance. He started the work, and He will finish the work in us. This we must believe. Our performance flows out of our faith, rather than being the basis of our faith.

## **Application**

1. List three practical things you can do this week to focus on God's *promise* to complete His work in you rather than on *your daily performance*. In other words, how do you make sure this week your eyes are fixed on Christ rather than self.
2. What specific area of your life is controlled by fear? What needs to change for that area to be controlled by faith? How can your group members help you exchange fear for faith?
3. Spend time in prayer affirming God's promises to bless you because of His faithfulness not because you deserve it.