

October 25/26, 2003

Study Questions

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

A Very Dysfunctional Family

Genesis 29:31-30:24

Opening Discussion

1. Are there any consequences you live with today related to past choices? What are those consequences?

Does this ever discourage you or make you feel like a failure?

2. Do you ever struggle with issues from your past that you feel really limit what God could do through you to build His Kingdom? How does your past affect your present?

3. Are you ever guilty of trying to meet legitimate needs through man-made solutions? What is typically the result?

Why do we do this? Why don't we wait on God to meet these needs?

Bible Study

1. Review the storyline from Genesis 28:10-29:30. Notice the complete absence of the mention of God in 29:1-30. How does this square with Jacob's statement in 28:21, "the LORD will be my God?"

Are we ever like Jacob in that what we say we believe (the LORD will be my God) doesn't seem to line up with our daily life choices? Why is this?

How does this relate to the subject of faith?

2. Jacob now has two wives. One he loves, and one he doesn't. Whether or not Leah was a willing party to the deception, she certainly now must live with the consequences of her father's deception of Jacob. Describe Leah's life with Jacob according to Genesis 29:31-35.

Leah seems to be cultivating a strong faith in the LORD in the midst of her pain. Since she came from a pagan environment in Haran, her view of God and her faith must have come from Jacob. There seems to be some disconnect between what Jacob believes to be true of God and is teaching Leah versus how Jacob is living himself. Is this ever true in our own lives? Are we ever guilty of seeking to get others to trust God or believe God's promises when we ourselves are not living like we believe? Why is this?

Why is it so easy to spot failures of faith in others, but often so hard to see this in ourselves?

3. Jacob only speaks once in this text. The Hebrew writers put great emphasis on dialogue to the extent that having the main character only speak once is in itself making a theological statement. What does Jacob say in the story, and what does the writer want us to know about Jacob by this one statement?

Make a list of adjectives that describe Jacob in this story. Now look at the list of adjectives and see if any of them describe you when you walk by sight rather than by faith. Can you give some examples?

4. It is also true that the first words that come out of the mouth of an important character are often very important to the writer's message. What are the first recorded words that ever come out of Rachel's mouth? What does this reveal to us about Rachel?

5. While the behavior of the wives may seem extreme and foolish, isn't it true that we often behave in similar fashion? When we lack faith, we try whatever we can think of that will satisfy us and make us happy or loved. Leah wanted Jacob's love. Rachel wanted to have sons. We seek happiness in cars, houses, material things, relationships, success, titles, pleasures, and the list goes on and on. When we lack faith and take matters into our own hands, isn't it true that one approach is as bad as another? While we may scoff at the 'dysfunctionality' of Jacob's home, we are basically no different. Discuss whether you agree or disagree.

6. Go back and read God's promise to Jacob in Genesis 28:13-15. How might Jacob's life have been different had he simply trusted God each step of the way?

In spite of Jacob's failures of faith and the consequences of choices which he will live with the rest of his life, he will make the faith Hall of Fame (see Hebrews 11), and God will refer to Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and *JACOB*. Knowing this, is there really anything in your past that has disqualified you from being used greatly by God in the future if you simply trust Him by faith?

Application

1. List specific areas of your life where you feel you need to stop operating with your own human solutions and need to trust God to work by faith. Practically speaking, what will it mean to trust God in these areas?

2. Do you struggle with failures from your past? What will it take for you to believe that despite ongoing consequences of past choices, God can still use you to do great things for Him?

3. Sometimes we mistake God's grace for God's blessing. Are there questionable areas of your life which you've convinced yourself are acceptable, because God seems to be "blessing" you? Is it possible what you're experiencing is God's grace rather than His blessing? In other words, God is favoring you *despite* your behavior not *because of* your behavior? Let's remember, as with Jacob, God will keep His promise on the basis of *His grace*, but Jacob will still live with the consequences of his own foolish decisions.