

What's the Message – Lesson Sixteen

STANDARD OPENING

New Text

ANNCR: 1. Today we continue our study of the book of Genesis with more examples of the role and purpose of separation.

Music concludes

NARATR: 2. Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. As we study today's topic, we pray that the Lord will give you a deeper understanding of the importance of being selected and set apart for His purposes. Amen.

3. In previous lessons we have discussed how Abraham was chosen by God to be the means God would use to get His message to the world. Along with this selection went the discipline of separation, a separation from the pagan influences that surrounded Abraham. But this separation was not just a separation from – a separation to protect the chosen people of God from the evil people of the world – it was also a separation to . . . a very special purpose.

4. So Abraham left Ur, then Haran, and went to the land the Lord had promised him. Next we saw a separation within the family, as Abraham was separated from Lot, then a separation between Isaac and Ishmael.

5. But now, in chapter 24 as we near the end of Abraham's life, we see him acting to ensure that the influences of the pagan world will not interfere with God's plan in the generation of Isaac. There is this interesting story of Abraham instructing his most trusted servant to make a solemn vow to go back to his father's house, to the city of Nahor, to find a wife for Isaac. Under God's guidance, this goal is achieved and Rebekah becomes the wife of Isaac.

6. However, for some time after the death of Abraham, Rebekah was barren. Then we read in chapter 25, verse 21, that *"Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife . . . and the Lord granted his prayer, and Rebekah conceived."*

7. It must have been a difficult pregnancy for she was carrying twins, and we are told that "the children struggled within her." She then prayed to the Lord, and received this rather strange message:

8. *"Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples, born of you, shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, and the elder shall serve the younger."*

9. Esau was the first-born, and his whole body was covered with hair. Thus he was given the name “Esau,” for it means “hairy” or “the hairy one.” Then verse 26 tells us:

“afterward his brother came forth, and his hand had taken hold of Esau’s heel; so his name was called

Jacob.” In those days a person’s name had a meaning, and the name “Jacob” means . . . “he grasps the heel.”

10. The boys were complete opposites. Esau was a hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, content to dwell in the tents of the family. Isaac preferred Esau, while Rebekah preferred . . . some might say, “spoiled” . . . Jacob. The story is told about Esau despising his birthright as the first-born and selling it to Jacob for a bowl of soup . . . because he was so hungry.

11. Another insight into the character of Esau is revealed, when at the age of forty, he took two Hittite women for his wives, and verse 35 of chapter 26 tells us: *“and they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah.”*

12. The third item in this group of snapshots of the family of Isaac gives us yet another insight into the character of these people God had chosen to be His representatives and leaders on earth. But if anything, it reveals to us what would be called today a “dysfunctional family” – much like many modern families of our day.

13. In chapter 27 we read the story of Isaac’s intent to bless Esau being thwarted by the scheming of Rebekah and Jacob. Since he was a hunter, Isaac told Esau to go out into the field, and hunt for game to prepare in a certain manner that Isaac liked, then to bring it to him to eat. But Rebekah overheard this, and devised a scheme for Jacob to pretend to be Esau and “steal” the blessing of the first-born. When Esau discovered what had happened, he was more than angry . . . he hated his brother and determined to kill him. So Jacob . . . literally . . . had to flee for his life.

14. It hardly seems like behavior properly suited to one selected by God to be a leader of His people. So teacher, what do these three stories mean to us today? What’s the message here?

TEACHR: 15. A couple of points need to be made. First, we need to erase the false idea that we must earn the right to be an ambassador for God. That we can’t do. It is not based on us, and what we do. God’s gifts to us are precisely that – gifts.

16. They come from His grace, not because we are worthy to receive them, for He knows that we can never keep His law perfectly. He judges us not because we are perfect, but on the basis of our vertical relationship with Him. He sees into our hearts, and knows our faith. We can hide nothing from Him, and He sees all our warts and imperfections. It is noteworthy that the Bible does not gloss over the imperfections of our spiritual forefathers, but reveals them as real people, so that we can relate to them.

17. One of the Means of Grace that God used in these early years was separation. By this process the Lord refined the leadership of His people. There was not to be a mongrel mixture of the pagan religions with the monotheistic plan of Yahweh. Thus, Isaac will remain separated from the idolatrous Canaanite people and his blood-line will be untainted by their influence.

18. Now to our second point. In spite of our weaknesses, God can still use us to be His witnesses and spread the word of His love and salvation. Isaac and Jacob may not have been great examples, in human eyes, to be the leaders of a new nation . . . and yet . . . God could see something within them that was positive for His purpose.

19. We need to think not in terms of our lack of qualifications, but that God sees us as a precious child, one He can use in the work of His kingdom. We – both adults and especially the young – need to be alert to the many ways we can serve our Lord, as volunteers or as full-time workers. If God could use Jacob, He can use you, too!

Music up, then fade behind . . .

NARATR: 20. Our next lesson will delve further into the development of Jacob as a person . . . as a trusting child of God . . . set apart for His purpose.

STANDARD CLOSE

Study Aids

Discussion Questions and Suggested Readings for “What’s the Message?” Lessons

Lesson Sixteen

Questions:

Why was it so important for Isaac, and later, Jacob to choose a wife from within the family of Abraham? Why was there this concern about marriage with the people of Palestine? Look at the following verses to help you with your answer: Exodus 34:10-16; Numbers 25:1-8; and Deuteronomy 7:1-5.

Esau felt that Jacob had cheated him two times in regard to what was “rightfully his” as the first-born, and he hated Jacob for it. It was the custom that the first-born received two-thirds of the estate as his inheritance, but he was so famished that he was “tricked” out of the larger portion because Jacob caught him in a moment of weakness. Isaac knew that God had declared before the boys were born that the elder would serve the younger, but Isaac intended to give the major share to Esau anyway. Then, to make matters worse, Rebekah decided God needed her help to make sure that Esau did not receive the blessing of Abraham, the blessing that would make him the father of the promised nation. So she and Jacob deceived the nearly blind Isaac into giving that blessing to Jacob. So here are the father and the mother both attempting to intervene in God’s plan. What are your thoughts on this whole twisted chain of events and behavior? Does it still happen today? Is the lesson of old still relevant?

Was the separation of God’s chosen people to be understood as a means to an end, or can it be seen as an end in itself? Is there any problem if separation is regarded as a goal to be achieved for its own sake?

Does the New Testament give us any guidance in answering the previous question? Consider Matthew 5:14-16 and Mark 2:15-17, and 4:21-22.