

**HEBREWS 38
(Hebrews 11:20)**

**THE OPERATION OF FAITH IN ISAAC
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INTRODUCTION

Now we have defined godly faith as believing what God has said. Now if God had not spoken, then it would be impossible to have godly faith. And that makes sense. If God never said anything, then it would be impossible for us to believe it. But since God has spoken, then our duty is to believe Him. And that is godly faith – believing God.

When it comes right down to it, in crucial times in life, those with true faith cling to the promises of God.

This was true with Abel (v.4), when he brought the right kind of sacrifice. It was true with Enoch (v.5) who was ultimately translated directly to heaven by faith. It was true of Noah (v.7) who I am sure encountered difficulty along the way but he persisted in the building of the ark. It was true of that old nomad Abraham (v.8) who held to the promise of God through many difficulties.

And now we come to Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. (vs.20 - 22)

Now none of these men were perfect men. None of these men were sinless men by any means. None of them had easy lives and in fact there were times in their lives that it would have been easy to withdraw from faith and give it all up. But in those crucial moments, when it came down to believing God or rejecting him, they all believed.

Faith in the life of Isaac

Of the four great patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, the Scriptures tell us less of Isaac than of any of the others. Abraham, Jacob and Joseph are given about twelve chapters of coverage in Genesis. But Isaac gets only two chapters (Gen. 26,27)

Now Isaac was exposed to the promises of God early on in his life. You remember that Abraham began to doubt God in his old age and he had a child by Sarah's handmaiden, Hagar. And Abraham finally had a child by Hagar whose name was Ishmael. And perhaps Sarah and Abraham thought this would be the child of promise. But God said, "No, this is not the child. Sarah will bear a child in her old age."

And Sarah bore a child and his name was Isaac.

I am sure that Abraham and Sarah must have told Isaac this story many times as Isaac was growing up. And so I am sure that Isaac was quite familiar with the promises which God had given Abraham.

And then, you remember that Isaac was taken up into the mountain where Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his own son. I am sure that Isaac was wide-eyed on this occasion. And when God provided an animal for the sacrifice, I am quite sure that Isaac was instructed again about the promises of God that were to come to the world through him.

Now, in addition to all of this instruction, after Abraham's death, God personally appeared to Isaac. (Genesis 26:1,2) And God repeated the promises to Isaac personally. (Genesis 26:3,4)

Now the question would be, "Did Isaac believe the promises?" And that is the question for us all. "Do we really believe God, or are we just going through the motions of religion?"

Now life is going to take us through hills and valleys. It is going to take us sometimes where we would rather not go. Life is going to test our faith all along the way. But if we truly have it, there will come moments in life, maybe there will come one moment in life, where our faith will be supremely demonstrated.

Now, let's consider

I. The faults of Isaac.

We only know a bit and a piece of Isaac's life. But I think we have enough to know that he was a real man with real weaknesses.

A. Isaac lied to Abimelech.

There was a famine in the land of Canaan and it appears that Isaac was wandering back toward Egypt in hopes of finding food there.

1. God told Isaac not to go to Egypt.
2. Isaac went to Gerar which was in Philistine territory.
3. Isaac told the men there that Rebekah was his sister. (v.7)
4. Abimelech saw Isaac “sporting” with his wife. (v.8)

Note: Sporting is tsachaq (tsaw – chaq) It means to laugh out loud, to play, to make sport. Now when Abimelech saw them sporting, he knew that they were not brother and sister. So, I doubt they were shooting hoops in the back yard.

B. Isaac loved Esau over Jacob. (Genesis 25:28)

1. Isaac may have been rebelling against the will of God.
 - a. God told Rebekah while she was pregnant that the elder would serve the younger which meant that the younger would get the birthright. (Now the birthright involved first of all, a double portion of the inheritance. But, more importantly, it involved becoming the leader of the family and the one through whom the promise would come.) See Romans 9:10,11)
 - b. We would suppose that Rebekah told Isaac what the Lord told her.
2. Isaac may have been preferring tradition over the will of God.
 - a. It was tradition to prefer the oldest and to give the birthright to the oldest.
 - b. And yet, in this case, God preferred the younger.

- (1) Abel over Cain
- (2) Isaac over Ishmael
- (3) Jacob over Esau
- (4) Joseph over Reuben

3. Isaac may have been preferring his earthly appetites over the will of God. (Gen.25:28)
4. Isaac may have been preferring his affections over the will of God. (Esau was a man's man – a hunter. Jacob was a Momma's boy. He was more likely found in the kitchen than in the field.)

All of this goes to show us that even the great saints of God struggled with submission to the will of God. We are all laden down with earthly desires and worldly affections. It is our duty to do our best to lay those aside in favor of the will of God.

But, now let's see evidence of,

II. The faith of Isaac.

- A. Isaac sought the Lord when Rebekah was barren. (Gen.25:21)
- B. Isaac obeyed God when God said don't go to Egypt. (Gen.26:1-6)
- C. The Lord continued to appear to him throughout his life. (26:2; 24)
- D. Isaac gave the blessing to Jacob over Esau.
 1. Before birth the children "wrestled" within Rebekah.

Note: This was a picture of the struggle of two nations:

- a. Esau went on to be the father of the Edomites and in fulfillment of the Word of God, the Edomites became servants of Israel during the reign of David. (II Kings 8:20)

- b. The elect vs. the reprobate. And, every knee shall bow to Christ.
- 2. At birth, Jacob held on to the heel of Esau. This was a picture of how he would cunningly supplant Esau as the leader of the family.
- 3. After birth, Esau was more concerned with worldly affairs. He became a hunter. He was a man's man. Jacob was a home body. He preferred the kitchen.

One day, Esau came home hungry. Jacob had made some red bean soup. And Jacob told Esau he could have some soup if Esau would sell him his birthright.

- a. Esau cared not for the birthright. (25:34)
- b. Jacob coveted the birthright

Note: The elect have an inclination toward spiritual things, but the reprobate do not.

Note: This contract between Jacob and Esau didn't really convey the birthright to Jacob. It was sort of a hand-shake deal between the brothers, but it was not really theirs to divide up. It was Isaac's responsibility to leave the birthright in his will. So, all was not lost to Esau.

- 4. When Isaac was old, Isaac was still intent on giving the birthright to the one he loved, Esau.
 - a. He fully intended to give it to Esau for he called for Esau. (27:4)
 - b. Isaac was still persuaded by a love for venison rather than a love for God. (v.4)

- c. Rebekah overheard and devised a plan of deception.
- d. Jacob deceived his father and Isaac blessed Jacob thinking it was Esau.

Now all of this is quite a story. And it appears that Isaac was about to reject the promise of God by blessing Esau. But when Isaac saw what had happened, he recognized the providence of God. Perhaps he remembered the Word of God spoken to Rebekah that the younger shall serve the elder. And by faith, he refused to undo the blessing.

And so, it says, by faith, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.