

# Isaac *and* Rebekah: Rearing Rivals



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Genesis 26–28.*

**Memory Text:** “‘May God Almighty bless you, And make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may be an assembly of peoples’” (*Genesis 28:3, NKJV*).

Isaac and Rebekah duplicated many events of Abraham's and Sarah's lives. (1) Isaac laid claim to the covenant promises that had been made by God to Abraham. (2) Both Sarah and Rebekah were barren an unreasonably long time. (3) Both families endured disputes about ownership of wells with local people among whom they had been instructed by God to live. (4) Both Abraham and Isaac took their families to a foreign land to ride out a famine. (5) Abraham informed the people of Gerar that Sarah, his wife, was his half sister. Isaac told the same people, a generation later, that Rebekah, his wife, was his sister. (6) Both families had to deal with sibling rivalry.

At the same time, too, Isaac and Rebekah had a lot going for them in their marriage and home. Too bad some wrong choices were made, choices that led to painful consequences for the whole family.

Let's learn what we can from their mistakes, in hopes of not doing the same thing ourselves.

**The Week at a Glance:** However different their environment from ours, we can learn some good spiritual lessons from the story of this dysfunctional family.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 21.*

## The Arrangement

**Read** Genesis 24 and then answer the following questions:

1. Why would Abraham be so adamant that his son not take a wife from among the Canaanites?

---



---

2. What was the key to the servant's success in finding the right woman for Isaac?

---



---

3. What do we learn from this story about the character and faith of Rebekah? How might these attributes have contributed to making her the right choice for Isaac?

---



---

Sarah had been dead three years when Abraham called his trusted servant, probably Eliezer of Damascus, to whom he had thought to bequeath his estate (*Gen. 15:2*). Though Abraham would live another 35 years, he was an old man at this time. Isaac had reached the age of 40 and needed a wife to carry on the covenant line. A messenger had earlier reported to Abraham that Nahor, his brother, and his wife, Milcah, had been blessed with eight sons (*Gen. 22:20–24*). Now Abraham instructed his servant to fetch a wife for Isaac from among those relatives.

Of course, there was always the outside chance that the girl would be unwilling to accompany him back to a strange land, and Eliezer needed clear instruction how to proceed if that turned out to be the case. If so, he would be released from the oath. Under no circumstances was Isaac to leave the land that God had covenanted to them. Abraham picked his agent well; the servant was determined to do God's will in such an important matter.

***It's one thing to say, I want to leave everything in God's hands regarding important matters; it's another to actually do this. Next time you face an important decision, what practical steps can you take in order to place yourself in a position where you can discern God's will and be surrendered enough to accept it?***

## Jacob and Esau

Rebekah, unlike Sarah, had no rival wives or concubines to contend with, and no stepchildren to compete with. Theirs should have been a happy home. Yet, even in this “ideal” situation, strife arose.

**Read** the story of Esau and Jacob in Genesis 25:19–34. In what ways were the parents to blame for the strife that arose among the brothers?

---



---

**At** the birth of those boys, the Lord gave Rebekah a message about their future. What was that message, and what do we see in the story about the character of these boys that helps explain their fate?

---



---

What we see in this story isn’t God’s *determining* the future but simply *predicting* it. It was the choices of the boys that led to their fate, not God’s predestination of that fate for them.

The sale of the birthright confirms that Esau is disinterested in spiritual matters; his actions certainly revealed him unfit to be the spiritual leader of the clan.

Jacob, on the other hand, is farsighted. He desires the spiritual leadership, is cunning enough to trick his brother out of it, and even gets the transaction sealed by an oath. Esau eats and goes away, not the least bothered about what he has given up.

“Because of his indifference to the divine blessings and requirements, Esau is called in Scripture ‘a profane person.’ . . . He represents those who lightly value the redemption purchased for them by Christ, and are ready to sacrifice their heirship to heaven for the perishable things of earth. Multitudes live for the present, with no thought or care for the future. Like Esau they cry, ‘Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die.’ 1 Corinthians 15:32.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 181, 182.

**How seriously do you take the redemption you have in Christ? How can you be careful not to sell it for a bowl of porridge? Why is that easier to do than one might think?**

## The Birthright—Content and Context of the Contest

The events in Genesis 26 surely took place before those in chapter 25. Isaac could not have hoped to pass Rebekah off as his sister if they had twins. The repetitions of the Abrahamic covenant to Isaac clarify what exactly Jacob bargained with Esau for. These promises are what Jacob hoped to inherit. This was a spiritual heritage with a serious responsibility. This is the privilege that Esau despised and Jacob coveted.

**What** promises in the Abrahamic covenant were confirmed to Isaac?  
*Gen. 26:4.*

These promises were not easy to believe. Isaac and Rebekah had no children yet—but *these children would become as numerous as the stars?* They were nomads wandering from country to country—but *God would give them “all these lands”?* (*Gen. 26:4, NKJV*).

**Note** the similarities in the experience of Isaac and Rebekah and Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 20, 21, and 26.

**Name of the place** (20:1, 26:1) \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of the king** (20:2, 26:1) \_\_\_\_\_

**Lying about** (20:2, 26:7) \_\_\_\_\_

**Explanation for lie** (20:11, 26:9) \_\_\_\_\_

**Remonstrance because of the lie** (20:9, 26:10) \_\_\_\_\_

The Lord has just appeared to Isaac and given to him a wonderful promise. Isaac now knows not only the reality of God but His promises. He should have been a man of faith, trusting in God’s ability to fulfill those promises. (After all, when was the last time God “appeared” to any of us and spoke to us?) Yet, soon afterward we see Isaac resorting to lies.

**Maybe because of the promise, that he would have a great seed, Isaac lied to protect himself from death. What lesson can we learn from this story about how easy it is to show lack of trust in God?**

## Stealing the Blessing

**Read** Genesis 27 and then answer the following questions:

1. Why did Jacob show some hesitancy in perpetrating this fraud on his father? What does that reason say about his character?
2. What were the material advantages that came with the blessing? How might that have explained each one's desire for it?
3. What did Isaac do that showed he had his suspicions? What reasons might he have had for them?
4. What reasons did Rebekah have for instigating this deception?

In the opening verses of Genesis 27 Isaac has two thoughts: (1) he is getting old and needs to pass on his blessing, and (2) his mouth is watering for some tasty food. Here we encounter a play on words. While Esau sold his *bekorah* (birthright) for a bowl of lentils, Isaac will give his *berakah* (blessing) in exchange for some venison. Rebekah will try to get the *berakah* for her favorite son.

We could defend Rebekah. After all, she is fighting the unjust institution of the blessing by which one child gets everything and the other nothing (*Gen. 27:37*). This is especially unfair in the case of twins. Maybe she thought she was carrying out the will of God, who had predicted the dominance of the younger. Maybe she knew, as Isaac must have known, that Esau was unsuited for the birthright and the blessings that came with it but that Jacob possessed those necessary qualities.

**In the end, everyone suffered because of the deception. What lessons can we learn from this story about the consequences of our actions? Take heed. Watch and pray before you act!**

## Wives and the Covenant

When Esau was 40, he got married (*Gen. 26:34, 35*). The problem was not just that Esau married two wives. Polygamy existed as early as the time of Lamech (*Gen. 4:23*). Abraham had several wives, and Jacob himself would end up in polygamy. The main problem was that Esau's wives were Hittites and probably not worshipers of Yahweh.

Bringing outside blood into the family was risky. But Abraham, too, had brought in Hagar, an Egyptian, and thought to make her son his heir. The worst problem, however, was that the Hittite daughters-in-law of Isaac and Rebekah endangered the worship of Yahweh among their descendants, possibly insisting on worshipping their own gods. Since they were two, it may have been easier to get their way. This threat is what must have caused grief to Isaac and Rebekah. Keeping their sons' marriages within the family would have served to protect the Abrahamic covenant.

**How** did Rebekah use this issue as an excuse to get Jacob out of angry Esau's reach? *Gen. 27:46–28:5*.

---



---

Isaac readily agreed to the plan, and he himself charged Jacob, instructing him to go quickly. The earlier blessing Jacob had stolen from Esau said nothing about the covenant blessings. Now, as Jacob prepared to leave, Isaac gave him the blessing he wanted all along.

**What** were the blessings given to Jacob? *Gen. 28:3, 4*. How did these differ from the blessings given to Esau?

---



---

Before Isaac gave Jacob the covenant blessings, he specifically charged him not to take a wife from among the Canaanites but to get one from among their own clan. It was afterward that he gave him the promised blessings. Could there have been a link between this admonition and the blessings? If so, what?

**What promises of God are especially important to you? At the same time, ask yourself, How can I make the kind of choices that will allow these promises to be fulfilled in my life?**

**Further Study:** Ellen G. White, “A United Front,” pp. 312–316, in *The Adventist Home*.

“What a contrast between the course of Isaac and that pursued by the youth of our time, even among professed Christians! Young people too often feel that the bestowal of their affections is a matter in which self alone should be consulted—a matter that neither God nor their parents should in any wise control. Long before they have reached manhood or womanhood, they think themselves competent to make their own choice, without the aid of their parents. A few years of married life are usually sufficient to show them their error, but often too late to prevent its baleful results. For the same lack of wisdom and self-control that dictated the hasty choice is permitted to aggravate the evil, until the marriage relation becomes a galling yoke. Many have thus wrecked their happiness in this life and their hope of the life to come.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 80.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Think about all the strife and suffering that could have been avoided had Rebekah and Isaac made wiser choices. What principles did they violate, and what can we learn from their mistakes that could help protect our homes from unneeded suffering?
- ❷ There’s a certain irony in the attitudes and actions of Rebekah. She was upset that Esau had married foreign women, because they could lead him away from the true God. And yet she was the one who pushed Jacob into this horrible deception. What kind of inconsistency do we see there? In what ways can we be in danger of doing something similar? *See also Matt. 23:23.*
- ❸ Is there someone you know who is facing an important decision? If so, what can you as a class do to give that person the best possible guidance? What can you do to help that person discern the will of God in making that choice?

**Summary:** Isaac and Rebekah could have avoided much trouble in their home if they had followed principles of truth and honesty. God had spoken, and they should have trusted Him and cooperated with Him.

# Faithful Friend

by HANS OLSON

Setsuko and Meiko have been friends for 15 years, ever since Setsuko, a literature evangelist, knocked on Meiko's door and offered her a subscription to *Signs of the Times*<sup>®</sup>. Meiko liked the magazine and subscribed. She also bought some books. Meiko's daughter began attending a branch Sabbath School program.

When Meiko's family moved to be near her husband's parents, Setsuko stayed in touch with her. Meiko continued to read the magazines and books.

As the wife of the eldest son in Japanese culture, Meiko felt compelled to respect her mother-in-law's Shinto religion. Meiko accompanied her mother-in-law to worship in the shrines, but Meiko wanted to find meaning in her own life. As Meiko searched, Setsuko remained a faithful friend. Meiko was not free to pursue Christianity at this time, but she continued reading *Signs of the Times*<sup>®</sup> and sought out other books to help her resolve the conflicts in her life and bring her peace. In time she found the God she was seeking.

Eventually Meiko's family returned to Yokohama, and Meiko and Setsuko reconnected in person. Setsuko invited Meiko to attend meetings at her church. Far from her mother-in-law, Meiko finally felt she could attend a Christian church. As Meiko sat in the church, she whispered to her friend, "At last I am home." For 15 years Meiko had struggled to find meaning, and at last she had found what she was searching for.

Meiko praised God that her husband did not resist her desire to be a Christian. But now Meiko faced a new problem: As a faithful daughter-in-law, she could not keep her faith in God a secret from her mother-in-law. But how could she tell her without hurting her? Meiko gently explained her new religious experience to her mother-in-law, who listened carefully. Meiko apologized for letting her mother-in-law down. She worried that her in-laws would disown her following her revelation of faith in Christ. But her mother-in-law wished Meiko well. Their relationship has become closer than it ever had been. They respect each other's religion.

When Meiko was baptized, she asked her friend Setsuko to be her spiritual guardian.

Your mission offerings help bring the hope of Jesus to hearts chained by culture and superstition. Thank you.

---

SETSUKO IWAI and SEINO (MEIKO) KATSUMATA live in Yokohama, where they continue to share their love for God with others. Hans Olson is managing editor of Mission.