

Isaac and Rebekah: Raising Rivals¹



SABBATH—JULY 14

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Genesis 26–28.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘May the Mighty God bless you. May he give you children. May he increase your numbers until you become a community² of nations’ ” (Genesis 28:3, NlrV).

ISAAC AND REBEKAH WENT THROUGH MANY OF THE SAME THINGS THAT ABRAHAM AND SARAH DID. (1) Isaac claimed the covenant promises³ that had been made by God to Abraham. (2) Both Sarah and Rebekah were childless for a long time. (3) Both families quarreled (argued) with local people over who owned the wells. (4) Both Abraham and Isaac took their families to a foreign land to survive a famine.⁴ (5) Abraham told the people of Gerar that Sarah, his wife, was his half sister. Isaac told the same people, years later, that Rebekah, his wife, was his sister. (6) Both families had to deal with their children's trying to outdo one another.

At the same time, too, Isaac and Rebekah had a lot going for them in their marriage and home. Too bad they made several wrong choices. These choices led to painful results for the whole family.

Let us learn what we can from their mistakes so that we will not make the same mistakes ourselves.

THIS WEEK'S STUDY UP CLOSE: Isaac and Rebekah's way of living may be different from ours today. But we can learn some good lessons about how to follow the Lord from the story of this family's problems.

1. rivals—two people who compete against each other; persons who try to do something better than those around them.

2. community—a group of people living, working, or worshipping together.

3. covenant promises—the blessings God will give to us if we obey Him.

4. famine—not having enough food.

SUNDAY—JULY 15**THE ARRANGEMENT (PLAN)**
(Genesis 24:3–8)

Read Genesis 24 and then answer the following questions:

- ❶ Why would Abraham feel so strongly about his son not choosing a wife who was a Canaanite?
- ❷ What was the key to the success of Abraham’s servant in finding the right woman for Isaac?
- ❸ What do we learn from this story about the character⁵ and faith of Rebekah? How did Rebekah’s character and faith help make her the right choice for Isaac?

Sarah had been dead three years when Abraham called his trusted servant. His servant was probably Eliezer of Damascus. Abraham had once thought of giving to Eliezer all that he owned and making him his heir (Genesis 15:2). Abraham would live another 35 years. But Abraham was already an old man at this time. Isaac had reached the age of 40 and needed a wife to carry on the promised line leading toward the birth of Christ. Earlier Abraham learned the news that Nahor his brother and Nahor’s

wife, Milcah, had been blessed with eight sons (Genesis 22:20–24). Now Abraham told his servant to get a wife for Isaac from Nahor’s family.

Of course, there was always the chance that the girl would be unwilling to go back with Eliezer to a strange land. So, Eliezer needed to know exactly what he should do if that happened. If the girl refused to come back with Eliezer, then Eliezer would be set free from the oath to find Isaac a wife. Isaac was not at all allowed to leave the land that God had promised to them. Abraham picked the right man for the job of finding Isaac a wife.

It is one thing to say, I want to leave all the important things in life in God’s hands. But it is another to really do this. Next time you face an important decision (choice), what useful steps can you take to become more willing to follow God’s will?

MONDAY—JULY 16**JACOB AND ESAU**
(Genesis 25:19–34)

Unlike Sarah, Rebekah had no rival⁶ wives to fight with. She had no stepchildren to compete with. Isaac and Rebekah’s home should have been happy. But, even in this “perfect” home, trouble arose.

5. character—who you are; all the things that a person does, feels, and thinks are what a person is made of; your character is the sum of the choices you make, such as a choice to be honest or to cheat.

6. rival—a rival is one of two people who compete against each other.

Read the story of Esau and Jacob in Genesis 25:19–34. In what ways were the parents to blame for the trouble between the brothers?

At the birth of those boys, the Lord gave Rebekah a message about their future. What was that message? What do we learn about these boys that helps explain what happened to them?

In this story, God did not decide on the future of the brothers. The choices that the boys made led to their future. God simply prophesied⁷ the choices they would make. The sale of the birthright⁸ showed that Esau was not interested in spiritual⁹ matters. Esau's actions showed him unfit to be the family's spiritual leader.

But Jacob desires the spiritual leadership. He is smart enough to trick his brother out of it. He even gets the business deal sealed by an oath (promise). Esau eats and goes away. He is not very interested in what he has given up.

“Esau represents those who do not value the salvation¹⁰ bought for them by Christ. They are ready to trade heaven for worldly things that do not last. Many people 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 Co-

rinthians 15:32.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*,¹¹ pp. 181, 182.



Esau sold his birthright blessing to Jacob for a bowl of lentils.

How seriously do you take salvation in Christ? How can you be careful not to sell it for a bowl of porridge? Why is salvation easier to “sell” than one might think?

TUESDAY—JULY 17

THE BIRTHRIGHT—WHAT WAS INVOLVED AND THE MEANING OF THE CONTEST (STRUGGLE) (Genesis 26:4)

The events in Genesis 26 surely happened before the events in chapter 25. Isaac could not have tried to fool people by saying that Rebekah was his sister if they already had twins.

7. prophesied—said what would happen in the future.

8. birthright—the gifts and blessings that belong to a person simply for being born into a certain family or place.

9. spiritual—having to do with God; holy.

10. salvation—God's plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death.

11. patriarchs and prophets—patriarchs are early Bible leaders, such as Abraham and Isaac, or other leaders of Israel, such as Moses; prophets are men and women sent by God to warn us about what will happen in the future.

God's repeated promises to Abraham show clearly why Jacob worked hard to bargain with Esau. These promises are what Jacob hoped to inherit (receive). This was an inheritance¹² from God. Important duties came with the inheritance. Esau did not care for the inheritance, but Jacob wanted it.

What promises in God's covenant (agreement) to Abraham were promised to Isaac in Genesis 26:4?

These promises were not easy to believe, even at that time. Isaac and Rebekah still had no children—but these children would become as many as the stars. Isaac and Rebekah were wanderers, traveling from country to country—but God would give them “all these lands” (Genesis 26:4, NKJV). Talk about the need to show faith!

Show how events in the lives of Isaac and Rebekah are the same as events in the lives of Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 20, Genesis 21, and Genesis 26.

**Name of the place
(Genesis 20:1; Genesis 26:1).**

**Name of the king
(Genesis 20:2; Genesis 26:1).**

**What was the lie about?
(Genesis 20:2; Genesis 26:7).**

**The reason for the lie
(Genesis 20:11; Genesis 26:9).**

**Feeling sorry about the lie
(Genesis 20:9; Genesis 26:10).**

**What was the quarrel (fight) about?
(Genesis 21:25; Genesis 26:20).**

What did each make? (Genesis 21:27; Genesis 26:28).

**What did they name the place?
(Genesis 21:31; Genesis 26:33).**

The Bible does not say how the Lord appears to Isaac. But He gives to Isaac a wonderful promise. So, Isaac now knows that God is real and that His promises are real too. Isaac should have been a man of faith, trusting in God's power to keep His promises. (When was the last time God “appeared” to any of us and spoke to us?) But in just a short while we notice Isaac using lies to save himself.

God promised to make Isaac the father of a great nation. Maybe because of this, 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? How can we protect ourselves from falling into this trap?

WEDNESDAY—JULY 18

**STEALING THE BLESSING
(Genesis 27:34–37)**

Read over the story in Genesis

12. inheritance—the belongings of another person that will become yours.

27 and then answer the following questions:

❶ Why did Jacob not rush into deceiving (fooling) and lying to his father? What does that reason say about his character?¹³

❷ What were the good things that came with the blessing Isaac gave Jacob? How would this explain both Jacob's and Esau's desires for the blessing?

❸ What did Isaac do that showed he knew something was wrong? What are the reasons that Isaac thought something was wrong?

❹ What reasons did Rebekah have for telling Jacob to trick Isaac?

In the opening verses of Genesis 27, Isaac has two thoughts: (1) He is getting old and needs to pass on his blessing. (2) He is hungry for some tasty (good) food. Esau sold his *bekorah* (birthright)¹⁴ for a bowl of lentils. But Isaac will give his *berakah* (blessing) in exchange for some venison (deer) stew. Rebekah will try to get the *berakah* for her favorite son.

In a way, we can understand Rebekah's reasons but not her actions. After all, Rebekah is fighting the unfairness of one child getting everything and the other child getting nothing (Genesis 27:37). This is very

unfair in the case of twins. Maybe Rebekah thought she was carrying out the will of God, who had told her when she was pregnant with twins that the younger son would rule over the older brother. Maybe Rebekah and Isaac, too, knew that Esau was not the best son to receive the birthright and the blessings that came with it and that Jacob was.



Rebekah uses a trick to make Jacob seem like Esau. This helps fool Isaac into giving Jacob the blessing.

In the end, everyone suffered greatly because of the lie. What lessons can we learn from this story about the results of our actions? So, always watch and pray before you act!

THURSDAY—JULY 19

WIVES AND THE COVENANT¹⁵ (Genesis 28:1–4)

When Esau was 40, he got married

13. character—who you are; all the things that a person does, feels, and thinks are what a person is made of; your character is the sum of the choices you make, such as a choice to be honest or to cheat.

14. birthright—the gifts and blessings that belong to a person simply for being born into a certain family or place.

15. covenant—a promise or agreement between God and His people. If the people obeyed God, God would bless them.

(Genesis 26:34, 35). The problem was that Esau married two wives. Polygamy¹⁶ was practiced as early as the time of Lamech (Genesis 4:23). Abraham had several wives. Jacob himself would end up in polygamy. But the main problem was that Esau's wives probably were not worshipers of God.

Bringing outside blood into the family was dangerous. But Abraham had brought in Hagar. Abraham had planned to make Hagar's son his heir. But there was a worse problem with Esau's wives. These Hittite¹⁷ women might weaken the worship of God among the future grandchildren of Isaac and Rebekah by wanting to worship their own gods. Because there were two of them, they may have gotten their way more easily. This problem must have brought sadness to Isaac and Rebekah. Marriage to a godly wife would have helped to protect God's covenant to Abraham.

How did Rebekah use this problem in Genesis 27:46–28:5 as an excuse to get Jacob out of angry Esau's reach?

Isaac quickly agreed to the plan. He himself advised (told) Jacob 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 Jacob

the blessing he wanted all along.

What were the blessings given to Jacob in Genesis 28:3, 4? How were these different from the blessings given to Esau?



Rebekah and Isaac may have worried that Esau would join his two wives in worshipping false gods.

Before Isaac gave Jacob the covenant blessings, he told Jacob not to take a wife from among the Canaanites¹⁸ but to get one from among their family group. Then Isaac gave Jacob the promised blessings. Could it be that the advice was connected with the blessings? If so, how?

What promises of God are important to you? Ask yourself, How can I make the kind of choices that will let these promises take place in my life?

16. polygamy—having more than one wife or husband at the same time.

17. Hittite—of, or belonging to, a group of people who lived in Asia Minor and Syria from about 1700 B.C. to about 700 B.C.

18. Canaanites—the people who lived in the land of Canaan before the Israelites came and lived there.



Isaac finally gave Jacob the blessing he wanted all along (Genesis 28:3, 4).

FRIDAY—JULY 20

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Ellen G. White, “A United¹⁹ Front,” pp. 312–316, in *The Adventist Home*.

“What a sharp difference between the actions of Isaac and the actions by the youth of our time, even among those who claim to be Christians! Young people too often feel that they themselves should choose the person they will marry. They also feel that God or their parents should not at all make the choices. Long before they have become adults, they think themselves able to make their own choices without their parents’ help. A few years of married life are usually enough time to show them their mistakes but often too late to keep its sad results from happening. The same

poor judgment that influenced²⁰ these bad choices can make marriage become so unhappy. Many have thus wrecked their happiness in this life and their hope of the life in eternity.”²¹—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 80.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ Think about all the trouble and suffering that could have been avoided if Rebekah and Isaac had made wiser choices. What principles²² did they break? What can we learn from their mistakes that could help protect our homes from unneeded suffering?

❷ There is something puzzling or hard to understand in the attitudes²³ and actions of Rebekah. She was upset that Esau married foreign women, because they could lead him away from the true God. But Rebekah was the one who pushed Jacob into tricking his own father. What kind of opposites²⁴ do we see there? In what ways can we be in danger of doing something almost the same? Read also Matthew 23:23.

❸ Is there someone you know who must make an important decision (choice)? If so, how can you give that person the best possible advice?²⁵

19. united—joined together as one.

20. influenced—had power, or an effect, over persons or things.

21. eternity—life without end; forever.

22. principles—basic rules or standards of good behavior.

23. attitudes—ways of thinking, acting, or feeling.

24. opposites—different in every way; when something or someone is exactly the reverse (different) of another thing or person.

25. advice—what you are told to do or how to do it; opinion.