Heavenly Father,

Esau son of Isaac despised his inheritance and counted it as worth nothing more than a bowl of lentil stew while his younger brother, Jacob, was willing to risk everything to possess the promises You made to Abraham's descendants.  We also have an inheritance that is the fruit of covenantal promises.  Our precious inheritance is Jesus Christ, and our eternal inheritance through Jesus the Messiah must be the focus of our lives and the foundation of our hope.  Guide us, Lord, in our study of two men who symbolize humanity's response to Your promises and rekindle in each of us the desire to risk everything in this life to obtain our eternal inheritance in the next.  We pray in the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.  Amen.

+ + +

*All these died in faith, before receiving any of the things that had been promised, but they saw them in the far distance and welcomed them, recognizing that they were only strangers and nomads on earth.  People who use such terms about themselves make it quite plain that they are in search of a homeland.  If they had meant the country they came from, they would have had the opportunity to return to it; but in fact they were longing for a better homeland, their heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, since he has founded the city for them.*   
[Hebrews 11:13-16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/hebrews/hebrews11.htm#v13)

*Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into a heritage that can never be spoilt or soiled and never fade away.  It is reserved in heaven for you who are being kept safe by God's power through faith until the salvation which has been prepared is revealed at the final point of time.*  
[1 Peter 1:3-5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1peter/1peter1.htm#v3)

The death of Sarah in chapter 23 was the pivotal point in this section of the narrative, while chapter 24 introduced the next bride to be the bearer of the "promised seed," Rebekah the wife of Isaac (see the outline of the chiastic pattern in handout #1 of Lesson 11).  Chapter 25 becomes the transition that takes the reader from the 38 years after Sarah's death, to Abraham's death, to the continuation of God's covenant with Isaac, and to the birth of the next generation, Isaac and Rebekah's sons Esau and Jacob.  Isaac married Rebekah when he was forty years old.  They were married for thirty-five years before the death of Abraham.

**Please read Genesis 25:1-6: The Descendants of Abraham and Keturah**   
**25:1*Abraham married (took\*) another wife (woman\*) whose name was Keturah;* 2*and she bore him Zimram, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah.* 3*Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan, and the descendants of Dedan were the Asshurites, the Letushim, and the Leummim.* 4*The descendants of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida and Eldaah.  All these were sons of Keturah.* 5*Abraham left all his possessions to Isaac.* 6*To the sons of his concubines Abraham made grants during his lifetime, sending them away from his son Isaac eastward, to the Land of the East.*   
\* = literal Hebrew (*Interlinear Bible vol. I, page 60*).**

**Question:** How many sons, grandsons and great-grandsons were born to Abraham from Keturah?  
**Answer:** There were six sons; two grandsons and three great-grandsons fathered by Jokshan and five grandsons fathered by Midian.

**Question:** How many sons did Abraham father from Sarah, Hagar, and Keturah?  
**Answer:** He had eight sons.

**Question:** Abraham made provisions for his concubine's sons before his death, but who was the beneficiary of a double portion of Abraham's material estate and the sole inheritor of Abraham's spiritual blessings?  
**Answer:** The son born by God's divine will, Isaac, Sarah's son.

From Keturah, whose name means "enveloped in fragrant smoke" (incense), were descended the tribes of the Arabian Desert.  The meaning of her name reflects their occupation'merchants in the spice and incense trade. Keturah's son Midian became the father of the Midianites, the people who offered Moses asylum after his escape from Egypt and into whose tribe Moses married ([Ex 2:11-22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/exodus/exodus2.htm#v11)).([1](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_12.htm" \l "end1))

*To the sons of his concubines Abraham made grants during his lifetime, sending them away from his son Isaac eastward, to the Land of the East.*  This verse must be referring to Hagar and Keturah who are both identified here as Abraham's concubines.  In [25:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm#v1) the New Jerusalem translation recorded that Abraham "married another wife," but the Hebrew word translated as "married" is the Hebrew verb  "to take" = *laqach;*  for other examples of the use of this Hebrew verb see [Gen 3:22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis3.htm#v22); [6:21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis6.htm#v21); [7:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis7.htm#v2); [12:19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v19); [14:23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis14.htm#v23); etc.,  and the word translated as "wife' = *ishshah*, in Hebrew simply means "woman;"  for other examples of the use of this Hebrew noun see [Gen 2:22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis2.htm#v22), [23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis2.htm#v23); [3:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis3.htm#v1), [2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis3.htm#v2), [4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis3.htm#v4), [6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis3.htm#v6), [12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis3.htm#v12), [13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis3.htm#v13), [15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis3.htm#v15), [16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis3.htm#v16); [12:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v14), [15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v15); [20:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis20.htm#v3); [24:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v5), [39](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v39), [44](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v44); etc. (*The Interlinear Bible: Hebrew-English, vol I, page 60; Brown-Driver-Biggs,* pages 60-61, 542).

**Question:** What is the difference between a legal wife and a concubine?    
**Answer:** The essential difference was the marriage contract which gave a wife and her children certain rights a concubine did not enjoy.

The biblical scholar Joachim Jeremiah defined the differences between a slave/ concubine and a wife: *Legally, the wife differed from the slave in the first place because she kept the right of possession (but not of disposition) of the goods she had brought with her as a marriage portion; in the second place by the assurance of the marriage contract (ketubah) in fixing the sum to be paid to her in case of separation or death of the husband.  'What is the difference between a wife and a concubine?  R. [Rabbi] Meir (c. AD 150) said: The wife has a marriage contract, the concubine has none'* (Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus,* page 368).

**Please read Genesis 25:7-11: Abraham's Death**   
**25:7*he number of years Abraham lived was a hundred and seventy-five.* 8*When Abraham had breathed his last, dying at a happy, ripe age, old and full of years, he was gathered to his people.* 9*His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah facing Mamre, in the field of Ephron the Hittite son of Zohar.* 10*This was the field that Abraham had bought from the Hittites, and Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried there.* 11*After Abraham's death, God blessed his son Isaac.  Isaac settled near the well of Lahai Roi.***

This passage, which concludes the life history of the Patriarch Abraham, is out of sequence with the following events.  The events in the next part of the narrative in Genesis 25:20-28 occurred before Abraham's death.

**Question:** How many years did Abraham live in the "promised land"?  Hint: see [Gen 12:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v4) and [25:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm#v7).  
**Answer:** Abraham lived exactly one hundred years in the land God promised him.

**Question:** How old was Isaac and how old were Isaac's sons when Abraham died?  Hint: see [Gen 21:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v5) and [25:26](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm#v26).  
**Answer:** Isaac was seventy-five when his father died (Abraham's same age when he entered Canaan) and his twin sons were fifteen years old.

It is interesting that the estranged Isaac and Ishmael came together to bury their father.  Notice that Isaac was mentioned first in verse nine, his position as the re'shiyt ("firstborn" as heir) giving him precedence over his elder half-brother.  Abraham was eighty-six when Ishmael was born and 100 when Isaac was born.  At the time of Abraham's death Ishmael was 89 years old.

**Question:** Where was Abraham buried?  What was significant about this site?  See [Gen 18:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v1); [23:17-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v17); [35:27-29](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v27); [49:29-32](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis49.htm#v29); [50:12-13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis50.htm#v12).  
**Answer:** He was buried in the cave of Machpelah, where Sarah was buried, across from the tree at Mamre where God visited Abraham and Sarah to tell them of Isaac's divinely ordained birth.  This cave will also become the resting place of Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and their son Jacob and his wife Leah.

**Genesis 25:8:** *When Abraham had breathed his last, dying at a happy, ripe age, old and full of years, he was gathered to his people.* Three Hebrew verbs are used to describe Abraham's death: expired, died, and gathered (*Interlinear Bible,* page 61).  The words "he was gathered to his people" seems confusing since Abraham was not buried with his "people" who still lived in northern Mesopotamia.

**Question:** What then does the inspired writer mean by the statement that Abraham was "gathered to his people"?  See [Gen 29:22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis29.htm#v22); [49:29](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis49.htm#v29), [33](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis49.htm#v33). What is the connection to the Redeemer-Messiah?  See [Mt 12:40](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew12.htm#v40); [Acts 2:24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts2.htm#v24), [31](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts2.htm#v31); [Rom 10:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/romans/romans10.htm#v7); [Eph 4:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ephesians/ephesians4.htm#v9); [Heb 13:20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/hebrews/hebrews13.htm#v20); [1 Pt 3:18-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1peter/1peter3.htm#v18); [4:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1peter/1peter4.htm#v6); and CCC 633.  
**Answer:** This expression, repeated in Genesis [29:22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis29.htm#v22); [49:29](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis49.htm#v29) and [33](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis49.htm#v33), refers to a belief in an afterlife and to a "place" where the dead reside collectively.  This "abode of the dead" was called *Sheol* by the Hebrews and *Hades* by the Greeks.  It was the "place" into which Jesus descended, after being placed in His tomb, to preach the Gospel of salvation to those spirits who were awaiting the coming of the promised Redeemer-Messiah.

**Question:** What did Jesus tell the Jewish crowd about Abraham in [John 8:56-58](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john8.htm#v56) and what did Jesus reveal about Abraham's role in *Sheol* in the parable He told in [Luke 16:19-31](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke16.htm#v19)?  
**Answer:** He told them that He existed before father Abraham, that Abraham looked forward to His coming, and Abraham served as guardian of the spirits in *Sheol*.

**Genesis 25:11:** *After Abraham's death, God blessed his son Isaac.  Isaac settled near the well of Lahai Roi.* The covenantal promises continued through Isaac.  He settled near the well where Hagar encountered the Angel of Yahweh in a region of the Negeb between Kadesh and Bered'despite Hagar's vision of the divine at this site, Isaac was the sole inheritor of the promise to possess the land.

**Please Read Genesis 25:12-18: The Descendants of Ishmael**  
**25:12*These are the descendants of Ishmael son of Abraham by Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian slave-girl.* 13*These are the names of the sons of Ishmael by name and line: Ishmael's first-born was Nebaioth; then Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam,* 14*Mishma, Dumah, Massa,* 15*Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah.* 16*These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names, according to their settlements and encampments, twelve chiefs of as many tribes.* 17*The number of years Ishmael lived was one hundred and thirty-seven.  When he breathed his last and died, he was gathered to his people.* 18*He lived in the territory stretching from Havilah-by-Sur just outside Egypt on the way to Assyria, and he held his own against all his kinsmen.***

Along with his age, the same three verbs that were used to describe Abraham's death are applied to Ishmael ( [25:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm" \l "v17)), and Isaac ( [35:28-29](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v28)). Only the names of Ishmael's sons are listed in this toledot.  Two daughters are listed in [Gen 28:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v9).  The chiastic pattern that began with the rejection of Ishmael in favor of Isaac continues with another list of the non-elect line (previous list of the non-elect line was the toledoth of Abraham's family in Mesopotamia in [Genesis 22:20-24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v20); see handout #1, Lesson 11).  The twelve tribes of the non-elect line of Ishmael will stand in contrast to the twelve tribes of the elect line of Isaac's son Jacob/Israel and fulfills the prophecy given to Abraham in [Genesis 17:20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v20).

**Question:** How old was Ishmael when he died?  Where did his descendants live?  
**Answer:** He was 137 years old.  They lived on the desert border between Egypt and the Promised Land.

**Please read Genesis 25:19-28: The Birth of Isaac's Sons, Esau and Jacob**  
**25:19*This is the story of Isaac son of Abraham.  Abraham fathered Isaac.* 20*Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah the daughter of Bethuel the Aramaean of Paddan-Aram, and sister of Laban the Aramaean.* 21*Isaac prayed to Yahweh on behalf of his wife, for she was barren.  Yahweh heard his prayer and his wife Rebekah conceived.* 22*But the children inside her struggled so much that she said, 'If this is the way of it, why go on living?'  So she went to consult Yahweh,* 23*and Yahweh said to her: 'There are two nations in your womb, your issue will be two rival peoples.  One nation will have mastery of the other, and the elder will serve the younger.'* 24*When the time came for her confinement, there were indeed twins in her womb.* 25*The first to be born was red, altogether like a hairy cloak; so they named him Esau.* 26*Then his brother was born, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so they named him Jacob.  Isaac was sixty years old at the time of their birth.* 27*When the boys grew up Esau became a skilled hunter, a man of the open country.  Jacob on the other hand was a quiet man, staying at home among the tents.* 28*Isaac preferred Esau, for he had a taste for wild game; but Rebekah preferred Jacob.***

This part of the narrative begins another chiastic pattern that will pivot on the birth of Joseph son of Jacob, the fourth central figure in the second half of the Genesis narrative (the first half of Genesis focused on four events while the second half focuses on the biographies of four individuals).  This chiastic pattern slightly overlaps the previous pattern, beginning with the history of Isaac's family:

A. The beginning of the history of Isaac's descendants: births of Esau and Jacob, divided and fighting against each other ( [25:19-34](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm" \l "v19)).  
     B.  Encounter with Yahweh and relationship with pagan neighbors ([26:1-35](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v1)).  
           C.  Blessings sought and blessings given ([27:1-40](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis27.htm#v1))  
                 D.  Jacob flees from Esau ([27:41-28:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis27.htm#v41)).  
                       E. Esau's union (marriage) to an Ishmaelite woman ([28:6-9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v6))  
                             F. Jacob's encounter with God's messenger ([28:10-22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v10)).  
                                   G.  Jacob's arrival in Haran and meeting with Laban ([29:1-30](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis29.htm#v1)).  
                                         H. Jacob acquires a family ([30:1-21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis30.htm#v1)).  
                                               **I. The birth of Joseph (**[**30:22-24**](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis30.htm#v22)**).**  
                                         H.  Jacob acquires wealth ([30:25-43](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis30.htm#v25)).  
                                   G.  Jacob's departure from Haran and Laban ([31:1-32:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis31.htm#v1)).  
                             F.  Jacob's encounter with God's messenger ([32:2-3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis32.htm#v2)).  
                       E.  Jacob's planned reunion with Esau ([Gen 32:4-13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis32.htm#v14)).  
                 D.  Jacob prepares to meet Esau ([32:4-22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis32.htm#v4)).  
           C.  Blessing sought and blessing given ([32:23-33](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis32.htm#v23)).  
     B.  Encounter with Esau and relationship with pagan neighbors ([33:1- 34:31](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis33.htm#v1)).  
A.  The end of the history of Isaac: the 12 sons of Jacob and Isaac's death; Jacob and Esau united in peace to bury their father ([35:23-29](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v23)).

This section of the narrative begins, like the narratives in [Genesis 2:4a](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis2.htm#v4) and [Genesis 6:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis6.htm#v9) that recounted the history of Adam and Noah, with the Hebrew word *toledot* (genealogy, lineage, history), which is used to convey that this part of the narrative is the historical record of the life of Isaac and his descendants.  Like Sarah, Rebekah was barren.  Isaac's faith in God's promises was tested like his father's faith was tested in Sarah's bareness.  To open Rebekah's womb would require divine intervention.

**Question:** Why didn't God give the mothers of the children of Israel the blessing of fertility in their youth?  What message is there for us in the struggles of these people?  
**Answer:** The birth of the son who would carry the "promised seed" was to be not through human will and desire but through the will of God.  The account of God orchestrating the unfolding history of the Patriarchs should assure us that God is in control of events in the past, present, and future.  He is the Master of the world and of our place in the drama of human history.

**Question:** Isaac interceded with God to give Rebekah children.  For how many years did Isaac patiently petition God to give Rebekah children?  
**Answer:** He prayed the same intercessory prayer for 20 years.

The barren mother of a future important figure in salvation history is a common motif in Sacred Scripture.

**Question:** How many Old Testament women can you recall who were barren but later, by the will of God, gave birth to men who had an important impact on salvation history?  Name the women and their sons.  
**Answer:**

* Sarah was barren prior to the birth of Isaac ([Gen 11:30](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v30); [21:1-3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v1)).
* Rebekah was barren prior to the birth of Jacob/Israel ([Gen 25:21-26](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm#v21)).
* Rachel was barren prior to the birth of Joseph ([Gen 29:31](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis29.htm#v31); [30:22-23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis30.htm#v22)).
* Manoah's wife was barren prior to the birth of the Judge Samson ([Judg 13:1-7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/judges/judges13.htm" \l "v1), [24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/judges/judges13.htm#v24)).
* Hannah was barren prior to the birth of the Prophet Samuel ([1 Sam 1:1-5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1samuel/1samuel1.htm#v1), [19-21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1samuel/1samuel1.htm#v19)).

In each case the bareness of the mother was reversed by God's intervention.  It is by God's divine will that sons were born from these women'sons who played an important role in God's plan of salvation:

* Isaac continued the line of the "promised seed" and the covenant made with Abraham continued through Isaac ([Gen 26:3-5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v3)).
* The covenant continued through Jacob who God renamed Israel.  He became the father of the 12 tribes of Israel who were the people from whom the "promised seed" would come forth ([Gen 32:28](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis32.htm#v28); [46:8-25](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis46.htm#v8); [49:28](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis49.htm#v28)).
* Joseph, son of Jacob/Israel became the instrument by which God sent the children of Israel into Egypt ([45:16-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis45.htm#v16); [46:6-7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis46.htm#v6), [26-27](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis46.htm#v26)).
* Samson, a Nazariate Judge of Israel, brought God's judgment on the pagan gods of the Philistines and those who worshipped them ([Judg 16:23-31](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/judges/judges16.htm" \l "v23)).
* The Prophet Samuel was God's last representative in the era of the Judges of Israel and the holy prophet who anointed David as God's chosen king of Israel.  David was the "father" (ancestor) of the future Redeemer-Messiah ([1 Sam 3:19-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1samuel/1samuel3.htm#v19); [16:1-13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1samuel/1samuel16.htm#v1); [2 Sam 5:1-3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2samuel/2samuel5.htm#v1); [Mt 1:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew1.htm#v1)).

**Question:** When God opened Rebekah's womb and she did conceive, Rebekah experienced a very difficult pregnancy.  What did she do and what was the result?  
**Answer:** She sought out an answer to her suffering by consulting God.  It was revealed to her that she was to have twins who were struggling in her womb just as they were to struggle against each other as adults, and as their descendants would struggle against each other.  She was also told the prophecy that the younger son would be dominant over the elder.

Rebekah must have visited a holy place where Yahweh's presence was believed to reside.  According to Jewish tradition Rebekah sought out God's holy priest Melchizedech ([Gen 14:17-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis14.htm#v17)) who was still living and who prophesized that the struggle in her womb was an omen of the future struggles between her twin sons and their descendants.  An important part of the prophecy was that again God would prefer the younger son over the elder'continuing the biblical theme of God's preference for the younger son.  It is interesting that God prophesied for each generation of Abraham's line the future family history (see [Gen 12:1-3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v1); [16:11-12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis16.htm#v11); [17:19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v19); [25:23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm#v23); [27:27-29](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis27.htm#v27), [39-40](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis27.htm#v39); [37:1-11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis37.htm#v1)).

**Question:** How old was Isaac when his twins were born; how old was Abraham?  See [Gen 21:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v5).  
**Answer:** Isaac was 60 and Abraham was 160.

**Question:** How does Scripture describe the twin sons of Rebekah?  
**Answer:** The first child born was named Esau.  He was covered in reddish hair.  He became an archer and a skilled hunter.  His brother was born grasping the heel of his elder brother.  He became a refined, introspective man.

Esau like Nimrod and Ishmael was an archer and a hunter ([Gen 10:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v9); [21:20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v20)).  In [Genesis 27:40](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis27.htm#v40) Esau is described as one who "lives by the sword."  In Scripture the hunter presents the negative image of a predator while the shepherd is the ideal image of a leader ([Ps 23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/psalms/psalm23.htm); [Ez 34](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel34.htm); [Jn 10:1-18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john10.htm#v1); [1 Pt 5:3-4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1peter/1peter5.htm#v3)).

In this passage there are word plays on the names of the twins.  Esau is red and hairy, symbolizing his animal-like nature while Jacob is related to the Hebrews words for "heel" and "smooth."  In Esau's case the word play is between the Hebrew words for "red," *adom,*  which sounds like Edom, the land of Esau's descendants, and "hairy," *se'ar* (see [Gen 27:11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis27.htm#v11)) and his Hebrew name *esaw* (Esau).  The Hebrew word for "hairy" also sounds like the region of Edom that Esau and his descendants will inhabit, the red clay land of *se'ir* ([Num 24:18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/numbers/numbers24.htm#v18)).  According to the narrative Jacob's (*Ya'akov*) name means "heel" (*akeb*) catcher or "usurper." [Genesis 27:36](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis27.htm#v36) and [Hosea 12:3-4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/hosea/hosea12.htm#v3) give the etymology as meaning one who has "supplanted" or "betrayed" (*'akab*) his brother (*Anchor Bible Dictionary,* vol. 3, page 599).  Jacob is described as "quiet," but the Hebrew word "smooth" is better translated as "civilized" or "refined."  The Hebrew word *tam* is from a root meaning "to be complete, finished, perfect," but the word can also mean "smooth," as in the smoothness of Jacob's skin in contrast to Esau.  The same Hebrew adjective is used elsewhere in Scripture to describe someone who is deceptive in their speech ([Prov. 5:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/proverbs/preverb5.htm#v3); [26:28](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/proverbs/preverb26.htm#v28)).  Jacob becomes a man who is both "smooth" of skin, refined in his tastes, and deceptive' both smooth and slippery, in his speech (*Anchor Bible Dictionary, vol. 3, page 602;* Waltke, page 362).

**Question:** How do the parents respond to the twins?  
**Answer:** Isaac preferred Esau because of his hunting skills in providing wild game for his dinner table while Rebekah favored her younger son, Jacob, the son of the promise.

It is sad that a marriage that began with such promise should now become divided over the sons.  The favoritism of the parents will lead to discord in what was meant to be a holy family.  This is the third time that a material greed in a food preference will contribute to the failure of a family.

**Question:** What were the other failures that involved man's gluttonous desires?  
**Answer:** Adam and Eve ate fruit which was forbidden, Noah and Lot drank themselves into disgrace, and now Isaac's fondness for the taste of wild game caused him to disregard God's oracle, to alienate his younger son and his wife in his preference for one son over the other because he was fond of eating wild game.

Concerning the sin of satisfying the physical over the spiritual in the failures of the Old Testament patriarchs, St. Basil the Great wrote: *This vice of gluttony delivered Adam up to death, by the pleasure of the appetite consummate evil was brought into the world.  Through it Noah was mocked, Canaan was cursed, Esau was deprived of his birthright and married into a Canaanite family.  Lot became his own son-in-law and father-in-law, by marrying his own daughters* (*On Renunciation of the World,* quoted from *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, vol. I,* page 152).

**Please read Genesis 25:29-34: Esau Despises His Birthright  
25:29*Once, when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau returned from the countryside exhausted.* 30*Esau said to Jacob, 'Give me a mouthful of that red stuff there, I am exhausted''hence the name given to him, Edom.* 31*Jacob said, 'First, give me your birthright in exchange.'* 32*Esau said, 'Here I am, at death's door; what use is a birthright to me?'* 33*Then Jacob said, 'First give me your oath'; he gave him his oath and sold his birthright to Jacob.* 34*Then Jacob gave him some bread and lentil stew; and he ate, drank, got up and went away.  That was all Esau cared about his birthright.***

This account is given out of chronological sequence in the narrative to illustrate Esau and Jacob's character and disposition.  Neither man exhibited exemplary behavior.  This episode would probably have occurred just prior to Genesis 26:34 and is evidence that God did not treat Esau unjustly in choosing Jacob over Esau.

**Question:** What was Jacob's failure?  
**Answer:** He showed a lack of compassion and hospitality to his brother and used his brother's weakness to trick him into renouncing his birthright'which as the *re'shiyt* (status as the firstborn) entitled Esau to a double portion of the material wealth and spiritual blessing of their father.  It was a blessing promised to him by prophecy, but instead of patiently waiting on God to fulfill what was promised he decided to take his destiny into his own hands.

**Question:** What were Esau's character flaws?  
**Answer:** He was a base man, caring more about the condition of his stomach than his inheritance.  He was a physical and material man who lived in the now with no regard for his future and God's promised blessings.

Writing about the difference between the brothers as a metaphor for differences between professing Christians, St. Augustine wrote: *...the reason why the elder son is called Esau is that no one becomes spiritual without first having been "of the flesh" or materialistic.  But if they persist in "the mind of the flesh," they will always be Esau.  If, however, they become spiritual, they will then be the younger son.  But then the junior will be the senior; the other takes precedence in time, this one in virtue.  [..].  He [Esau] sold his right as firstborn to his younger brother.  He went off with a temporary satisfaction; the other went off with a permanent honor.  So those in the Church who are slaves to temporary pleasures and satisfaction eat lentils'lentils that Jacob certainly cooked but that Jacob did not eat.  [..]. Now apply this.  You have a Christian people.  But among this Christian people it is the ones who belong to Jacob that have the birthright or right of the firstborn.  Those, however, who are materialistic in life, materialistic in faith, materialistic in hope, materialistic in love, still belong to the old covenant, not yet to the new.  They still share the lot of Esau, not yet in the blessing of Jacob* (Augustine, *Sermon 4.12;* quoted from *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, vol. I, page 151*).

The sad truth is that it isn't always the big mistakes that trip us up but the little insidious mistakes in choosing the immediate and the material over the spiritual and eternal that evolve into sins that are like poisoned arrows'small but deadly.  In his commentary on Genesis St. John Chrysostom pointed out, concerning Esau's choice of the material over the spiritual, that God chose Jacob because He knew in advance the heart of Esau.  St. John concluded that Esau's fate was meant to be a lesson to us all: *Esau treated the birthright as of no account, proving unappreciative of the precedence given him by nature itself.  All this happened, however, so that one man's ingratitude might be demonstrated and that God's predilection might take effect.  Listening to this, however, let us learn the lesson never to neglect the gifts from God or forfeit important things for worthless trifles.  I mean, why, tell me, should we be obsessed with a desire for money when the kingdom of heaven and those ineffable blessings are within our grasp, and why prefer blessings that endure forever and never to those that are passing and scarcely last until evening?  What could be worse than the folly of being deprived of the former through lust after the latter and never being able to enjoy them in a pure fashion:  What good, after all, tell me, is such wealth?* (*Homilies on Genesis 50.6-7,* page 52).

Note the reference to the "red" stew/porridge in verse 30. Once again the image of the color "red," in Hebrew *'adom*, is another word play connected to Esau.  His descendants will come to inhabit the red soil of the land of Edom.([4](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_12.htm" \l "end4))

**Please read Genesis 26:1-14: The Threat to the Bride of Isaac**  
**26:1*There was a famine in the country'different from the previous famine which took place in the time of Abraham'and Isaac went to Abimelech, the Philistine king at Gerar.* 2*Yahweh had appeared to him and said, 'Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the country which I shall point out to you.* 3*Remain for the present in that country; I shall be with you and bless you, for I shall give all these countries to you and your descendants in fulfillment of the oath I swore to your father Abraham.* 4*I shall make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven, and I shall give them all these countries, and all nations on earth will bless themselves by your descendants* 5*in return for Abraham's obedience for he kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes and my laws.'* 6*So Isaac stayed at Gerar.* 7*When the people of the place asked him about his wife he replied, 'She is my sister,' for he was afraid to say, 'She is my wife,' thinking, 'The people of the place will kill me because of Rebekah, since she is beautiful.'* 8*When he had been there some time, Abimelech the Philistine king happened to look out of the window and saw Isaac fondling (laughing\*) with his wife Rebekah.* 9*Abimelech summoned Isaac and said to him, 'Surely she must be your wife!  How could you have said "She is my sister"?  Isaac replied, 'Because I thought I might be killed on her account.'* 10*Abimelech said, 'What a thing to do to us!  One of the people might easily have slept with your wife.  We should have incurred guilt, thanks to you.'* 11*Then Abimelech issued this order to all the people: 'Whoever touches this man or his wife will be put to death.'* 12*Isaac sewed his crops in that country, and that year he reaped a hundredfold.  Yahweh blessed him* 13*and the man became rich; he prospered more and more until he was very rich indeed.* 14*He acquired flocks and herds and a large retinue.  The Philistines began to envy him.*   
(\* = literal Hebrew; *Interlinear Bible, vol. I, page 64; Brown-Driver-Biggs, page 850*).**

**Question:** Why did the inspired writer include the information in verses 1-2?  
**Answer:** He wanted the reader to understand that this was not a repeat of Abraham and Sarah's adventures in Egypt in Genesis 12:10-20, but this was instead another threat to the bride of a patriarch that was similar to Abraham and Sarah's previous experience with the Egyptian pharaoh.

Isaac was preparing to go into Egypt to avoid the famine when he had his first direct experience with the God of Abraham.

**Question:** Why did Isaac stay in Philistine territory during the famine instead of the Egypt?  
**Answer:** God instructed Isaac not to go to Egypt but to remain in Gerar.

**Question:** What assurances, promises, and commands did Yahweh give Isaac in addition to the command to stay in Gerar?   What was the three-fold command God gave Isaac?  
**Answer:** God repeated the three-fold covenant promises made to Abraham: land/a nation, descendants, and a world-wide blessing.  But God also instructed Isaac that like his father he must be obedient in keeping God's (1) commandments, (2) statutes, and (3) laws.

**Question:** What were God's commandments, statutes and laws that Abraham kept?  See [Gen 17:9-14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v9) and [Gen 9:4-7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis9.htm#v4), CCC 58, and the oral tradition of the [Noahide Laws found in Lesson 6](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_6.htm#noahide_laws).    
**Answer:** The covenant commandment to circumcise all the males of his household ([Gen 17:9-14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v9)) and to keep the statutes and laws of the Noahide Covenant under which all peoples were still bound ([Gen 9:1-17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis9.htm#v1)). These laws and statutes included the prohibition against blasphemy, theft, idolatry, sexual immorality (incest, adultery, etc.), the eating of raw flesh and drinking blood, the statute of the death penalty in cases of homicide, and the command to establish courts of justice.

The laws of the Noahide covenant are an extension of the natural law that God has put in the hearts and in the conscience of all humans (see CCC 58).  Another possible answer is that the reference is to what will become the law of the Sinai Covenant that Abraham in his faithfulness and understanding of God has already kept in his walk of faith'the point being that a person of faith doesn't just observe God's law in external actions but lives God's laws from the heart ([Gen 15:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis15.htm#v6); [22:1-19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v1); [Heb 11:8-19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/hebrews/hebrews11.htm#v8)).  The same phrase in [Gen 26:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v5): "my commandments, my statutes, and my laws," is repeated in [Deuteronomy 11:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/deuteronomy/deuteronomy11.htm#v1) in reference to the whole of the Law of Moses.

It is interesting that the inspired writer did not draw our attention to the similar episode of Abraham and Sarah's encounter with the Philistine King Abimelech in [20:10-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis20.htm#v10).  This is probably because he expects the reader to make that more recent connection to this present episode on his/her own (same king name and same location).  He does, however, want the reader to see the link between these three separate encounters and the plan of salvation history (as outlined in Lesson 8; see handout #1-Lesson 8).

The threat to the bride in this passage has the same five elements as the previous accounts in [Genesis 12:10-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v10) and [20:1-13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis20.htm#v1), except God's intervention is less direct (see [handout #1 Lesson 8](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_8_Handouts.pdf)).  In this encounter God led Abimelech to look out of his window and observe Isaac "laughing" (the literal Hebrew) with a woman he had been told was Isaac's sister.  "Laughing" in this passage is an idiom for sexual foreplay.  It is the same Hebrew word that was used in [Genesis 21:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v9) in the episode where Sarah became concerned to see Ishmael "laughing" with Isaac (*Interlineal Bible, vol. I,* page 47). The use of this word cannot mean "mocking laughter," as is usually suggested in the [21:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v9) passage, since the king determined that the interaction between Isaac and Rebekah indicated sexual intimacy between a man and his wife/woman.

The King Abimelech (his name means "king's father" or "father of the king") in Genesis 26 may be the son of the previous King Abimelech who Abraham encountered in chapters 20 and 21.  At least 40 years have passes since Abraham's encounters with the King Abimelech.  In Abimelech and Abraham's last encounter in [Genesis 26:26-33](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v26), the Philistine king was concerned about the succession and successful reign of his son and heir.  This man may indeed be the son of the previous Abimelech (with the name "Abimelech" being a dynastic name for each Philistine king), but, if this is the son, the present King Abimelech was still served by the same army commander as his father, the military commander Phicol ([21:22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v22); [26:26](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v26)).  Notice that the king in this passage does not treat Isaac with the deference and respect with which the previous King Abimelech treated Isaac's father, Abraham, nor does he bring up the previous encounter with Sarah and Abraham.

**Question:** What was Isaac's response to Abimelech's accusations and his criticism of Isaac behavior?  What are the parallels to Abraham's response to the Egyptian pharaoh in [Genesis 12:15-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v15) and to King Abimelech in [Genesis 20:8-13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis20.htm#v8)?  What is different?  
**Answer:** Isaac gave the same excuses: fear he would be killed; it is the same excuse Abraham gave the Egyptian pharaoh and the Philistine king.  Isaac's King Abimelech reacted in much the same way as Abraham's King Abimelech.  He was shocked that Isaac's behavior could have put his people in jeopardy in violating a married woman.  Isaac's King Abimelech, however, was free of guilt because he had not taken Rebekah into his harem and therefore there was no compensation paid to Isaac, only the king's assurance of protection.

**Genesis 26:12-14:** 26:12*Isaac sewed his crops in that country, and that year he reaped a hundredfold.  Yahweh blessed him* 13*and the man became rich; he prospered more and more until he was very rich indeed.* 14*He acquired flocks and herds and a large retinue.  The Philistines began to envy him.* It was not uncommon for pastoral nomads to plant crops during the growing season.  Isaac's obedience during the famine by resisting going into Egypt and remaining as God had directed him in the Negeb was rewarded.

**Question:** How did God reward Isaac's obedience?  
**Answer:** He reaped an abundant harvest, he became rich, he acquired flocks, herds, and numerous men and women retainers.

Abraham was a wealthy man and even though Isaac received a double portion of his father's wealth, the majority of Abraham's wealth had been divided among Isaac's seven half-brothers; therefore, it was necessary for Isaac to rebuild his wealthy from what he had received from his father.

**Question:** What was the negative aspect of Isaac's growing material wealth?  
**Answer:** The Philistines began to envy his prosperity.

It is worth noting that the Pharaoh of [Genesis 12:10-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v10), Abraham's King Abimelech and Isaac's King Abimelech all seem to be men who were more honorable than either Abraham or his son.  Pagan nations and their leaders were not all wicked'they too were deserving of redemption, but the offer of salvation to the nations would come through the descendant of Patriarchs who as to be born through Divine will and who would come in to mankind in both the flesh and the Spirit.

**Please read Genesis 26:15-25: The Disputes over Water Rights in Gerar and Beersheba**  
***father Abraham'filling them in with earth.* 16*Then Abimelech said to Isaac, 'You must leave us, for you have become much more powerful than we are.'* 17*So Isaac left; he pitched camp in the Valley of Gerar and there he stayed.* 18*Isaac reopened the wells dug by the servants of his father Abraham and blocked up by the Philistines after Abraham's death, and he gave them the same names as his father had given them.* 19*But when Isaac's servants*26:15*The Philistines had blocked up all the wells dug by his father's servants'in the days of his, digging in the valley, found a well of spring-water there,* 20*the herdsmen of Gerar disputed it with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, 'That water is ours!'  So Isaac named the well Esek, because they had disputed with him.* 21*They dug another well, and there was a dispute over that one too; so he named it Sitnah.* 22*Then he left there, and dug another well, and since there was no dispute over this one, he named it Rehoboth, saying, 'Now Yahweh had made room for us to thrive in the country.'* 23*From there he went up to Beersheba.* 24*Yahweh appeared to him the same night and said: 'I am the God of your father Abraham.  Do not be afraid, for I am with you.  I shall bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake.* 25*There he built an altar and invoked the name of Yahweh.  There he pitched his tent, and there Isaac's servants sank a well.***

**Question:** How many new wells did Isaac's servants dig?  What was the significance of the last well?  
**Answer:** Three new wells were dug before Yahweh appeared to him and a fourth well was dug at Beersheba after Yahweh appeared to him to reassure Isaac of His protection.

Wells were named to signify ownership.  That the wells are designated "spring-water" wells, in the literal Hebrew "living waters," indicates that the wells were highly prized artesian springs.  The discovery of these wells symbolized God's divine protection and blessings.

**Question:** In [John 4:6-14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john4.htm#v6) at a well identified as "Jacob's well", Jesus offered a Samaritan woman "living waters," "welling up for eternal life."  What spiritual gift was Jesus offering to this woman?  
**Answer:** He was offering her the gift of salvation through the power of the Holy Spirit'the living water "welling up to eternal life" in the heart that accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior.

In the Old Testament the "living water" of the wells of the Patriarchs symbolized God's gracious protection and the abundance of His blessings.  In the New Testament "living water" will become a sign of the work of God the Holy Spirit in Christian baptism and His action in "welling up" faith in the hearts of believers (CCC 694; 2652; 2654).

Isaac restored his father's wells, giving them the same names Abraham gave them.  The names of the new wells reflected Isaac's experience with his foreign hosts: *Esek* means "dispute," *Sitnah* means "opposition," and *Rehoboth* means "space."  Isaac's *Rehoboth* is probably the current day well-site called Reheibeh, located about 19 miles southwest of Beersheba.  Several large ancient wells have been found in this region (Waltke, page 370).

**Genesis 26: 23:***From there he went up to Beersheba.*

**Question:** What was the significant of Beersheba in the story of Abraham?  See [Gen 21:22-34](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v22).  
**Answer:** It was the site of the covenant treaty between Abraham and King Abimelech; it was where Abraham dug a new well which he named "well of the oath" and where Abraham worshipped Yahweh.

**Genesis 26:24:** *Yahweh appeared to him the same night and said: 'I am the God of your father Abraham.  Do not be afraid, for I am with you.  I shall bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake.  There he built an altar and invoked the name of Yahweh.  There he pitched his tent, and there Isaac's servants sank a well.*

**Question:** God addressed Isaac a second time, giving him a blessing.  What reason did God give for Isaac's blessing?  Was it because of Isaac's righteousness?    
**Answer:** No, he was blessed because of Abraham's obedient and faithful service.

**Question:** What was Isaac's response and what was God's additional blessing and what did it symbolize?  
**Answer:** Isaac built and altar and offered worship to Yahweh.  God blessed him with yet another well, symbolizing the abundance of God's blessings.

Isaac, like his father before him, built an altar to commemorate God's revelation (see [12:7-8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v7); [21:33](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v33)).  Abraham's sanctuary at Beersheba became his son's sanctuary'Isaac claimed both the material and spiritual blessings of his father.

**Question:** With Yahweh's blessing both Abraham and Isaac became wealthy and powerful men.  What was the difference between King Abimelech's reaction to Abraham's growing power in [Genesis 21:22-34](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v22) and his successor's response to Isaac's growing power in this passage?  
**Answer:** Abraham's Abimelech sought a non-aggression pact with Abraham, forming a covenant and a lifelong friendship.  Isaac's King Abimelech's fear of Isaac made him demand that Isaac remove his herds and flocks of animals and his people.

The command was probably to leave from the vicinity of Gerar, Abimelech's capital city, since Isaac remained in Philistine territory in the Valley of Gerar and opened up wells between Gerar and Beersheba.([2](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_12.htm" \l "end2))

**Please read Genesis 26:26-35: The Alliance with Abimelech and Esau's Foreign Wives**  
**26:26*Abimelech came from Gerar to see him, with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol the commander of his army.* 27*Isaac said to them, 'Why do you come to me since you hate me, and have made me leave you?'* 28*'It became clear to us that Yahweh was with you,' they replied, 'and so we thought, "It is time to have a treaty sworn between us, between us and you."  So let us make (\*cut)  a covenant with you:* 29*that you will not do us any harm, since we never molested you but were unfailingly kind to you and let you go away in peace.  Henceforth, Yahweh's blessing on you!'* 30*He them made them a feast and they ate and drank.* 31*Early next morning, they exchanged oaths.  Then Isaac bade them farewell and they left him as friends (brothers\*).* 32*It happened, the same day, that Isaac's servants brought him news about the well they had been digging.  'We have found water'; they said to him.* 33*So he called the well Sheba, and hence the town is named Beersheba to this day.* 34*When Esau was forty years old he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite.* 35*These were a bitter disappointment to Isaac and Rebekah.*   
\*= literal Hebrew (*Interlineal Bible vol. I, page 66).***

Isaac and Abimelech did not part on happy terms verse 16 and the tension escalated when Abimelech's herdsmen disputed with Isaac's servants over the water rights.  But now, Abimelech, with two men (his army commander and probably his prime minister) has sought to reestablish a relationship with Isaac and has requested a non-aggression covenant treaty.

**Genesis 26:28-29:** 28*'It became clear to us that Yahweh was with you,' they replied, 'and so we thought, "It is time to have a treaty sworn between us, between us and you."  So let us make (\*cut)  a covenant with you:* 29*that you will not do us any harm, since we never molested you but were unfailingly kind to you and let you go away in peace.  Henceforth, Yahweh's blessing on you!'*

**Question:** What may have happened to change Abimelech's attitude toward Isaac?  
**Answer:** It is possible that Phicol, who knew Abraham was a prophet of Yahweh, has counseled the new king Abimelech that it is better to have Abraham's son as a friend than an enemy.  It is also possible that the promise God made to Abraham, which is now part of Isaac's inheritance, has been visited on the Philistines: *I shall bless those who bless you, and shall curse those who curse you* ([Gen 12:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v3)).  It is clear that something has happened to change the attitude of the Philistine king.  What has "become clear" may also be associated with God blessing Isaac with abundant water in the wells his men have dug'a sign the Philistines have recognized that Isaac, like his father, is protected and blessed by his God.

**Genesis 26:30-31:** 32*It happened, the same day, that Isaac's servants brought him news about the well they had been digging.  'We have found water'; they said to him.* 33*So he called the well Sheba, and hence the town is named Beersheba to this day.*

Isaac and Abimelech sacrificed an animal, ate a sacred covenant meal, and exchanged oaths to seal the covenant treaty which made them "brothers."  Covenants create the loyalty of family bonds.

**Genesis 26:32-33:** *It happened, the same day, that Isaac's servants brought him news about the well they had been digging.  'We have found water'; they said to him. 33 So he called the well Sheba, and hence the town is named Beersheba to this day.*

The discovery of yet another well, which was perhaps the rediscovery of Abraham's well at Beersheba that had been filled in by the Philistines, was a sign of God's favor.  Like his father who named the well after his covenant treaty with the Philistines "well of the oath," or "Beersheba", Isaac commemorates both the new covenant with the Philistines and God's blessing by naming the new well "Sheba," meaning both "oath" and "seven;" to swear an oath is to "seven oneself."  This discovery reaffirms the name of the place as "Beersheba," the name Abraham gave the site approximately 40 years earlier in [Genesis 21:31-33](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v31).

**Genesis 26:34-35:** *When Esau was forty years old he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite. 35 These were a bitter disappointment to Isaac and Rebekah.*

Abraham sought a wife for Isaac when he was 40 years old ([Gen 25:20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm#v20)), but now, either because of Isaac's negligence or Esau's willfulness, Esau married contrary to the wishes of his parents.  Isaac and Rebekah, who have been divided over their sons, are now united in their disappointment over Esau's selection of brides'foreign women.

**Question:** Why are the Hittite brides of Esau unsuitable to bear the "promised seed"?  See [Gen 10:15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v15); [15:16-21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis15.htm#v16); [23:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v3); [28:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v1). Hint: The literal translation is "sons of Heth" for Hittites.  
**Answer:** They are descended from the cursed line of Canaan and not the blessed line of Shem.  They are not fit to bear the "promised seed."

Once again Esau has shown that he is not to be trusted as the father of the "promised seed" through which all nations on earth are to be blessed.  Although Abraham was befriended by Hittites who came to his aid in the war against the Mesopotamian kings, the Hittites, descendants of Heth, son of Canaan son of Ham, are listed among the accursed Canaanites.

**Please read Genesis 27:1-17: Rebekah and Jacob Plan to Obtain the Blessing of the Firstborn for Jacob by Fraud**

***1 When Isaac had grown old, and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see, he summoned his elder son Esau.  'Son!' he said, and Esau replied, 'Here I am.'  2 He then said, 'Look, I am old and do not know when I may die.  3 Now take your weapons, your quiver and bow; go out into the country and hunt me some game.  4 Make me the kind of appetizing dish I like and bring it to me to eat and I shall give you my special blessing before I die.'  5 Rebekah was listening while Isaac was talking to his son Esau.  So when Esau went into the country to hunt game for his father, 6 Rebekah said to her son Jacob, 'I have just heard your father saying to your brother Esau, 7 "Bring me some game and make an appetizing dish for me to eat and then I shall bless you in Yahweh's presence before I die."  8 Now, son, listen to me and do as I tell you.  9 Go to the flock and bring me back two good kids, so that I can make the kind of special dish your father likes.  10 Then take it to your father for him to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies.'  11 Jacob said to his mother Rebekah, 'Look, my brother Esau is hairy, while I am smooth-skinned.  12 If my father happens to touch me, he will see I am cheating him, and I shall bring a curse down on myself instead of a blessing.'  13 But his mother replied, 'On me be the curse, my son!  Just listen to me; go and fetch me the kids.'  14 So he went to fetch them and brought them to his mother, and she made the kind of special dish his father liked.  15 Rebekah took her elder son Esau's best clothes, which she had at home, and dressed her younger son Jacob in them, 16 covering his arms and the smooth part of his neck with the skins of the kids.  17 She then handed the special dish and the bread she had made to her son Jacob.***

**Old and infirm, sensing that his death was not far off, Isaac sought to cushion his beloved son's loss of the material birthright by giving Esau the spiritual blessing inherited from Abraham.   Rebekah's plan to deceive her husband may seem shocking, but she is not the only one engaging in plotting and deceit.  It was a common practice for the father to publically bless his sons and announce their inheritance before his death in the presence of witnesses (see** [**Gen 48:21**](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis48.htm#v21)**;** [**49:1**](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis49.htm#v1)**,** [**28**](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis49.htm#v28)**;** [**50:24-25**](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis50.htm#v24)**;** [**Dt 33:1**](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/deuteronomy/deuteronomy33.htm#v1)**).  What was unusual in this case was that Isaac planned that the blessing of Esau was to be a private affair.  Knowing that God prophesized that Jacob was to be chosen over his elder brother (**[**Gen 25:23**](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm#v23)**), Isaac was plotting against Rebekah, Jacob, and the will of God in giving Esau the private "special blessing" of the Abrahamic "birthright." The double blessing of the material wealth, the spiritual blessing as the head of the family, and the heir of the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant were the inheritance the patriarchs were to pass on to their heirs.  Esau had already renounced his material birthright; only the special blessing of the spiritual reward remained.  Perhaps this was Isaac's revenge for Jacob's uneven exchange of a bowl of lentil stew for the firstborn's material inheritance.  He would give Esau the blessing in private where no one else was present to protest and then announce the event publically when it was too late for Rebekah or Jacob to intervene.(****[3](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_12.htm" \l "end3))**

**Question:** In what way was Isaac's physical blindness symbolic of a more serious condition?  See [Gen 25:23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm#v23), [28](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm#v28); [26:35](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v35); [27:3-4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis27.htm#v3).  
**Answer:** His physical blindness was symbolic of his spiritual blindness in his failure to see the character flaws in Esau and the necessity of God's spiritual choice over the natural order of the firstborn by birth.

**Question:** Contrast Isaac's preference for Esau and his response to God's choice of Jacob with Abraham's response to God's rejection of Ishmael and selection of Isaac.  What is the problem with Isaac choosing Esau to be the inheritor of the promises made to Abraham? See [Gen 17:18-22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v18); [21:12-14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v12).  
**Answer:** Abraham preferred that Ishmael should be his heir and petitioned God to choose his elder son ([Gen 17:18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v18)), but when God refused his petition, Abraham submitted to the will of God ([Gen 17:19-22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v19); [21:12-14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v12)).  Isaac decided to ignore the prophecy concerning his elder son and was determined to give Esau the double portion birthright of the re'shiyt, "the firstborn," which included the spiritual blessing of the Abrahamic covenant'a role for which he was most unsuited.

Rebekah, whose decisiveness was such a virtue in the narrative of her selection as the bride of Isaac, decided, after overhearing Isaac's plan, to take her son's destiny into her own hands and plotted against her husband to secure the blessing of the firstborn for her favorite son.  In light of Isaac's deception, Rebekah's actions seem less objectionable'she was trying to secure the destiny God promised her son.

**Question:** She may have spiritually in the right because she was promised by God that her younger son was to take precedence over her elder son, but how did she fail in her actions to secure that promise and who made a similar mistake in an attempt to secure God's promise?  
**Answer:** Rebekah failed to trust God to keep His promise concerning Jacob in the same way that Sarah failed to trust God to give Abraham a legitimate son.

**Question:** What risks were Rebekah and Jacob taking in formulating this plan?  
**Answer:** If Isaac discovered their plan to usurp the blessing, Jacob could be excommunicated from the family'he could be cursed and she might be cursed as well.

**Please read Genesis 27:18-29: The Plan is Executed: Jacob Receives the Blessing of the Heir**  
**27:18*He went to hisfather and said, 'Father!'  'Yes?' he replied.  'Which of my sons are you?'* 19*Jacob said to his father, 'I am Esau your first-born; I have done as you told me.  Please sit up and eat some of the game I have brought and then give me your soul's blessing.'* 20*Isaac said to his son, 'Son, how did you succeed so quickly?'  He replied, 'Because Yahweh your God made things go well for me.'* 21*Isaac said to Jacob, 'Come closer, son, so that I can feel you and be sure whether you really are my son Esau or not.'* 22*Jacob went closer to his father Isaac, who felt him and said, 'The voice is Jacob's voice but the arms are the arms of Esau!'* 23*He did not recognize him since his arms were hairy like his brother Esau's, and so he blessed him.* 24*He said, 'Are you really my son Esau?'  And he replied, 'I am.'* 25*Isaac said, 'Serve it to me, so that I can eat my son's game and give you my special blessing.'  He served it to him and he ate; he offered him wine, and he drank.* 26*His father Isaac said to him, 'Come closer, and kiss me, son.'* 27*He went closer and kissed his father, who sniffed the smell of his clothes.  Then he blessed him, saying: 'Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a fertile field which Yahweh has blessed.* 28*May God give you dew from heaven, and the richness of the earth, abundance of grain and wine!* 29*Let peoples serve you and nations bow low before you!  Be master of your brothers; let your mother's other sons bow low before you!  Accursed be whoever curses you and blessed be whoever blesses you!'***

When Jacob approached Isaac with the meal Rebekah prepared, Isaac was cautious and questioned if this son was indeed Esau.  Isaac examined Jacob in several ways, but clever Rebekah had carefully thought out every possible test and Isaac accepted that Jacob was indeed the son he intended to bless. Jacob received the blessing of the re'shiyt'the "firstborn", but it is significant that in the blessing Isaac left no share in the spiritual blessing for another son.  His meanness in this regard will backfire and Isaac with be left without a positive blessing for Esau'Esau will only be left with an anti-blessing.

It is interesting that Jacob spoke of Yahweh as Isaac's God and not as their God.  This is either because Jacob had not yet given his heart entirely to Yahweh or because he knew that this was the way Esau would express his lack of a relationship to the god of his fathers. 

**Genesis 27:28-29:** *'May God give you dew from heaven, and the richness of the earth, abundance of grain and wine!  Let peoples serve you and nations bow low before you!  Be master of your brothers; let your mother's other sons bow low before you!  Accursed be whoever curses you and blessed be whoever blesses you!'*

**Question:** What was the extent of the spiritual blessing?  
**Answer:** The blessing of the fertility of the land and dominion over not only the extended family to include the nations who will be descended from the sons of Abraham, but over other nations'it is the world-wide blessing promised to Abraham ([Gen 12:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v2); [22:18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v18)).

To be master over his "brothers" and his "mother's other sons" does not mean that Rebekah had other sons in addition to her twins (see [27:40](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis27.htm#v40)).  Isaac was referring to mastery over the other kinsmen'this son was to possess the power and authority over the extended family including the sons of his brother.

**Question:** What is the significance of the last line of verse 29: *Accursed be whoever curses you and blessed be whoever blesses you!* See [Gen 12:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v3) and [Num 24:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/numbers/numbers24.htm#v9).  
**Answer:** Isaac passed on to Jacob the blessing and destiny God gave Abraham in [Genesis 12:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v3).  It will be a blessing that the children of Jacob/Israel will inherit ([Num 24:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/numbers/numbers24.htm#v9)).

**Please read Genesis 27:30-39: The Fraud Revealed and Esau's Anti-blessing**  
**27:30*As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and just as Jacob was leaving his father Isaac, his brother Esau returned from hunting.* 31*He too made an appetizing dish and brought it to his father, 'Father, please eat some of your son's game and then give me your special blessing.'* 32*His father Isaac asked, 'Who are you?'  'I am your first-born son, Esau,'* 33*At this Isaac was seized with a violent trembling and said, 'Who was it, then, that went hunting and brought me the game?  I finished eating it just before you came; I blessed him, and now blessed he will remain!'* 34*On hearing his father's words, Esau cried out loudly and bitterly and said to his father, 'Father, bless me too!'* 35*But he replied, 'Your brother came by fraud and took your blessing.'* 36*Esau said, 'His name should be Jacob right enough, for he has now supplanted me twice.  First he took my birthright, and look, now he has gone and taken my blessing!  But', he added, 'have you not kept a blessing for me?'* 37*Isaac replied to Esau, 'I have already made him your master; I have given him all his brothers as servants, I have given him grain and wine to sustain him.  So what can I do for you, son?'* 38*Esau said to his father, 'Can you bless only once, father?  Father, bless me too.'  Isaac remained silent, and Esau began to weep aloud.* 39*Then his father Isaac spoke again and said: 'Far from the richness of the earth and the dew of heaven above, your home will be.  By your sword you will live, and your brother will you serve.  But when you win your freedom, you will shake his yoke off your neck.'***

Isaac's shock in realizing that he has been tricked by the son he meant to disinherit from the spiritual blessing followed by Esau's cry of despair is heart-wrenching.  Isaac's deception has backfired.  His earlier full pronouncement of the secret spiritual blessing intended for Esau has left nothing for a second blessing.  Esau recognized that his brother's name was prophetic:  Jacob, meaning "usurper" has once again deprived him of what he considered to be rightfully his.  Esau begged his father for another blessing, but the only blessing Isaac can give Esau is an anti-blessing'a curse.

**Question:** Why couldn't the first blessing be amended or retracted?  
**Answer:** A blessing carried the force and power of Yahweh's name; it was in essence Yahweh who pronounced the blessing and the force of God's name was behind honoring it.  Isaac cannot take back or amend the blessing.  He must have also recognized God's will in what had transpired earlier in Jacob's blessing.

**Question:** What was the extent of the anti-blessing? Contrast Esau's anti-blessing to Jacob's blessing.  
**Answer:** The descendants of Esau were denied the richness of the earth with which the descendants of Jacob/Israel were to be blessed. Esau's people were to live and die by the sword, never to receive the inheritance of the Promised Land and to be dominated by Israel until the time came when they would *shake his yoke off your neck,* which means toeventually be freed of the domination of Israel.

Edom throwing off the "yoke" of Judah was historically fulfilled in [2 Kings 8:20-22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2kings/2kings8.htm#v20) when Edom broke off from the control of King Jehoram of Judah and set up its own king. Time would come when a descendant of Esau, in violation of the Sinai Covenant, would become the King of the Jews; this man who laid his "yoke" upon the descendants of Jacob was King Herod the Great.([5](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_12.htm" \l "end5))

**Genesis 27:41-45: Rebekah Sends Jacob to Haran**  
27:41*Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing of his father had given him, and Esau said to himself, 'The time to mourn for my father will soon be here.  Then I shall kill my brother Jacob.'* 42*When the words of Esau, her elder son, were repeated to Rebekah, she sent for her younger son Jacob and said to him, 'Look, your brother Esau means to take revenge and kill you.* 43*Now, son, listen to me; go at once and take refuge with my brother Laban in Haran.* 44*Stay with him a while, until your brother's fury cools,* 45*until your brother's anger is diverted from you and he forgets what you have done to him.  Then I shall send someone to bring you back.  I do not want to lose you both on one day!*

Hearing of Esau's plan for revenge, the decisive Rebekah did not hesitate to take action.  Once again a mother mediated God's preference in protecting her son while the father seemed to be blind to God's higher purpose for the chosen son ([Gen 21:9-13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis21.htm#v9)).  But Isaac, Rebekah, and Jacob all paid a painful price for their sins of usurping God's plan for the future of this family:

* Isaac became completely alienated from his wife and younger son'the once holy family disintegrated into a dysfunctional family filled with mistrust, hatred, and the desire for revenge.
* Rebekah sent Jacob away to protect him from his angry brother, but she never saw her beloved Jacob again.
* Jacob, who deceived his father, was himself be deceived by his uncle Laban, by his bride Leah, and most cruelly by his own sons.

**Question:** Why was Rebekah fearful that she would loose both her sons?  See [Gen 9:5-6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis9.htm#v5).  
**Answer:** She was fearful that Esau would murder Jacob and that Esau would pay for his crime with his life.  Under the Noahide law the penalty for homicide was execution.

**Question:** For how long does the Noahide covenant remain in place?  See CCC 58.  
**Answer:** The covenant with Noah remains in force over the non-elect until the completion of the universal proclamation of the Gospel.

Writing of God's divine election of Israel to fulfill His plan of salvation, God's prophet addressed the nation of Israel using Jacob and Esau as examples: *The word of Yahweh to Israel through Malachi.* *'I have loved you, says Yahweh.  But you ask, "How have you shown your love?"  Was not Esau Jacob's brother? Declares Yahweh; even so, I loved Jacob but I hated Esau.  I turned his mountains into a desert and his heritage into dwellings in the wastelands.  If Edom says, "We have been struck down but we shall rebuild our ruins," Yahweh Sabaoth says this, "Let them build, but I shall pull down! They will be known as Land of Wickedness and Nations-with-which-Yahweh-is-angry-for-ever.  You will see this yourselves and you will say:  Yahweh is mighty beyond the borders of Israel"* ([Mal 1:1-5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/malachi/malachi1.htm#v1)).

**Questions for group discussion:**

**Question:** How would you characterize the differences between Isaac and Abraham in their relationship to God and to the fatherly leadership in their family?

**Question:** How do Esau and Jacob become symbols of everyman?  What were Esau's failures?  What were Jacob's strengths and what were his character flaws?  When you consider that both men had weaknesses why was it that God chose Jacob over Esau?