

# Isaac, Jacob, and Esau

## Sarah's Death

Since Sarah was ninety when Isaac was born, Isaac would be about thirty-seven when his mother died.

*Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. 2 So Sarah died in Kirjath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. Gen 23:1-2*

Abraham then purchased the cave of Machpelah. For his entire life, Abraham had sojourned in the land of Canaan with no property. But after the death of Sarah, God recorded in detail the purchase of the one piece of property in Canaan that Abraham owned, a place to bury his dead.

*in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite as a possession for a burial place. 31 There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah. Gen 49:30-32*

## Isaac's wife Rebekah

After the death of Sarah, with Isaac nearing the age of forty, Abraham takes thought for a wife for Isaac. Perhaps it was his own assessment of the moral standards of the inhabitants of Canaan or maybe knowing God that would dispossess them of their land he makes his servant swear by the Name of the LORD, he will not take a wife from them.

*"Please, put your hand under my thigh, 3 and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; 4 but you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac." Gen 24:2-4*

This was Abraham's chief steward to whom he had set over and "who ruled over all that he had." So to the best and most trusted of all he knew Abraham entrusted the important task for finding the woman through whom all of God's promises regarding the seed would come.

Since this is a journey of many days, the servant wants an exact idea of Abraham's expectations. If he can't find one, is he to take Isaac back to look for himself? Abraham's strong response revealed that was out of the question. But Abraham expressed his strong conviction that God would send an angel to lead the way and make the journey prosperous, but not being presumptuous, he informs the servant that he will be blameless if he could not find a woman.

The city to which the servant journeyed was Haran in Mesopotamia about 300 miles away. The journey passes in silence and having arrived at Haran at the time when the women go out to draw the water, he offers a prayer to God for help in finding the woman who would become Isaac's wife.

*"O Lord God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day, and show kindness to my master Abraham. 13 Behold, here I stand by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. 14 Now let it be that the young woman to whom I say, 'Please let down your pitcher that I may drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink' — let her be the one You have appointed for Your servant Isaac. And by this I will know that You have shown kindness to my master." Gen 24:12-14*

Even before he had finished the prayer, Rebekah arrived. She is described as: "the young woman was very beautiful to behold, a virgin; no man had known her." (Gen. 24:16). When he first saw her, "the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please let me drink a little water from your pitcher." (Gen. 24:17). Everything he had requested in the prayer, she fulfilled and in gratitude for her actions, he gave her a gold nose ring and two bracelets of gold. When he asked her of her lineage, all that he had hoped for was fulfilled and he worshiped God for His intervention.

*"Whose daughter are you? Tell me, please, is there room in your father's house for us to lodge?" 24 So she said to him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel, Milcah's son, whom she bore to Nahor." 25 Moreover she said to him, "We have both straw and feed enough, and room to lodge." 26 Then the man bowed down his head and worshiped the Lord. Gen 24:23-26*

As he expressed his thanks to God out loud she overheard them and ran to tell her family.

*And he said, "Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His mercy and His truth toward my master. As for me, being on the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren." 28 So the young woman ran and told her mother's household these things. Gen 24:27-28*

With the subsequent history bearing out the covetous attitude of her brother Laban, and the wording here, it is easy to question Laban's sincerity. After entering the home, unloading the camels, and taken care of their needs, food is brought to him, but he can't eat because his duty to Abraham is pressing upon him.

*Then the man came to the house. And he unloaded the camels, and provided straw and feed for the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. 33 Food was set before him to eat, but he said, "I will not eat until I have told about my errand." Gen. 24:32-33*

With a few additional explanations regarding Abraham's welfare he sets forth his commission exactly as Abraham had given it to him. He also relates to them his prayer to God and how Rebekah had acted. He then made his request.

*And I bowed my head and worshiped the Lord, and blessed the Lord God of my master Abraham, who had led me in the way of truth to take the daughter of my master's brother for his son. 49 Now if you will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me. And if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left." Gen 24:48-49*

Both Laban and Bethuel respond exactly as they should.

*Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, "The thing comes from the Lord; we cannot speak to you either bad or good. 51 Here is Rebekah before you; take her and go, and let her be your master's son's wife, as the Lord has spoken." Gen 24:50-51*

But when the servant seeks to leave the next day, they ask that she might remain with them a few days to say their farewells. The servant knows what Abraham is enduring with the passing days and refuses to delay. When they defer to Rebekah, she agrees to go that very day.

*And he said to them, "Do not hinder me, since the Lord has prospered my way; send me away so that I may go to my master." 57 So they said, "We will call the young woman and ask her personally." 58 Then they called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" And she said, "I will go." 59 So they sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men. Gen 24:56-60*

The return journey is also passed over in silence, but when they arrive, Isaac is meditating in the field and sees them approaching. When Rebekah saw Isaac and learned who he was in modesty she put on a veil and the servant recounted all the details to Isaac and she became his wife.

*And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening; and he lifted his eyes and looked, and there, the camels were coming. 64 Then Rebekah lifted her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from her camel; 65 for she had said to the servant, "Who is this man walking in the field to meet us?" The servant said, "It is my master." So she took a veil and covered herself. 66 And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. 67 Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent; and he took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. Gen 24:63-67*

## **The Final Days of Abraham**

The final years of Abraham after burying Sarah and choosing a wife for Isaac are summed up in his remarriage to Keturah and the offspring she bore him. Always thinking ahead with wisdom, he while he had given gifts to his later sons the Scripture makes it clear that Abraham gave "all that he had to Isaac."

*And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. 6 But Abraham gave gifts to the sons of the concubines which Abraham had; and while he was still living he sent them eastward, away from Isaac his son, to the country of the east. Gen 25:5-6*

After these final words we read of his death.

*This is the sum of the years of Abraham's life which he lived: one hundred and seventy-five years. 8 Then Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people. 9 And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, 10 the field which Abraham*

*purchased from the sons of Heth. Gen 25:7-10*

So God had called Abraham when he was seventy-five allowed Abraham to live 100 years in the promised land.

75	Entered the Promised land	<u>12:4</u>
86	Birth of Ishmael	<u>16:16</u>
99	God promised Isaac's birth	<u>17:1</u>
100	Isaac Born	<u>21:5</u>

127	Sarah Died	<u>23:1</u>
140	Isaac Marries Rebekah	<u>25:20</u>
160	Jacob and Esau Born	<u>25:26</u>
175	Abraham Died	<u>25:7</u>

## **Birth of Esau and Jacob**

As noted above, Isaac was forty when he married Rebekah, and she remained childless for many years. After Isaac's pleas, God intervened and allowed him to have a son.

*Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah as wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan Aram, the sister of Laban the Syrian. 21 Now Isaac pleaded with the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived. Gen. 25:20-21*

After she conceived, the twins continued wrestling caused her great concern. She inquired of the Lord and the Lord answered her query.

*But the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If all is well, why am I like this?" So she went to inquire of the Lord. 23 And the Lord said to her: "Two nations are in your womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, And the older shall serve the younger." Gen 25:22-23*

Later, the Holy Spirit would reveal the true significance of this statement for us today. After Israel's downfall at the cross and the dismal response from Israel to God's pleas to return through Christ and the gospel, Paul expressed his deep sorrow. "I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh (Rom 9:2-3)." But God wanted it clearly understood that this was not a surprise. It was not something that in any way reflected on His plan. He had known from the beginning that this would be the case.

*But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, 7 nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." 8 That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. Rom 9:6-8*

It was always going to be God who selected the quality of character that would make up His people. It was always God who selected the children. Never just of the flesh, but of the promise. So Isaac was chosen over Ishmael and Jacob over Esau.

*And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac 11 (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), 12 it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." 13 As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." Rom 9:10-13*

Many have misunderstood verse 13 as being spoken at the birth of the children when it is actually quoted after the fact in the book of Malachi. The truth is what God foresaw and foretold was the fact by the time of Malachi. Jacob and his offspring were more spiritually minded and better suited to the promise than Esau. Yet even among the offspring of Jacob (Israel), the same process was being fulfilled with each person.

*What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, 24 even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? Rom 9:22-24*

As each infant was born, the process continued. There were vessels of mercy, like Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David etc. There were also vessels of wrath as Korah, all who left Egypt except Joshua and Caleb, etc. Each man and woman made themselves vessels of wrath or vessels of mercy by

the choices they made. Not only was that true of Israel, but also of the Gentiles. God had made that clear through Hosea and Isaiah.

*even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? 25 As He says also in Hosea: "I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved." 26 "And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, ' You are not My people,' There they shall be called sons of the living God." 27 Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, The remnant will be saved. 28 For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, Because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth." 29 And as Isaiah said before: "Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, We would have become like Sodom, And we would have been made like Gomorrah." Rom 9:24-29*

Hosea told Israel God would call these vessels of mercy *"My people who were not My people."* referring to the vessels of mercy among both Israel and the Gentiles. No one is fixed! Vessels of wrath can become vessels of mercy. For *"where it was said to them, ' You are not My people,' There they shall be called sons of the living God."* Isaiah reported the dismal truth that if God had not needed Israel for the coming seed even in the days of Isaiah (and many other times as well) they would have become like Sodom and Gomorrah. For though Israel numbered as the sand of the sea, only a remnant would be saved.

Details of the birth centered on two things. First the appearance of Esau. He had so much hair that he looked like a "hairy garment" and the hair color was red. Second was Jacob hold on to Esau's heel.

*And the first came out red. He was like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau. 26 Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them. 27 So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents. 28 And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob. Gen 25:25-28*

The names reflected these two things. They called them Esau (red) and Jacob (heel-catcher, supplanter). Their characters were also different. Esau was a skillful hunter and "outdoorsman" who liked to be outside and enjoyed knowing and pitting himself against the elements and the animals. Jacob was a mild man, a man of peace who enjoyed what could be done inside a home, meditating, reading, learning.

These characteristics led to a terrible favoritism in which Isaac loved Esau and favored him (wanted to give him the blessing in spite of the clear prophesy that the older would serve the younger) and Rebekah loved Jacob (so much she was willing to lie and deceive her husband to get the blessing for him).