

Commentary on Genesis (9).

ISAAC (25.19b-27.46).

After the heart warming record of the obtaining of a suitable wife for Isaac as a result of the direct activity of Yahweh little is told us about him. This is because during his lifetime important covenants and theophanies were few and therefore there was no recording in writing.

The family tribe over which he presided continued to be strong (26.16) and he clashed with Abimelech at Gerar but that is almost all we know about him apart from the birth of his children and his part in the continuation of the chosen line. But he did continue Abraham's policy of allying his family with the family of Abraham's father Terah and was upset when Esau departed from it (28.9). More dangerously (and with less justification) he also continued the policy of describing his wife as his sister. He seems to be a mirror image of his father but without his effectiveness and personality.

But his importance is that he was part of the fulfilling of God's purposes. He was not charismatic, he was not outstanding, but he was chosen by God and was a necessary part of the chain that led up to Moses, then to David and finally to Jesus Christ. What Abraham began he had to hold on to and continue. And this he did, without fuss and without bravado. He was there when God wanted him.

We too may feel that we are not important, but if we are His and responsive to His words we too are an important part of the chain that leads to the fulfilling of His purposes. Isaac should be an encouragement to us all.

However, Isaac is seen later as an important member of those to whom the covenant was given (2 Kings 13.23; 1 Chronicles 6.16; Psalm 105.9). In Amos 7.9, 16 Isaac is used as another name to designate Israel.

Isaac and Jacob - the Family History of Esau (25.19b-36.1)

The family history of Esau takes us up to the death of Isaac (35.29) and while doing so describes the covenants in which Isaac participated, and the finding of wives for Jacob and the birth of his twelve sons. As the senior male of the family he had the responsibility of maintaining and preserving the important family covenant records. However the work would be done by a tribal scribe and he may not even have known much about it.

25.19b 'Abraham begat Isaac.'

Abraham is possibly a catch word connecting with the final word in the previous colophon, and this brief heading is therefore the title of a new tablet. But while 25.19b-36.1 may make up a tablet in themselves they incorporate records made at various times which were originally on their own, for once more each of them was the record of a covenant.

The Birth of Esau and Jacob (Genesis 19b - 26) - the Sale of the Birthright (Genesis 25.27-34).

This section 25.19b-26 centres on Yahweh's covenant in 25.23, and this is followed by the record of the covenant between Esau and Jacob resulting in the exchanging of the birthright (25.27-34).

25.20 'And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the

Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife.'

Forty years is a round number. Thus the suggestion is that he was fully matured. The detail with which Rebekah is described demonstrates the importance placed on who she was.

If we take the age as roughly correct this was when Abraham was about one hundred and forty (see 20.5). So if Sarah had died by this time she was probably approximately ten or so years younger than Abraham (she died at one hundred and twenty seven - 23.1). Thus Abraham is still alive at this time, although feeling his age, and at the time of the births of Esau and Jacob when he is one hundred and sixty.

'Paddan-aram'. 'The field or plain of Aram', that is the area around Haran in Upper Mesopotamia north of the junction of the rivers Habur and Euphrates.

25.21a 'And Isaac entreated Yahweh for his wife because she was barren. And Yahweh was entreated of him.'

Quiet he may have been but one thing Isaac could do and that was pray. He knew how his father Abraham had had to pray in a similar way and he knew that because of the promises to Abraham a child would also be born to him. He had the quiet confidence that the Yahweh Who had found him a wife would now provide him with a child through that wife, for the one assumed the other.

So he prayed and his prayer was answered. We are given no detail of how he went about it, nor of what he prayed, for that was not considered important. The concentration is rather on the result of the prayer. And, as we are informed in verse 26, this was twenty years after the wedding. Thus Isaac too, like his father, has had to possess his soul in patience.

'Ten years' was the time Abraham spent in Canaan before Sarai lost courage and gave her maid Hagar to Abraham (16.3). Thus Isaac and Rebekah, waiting for twenty years, are seen as very patient and we are intended to see in this his quiet confidence in Yahweh.

25.21b-22 'And Rebekah his wife conceived, and the children struggled together within her, and she said, "If it is thus, why do I live?" And she went to enquire of Yahweh.'

Rebekah conceived, but the birth was to be a difficult one for she was having twins and she was aware that all was not right within. In those days death in child birth was a fairly common experience.

'The children struggled together within her.' She seems to have felt that death was near ('why do I live?') and she goes to enquire of Yahweh. We are not told where she went, but it may well have been the cultic centre under the tamarisk tree at Beersheba (21.33). And Abraham the prophet may well have been the one through whom she enquired. But concentration is now on Isaac, and Abraham has slipped into the background so that he is disregarded. This has never been the story of a man, it is the story of God's sovereign activity and covenants with man. The players, even Abraham, are secondary.

25.23 'And Yahweh said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples shall be separated even from your bowels. And the one shall be stronger than the other, and the elder shall serve the younger."' '

This theophany and covenant are the basis of this covenant record. In accordance with His promises to Abraham Yahweh now promises that from Isaac will come not one but two separate nations, clearly divided. The original promises do not need to be repeated. Isaac

knows them by heart and they are a part of the tapestry of their lives.

But here there is a further twist. 'The one shall be stronger than the other and the elder will serve the younger.' Ironically the one who will be the stronger will be the one who serves. The main point is that it is the younger who will carry on over the family tribe as the chosen of Yahweh. Yahweh is in control of events and He chooses whom He will.

The use of the word 'rab' for 'elder' is rare. It is a description which occurs elsewhere only in second millennium cuneiform texts.

Whether 'the one who is stronger' is meant as Esau or Jacob depends on viewpoint. Esau was the efficient fighting man and leader of a powerful roving band, but in the end it was Jacob with his strength of purpose who prevailed to lead the tribe.

25.24-25 'And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled behold there were twins in her womb. And the first came forth ruddy, all over like a hairy garment, and they called his name Esau.'

Esau was very red when born and covered with a mat of hair. The red may refer to the colour of his skin or to his covering hair. The name Esau probably reflects 'hairy' from the Arabic.

'Ruddy' ('athmonee). This connects with 'Edom' ('ethom - from the root 'thm red), a name given to Esau - see 36.1, 8.

25.26a 'And after that came forth his brother and his hand had hold of Esau's heel, and his name was called Jacob.'

The name Jacob (ya'aqov - in its lengthened form ya'aqov-el) probably means 'may God protect'. It was in frequent use among Semites. But by a play on words it relates to 'eqeb (to clutch) thus signifying 'the clutcher'.

The clutching of the heel was seen as significant in the light of the preceding prophecy. Even from the womb Jacob sought to supplant his brother.

25.26b 'And Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.'

Thus they had been married twenty years and Abraham was now approximately one hundred and sixty. All are certainly round numbers, the 'twenty years' indicating twice ten years (compare on 16.3), an extended and weary wait.

This short record of God's covenant connected with the birth was probably written down immediately, as with all such covenants connected with a theophany, and later expanded to include the subsequent fulfilment now dealt with, which would also be a covenant record recording the covenant made between Esau and Jacob.

25.27 'And the boys grew, and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the open country, and Jacob was a perfect man, dwelling in tents.'

The two boys, different in birth, grew up as very different people. Esau was the outdoor type, interested in hunting in the woods and the wide open spaces, away for days on end, never long at home. But Jacob was 'a perfect man', meaning that he was more 'respectable', more in keeping with the expectations of the family tribe, an established farmer tending the sheep and the crops and living in a 'civilised' fashion and remaining in the family tribe encampment.

25.28 'Now Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his venison. And Rebekah loved Jacob.'

Sadly both parents had their favourites. The one because Esau brought him luxuries to enjoy. He overlooked the fact that Jacob remained at home assisting with the main work. He probably just took that for granted. The other for reasons not given, but it may well partly be because Jacob was there and helpful in domestic affairs and was more responsive to her love.

25.29 'And Jacob boiled pottage, and Esau came in from the open country, and he was faint.'

Esau was a tough hunter. If he felt faint and hungry we can be sure it was something quite severe. He had possibly been out for many days and had not taken anything, and now famished and totally exhausted he is returning to the camp. He feels literally on the point of death. He may have been out in the scorching sun, and having run out of water, be feeling completely dehydrated. And in such a state he comes across Jacob in the act of preparing food and liquid.

25.30 'And Esau said to Jacob, "I beg you. Feed me with the red stuff, this red stuff, for I am weak." That is why his name was called Edom (red).'

It has been suggested that Esau saw the red stuff cooking and thought it was a blood soup or red meat concoction. If he had a special liking for such things it helps to explain the comment about why he was called red, i.e. because of his liking for such things. But he may well not have been too bothered what it was. He was so desperately hungry and thirsty that anything would do. He genuinely felt as though he was dying. Thus it may be that his nickname Edom came from this incident of the red pottage.

25.31 'And Jacob said, "Sell me this day your birthright".'

That Jacob was taking advantage of the situation cannot be doubted. But it is very probable that there is a past history to this suggestion, for the writer certainly does not moralise on it. The 'birthright' in mind was the elder son's portion (probably a double portion as later) and would include leadership of the family tribe and responsibility for its possessions and wealth. We cannot really doubt from what has been said that Esau had no particular desire for such a position. He wanted to be free to hunt and venture far and wide. And there can be no doubt that Jacob was more suitable for the position.

It is probable too that Esau had often lamented to Jacob about the fate that would eventually tie him down to his responsibilities. Indeed this was probably what gave Jacob the hope that he might succeed in what he was doing. Thus what Jacob was asking him to give up was not something he greatly desired.

Yet we cannot admire the trait in Jacob's nature that prompted him to take advantage of the situation. It was not a transaction that Esau had thought out but one arising on the spur of the moment, and he knew he had caught Esau at a time when he was most defenceless. But the final truth is, as the writer later points out, that Esau despised his birthright. It was, in fact, not what he wanted from life at all. Pleasure came before duty. So neither can be exonerated from blame.

25.32 'And Esau said, "Look, I am at the point of death. And what profit will the birthright do to me?"'

Many subconscious factors no doubt brought him to this decision, including the wish to be free from something burdensome, the desire to enjoy full liberty to do his own thing, his scorn at those who could make do with camp life, all now brought to a point by his present condition of thirst and starvation.

Thus at a moment of great need like this he could dismiss his birthright as irrelevant. What good was a birthright to a dead man? It must be said in Jacob's favour that had he been put in that position he would have died rather than yield it.

25.33 'And Jacob said, "Swear to me this day." And he swore it to him. And he sold his birthright to Jacob.'

The seriousness of this transaction must not be underestimated. It was a genuine transaction carried out quite legally and not under duress. And it was established by an oath. Once that had been sworn the position was legally and permanently fixed. The birthright legitimately belonged to Jacob. And we cannot doubt that Jacob soon committed it to writing as permanent evidence of the contract which had taken place without witnesses (unless witnesses were brought in to witness the oath).

25.34 'And Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil pottage, and he ate and drank, and rose up and went his way. Thus did Esau despise his birthright.'

Jacob fulfils his part in the transaction. And it is noteworthy that any disapproval of the transaction by the writer is directed at Esau. He treated lightly what was so valuable, including his responsibilities to the tribe. Jacob merely took advantage of his contempt for his birthright. From now on Jacob can carry on knowing that the leadership in the family tribe will one day be his, and he can happily bide his time.

'He ate and drank and rose and went away.' This suggests that at this point Esau could not care less about his birthright. To him Yahweh's covenant with His people mattered little. Future events suggest that to Jacob at least it was of more importance. But his methods demonstrated that his own trust in Yahweh was minimal at this point. He did not believe God's promise could be fulfilled without his own intervention. Like many he sought the right things by the wrong methods.

An interesting example of a similar transaction to this is found at Nuzi coming from the second millennium BC. "On the day they divide the grove ... Tupkitilla shall give it to Kurpazah as his inheritance share. And Kurpazah has taken three sheep to Tupkitilla in exchange for his inheritance share."

Isaac and Abimelech (Genesis 26.1-33).

As we have been informed earlier, after the death of Abraham Isaac moved to Beer-lahai-roi (25.11). When therefore famine arose in the land of Canaan he must have experienced great temptation to slip, with his tribe and cattle, across the nearby border into Egypt. But Yahweh appears to him and tells him that he must not leave the promised land.

So instead he moves to Gerar, where Abraham had prospered, knowing that there were sources of water to be found there to which he had some entitlement (21.27-33). But above all the passage reveals Isaac as a man of peace. He knows that Yahweh is with him, and he is prepared to rely on Him rather than use force to obtain what he wants.

26.1 'And there was famine in the land beside the first famine that was on the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines, to Gerar.'

The writer knows of the extreme famine in the time of Abraham that drove him into Egypt (12.10-20). Now the rains fail once more and another extreme famine arrives and this drives Isaac from where he is to Gerar. As a young man he had been acquainted with Gerar, although the Abimelech he knew then may have been an ancestor of the present one. It is probable that

Abimelech was a throne name taken by all the kings who ruled over the Philistine conclave at Gerar (compare introduction to Psalm 34) which was probably a large trading post of not too great strength, as shown by the fact that they were continually wary of Abraham and Isaac.

But why did Isaac go to Gerar and not make for nearby Egypt which regularly provided sanctuary at times such as this? Egypt had jurisdiction over Palestine and recognised responsibilities towards it. The answer is now given. Had it not been for the theophany he would have done so.

The First Theophany - Promise of Blessing and Prosperity to Him and to The World (Genesis 26.2-14).

26.2-5 'And Yahweh appeared to him and said, "Do not go down into Egypt. Dwell in the land which I will tell you of. Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and to your seed I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and will give to your seed all these lands. And in your seed will all the nations of the world be blessed, because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes and my laws.".'

'Yahweh appeared to him'. This is the first theophany experienced by Isaac. We do not know what form these theophanies took, nor how Yahweh spoke, but the experience must have been awe-inspiring, unlike the usual run of their experiences in worship. It is this theophany, with its ensuing promises, that results in the recording in writing of this episode.

'Do not go down into Egypt.' A warning is given of the dangers of that arrogant land. We are already aware of what happened when Abraham went there in a similar situation. Once was forgivable, but not a second time.

'Dwell in the place which I will tell you of.' This compares with 12.1. Yahweh wants Isaac to feel that he too is a part of these promises.

'Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and will bless you.' The patriarchs owned no land (except for Machpelah). They were sojourners. They lived on land owned or controlled by others, seeking water, trading, offering services in return for the use of land for grazing and the sowing of grain, usually living near cities but not actually in them. Thus were they a self-contained community separated from the evils around them. Yahweh says they are to remain so, and thus they will experience His presence and His blessing, being 'in the world but not of the world'.

The promises are then renewed. The land will one day be theirs. Their seed will be multiplied as the stars. The whole world will be blessed through them. The oath Yahweh made to Abraham stands firm, because Abraham was worthy.

'Because Abraham kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes and my laws.' Yahweh puts his seal on Abraham's obedience and on their tribal customs forged in association with Him. The description signifies overall obedience to cultic requirements and moral demands. Abraham had been true to his understanding of Yahweh, acting in justice and in mercy, therefore would Yahweh be true to him. He who had been chosen by Yahweh had revealed his worthiness in his obedience to Yahweh.

This renewal of the covenant after so long a time must have been a great blessing to Isaac. He had been used to learning of his father's experiences, but now he had experienced Yahweh for himself. Perhaps it took his mind back to his experience in the land of Moriah (Genesis 22).

26.6 'And Isaac dwelt in Gerar.'

He was obedient to Yahweh's instruction, which is placed firmly within history.

26.7 'And the men of the place asked him about his wife, and he said, "She is my sister". For he feared to say 'my wife' lest (thought he) the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah, because she was fair to look on.'

As in so much Isaac imitates his father. He remembers how his father constantly used this subterfuge and it seemed such a good idea. But to the reader there comes a feeling of trepidation and a sense that we have been here before.

'She is my sister.' There is a half truth in the statement for they are cousins, and she is therefore a close blood relation and relationships were not then so cut and dried. But it shows lack of faith in Yahweh and is inexcusable. But when men are afraid they will do strange things, and Rebekah was very beautiful with a beauty not common among townsfolk (and perhaps they did not even appreciate it).

26.8-9 'And it happened, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech, king of the Philistines, looked out at a window and saw, and lo, Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife. And Abimelech called Isaac and said, "See, of a certainty she is your wife. And how did you say 'she is my sister?'" And Isaac said to him, "Because I said, 'lest I die for her'."

The whole truth now comes out, but only 'after a long time'. Isaac was possibly living for a time in a building which was by the king's house, and was not aware that it was possible for someone to see into his rooms from one of the windows. Alternately it may be that the king's house looked out over an open space where the tents of Isaac were pitched. In that case the king may have seen the silhouette of what was happening in a lighted tent. Either way the king spots Isaac making love to his wife and immediately realises the truth. Subsequently he calls for Isaac and rightly rebukes him.

26.10 'And Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of my people might lightly have lain with your wife and you would have brought guilt on us".'

Unconsciously Abimelech's words support Isaac's worst fears. He recognises the propensity of his menfolk to treat a visiting woman casually. And he also confirms the danger Isaac might have been in. To take a man's wife is to incur guilt, but how different it is if that man is dead. Who then will care about the guilt? Yet his rebuke is justified for Isaac had unthinkingly put temptation in men's way.

26.11 'And Abimelech charged all the people saying, "He who touches this man or his wife will surely be put to death."'

So Isaac's fears are allayed, for now they enjoy the protection of the king's command, a proof that Yahweh is keeping His word and protecting them. As He had said, "I will be with you", and He was.

Is This Story a Duplicate?

Those who delight in seeing duplicate narratives everywhere where there is a coincidence, and have a bias against anything that seems like a coincidence when it comes to ancient records, try to tell us that this story is simply a duplicate of chapters 12.10-20 and 20.1-13, but on careful examination there is no essential where the stories are similar, apart from those which are totally explicable and likely.

It is true that each depicts men as licentious, but then that has ever been the case. In those days a woman's virtue was ever at risk, especially a 'foreign' woman, if she was not closely watched and guarded. And they all depict the profession that a wife is a sister. But as this is in fact stated to be Abraham's regular policy it would clearly happen again and again. The only other 'coincidence' is explained by the fact that Abimelech is a throne name (or a family name) and therefore passes from one generation to another. Thus the similarities are easily explained and happened often.

What is striking is the differences. In 12.10-20 we have a situation well known in those days of servants of Pharaohs ever seeking beautiful women to satisfy him, something they did regularly, and the account is accurate in the way it presents how Sarah is brought into one of his households. But she escapes because of Yahweh sending a plague. In 20.1-13 we have a petty king misusing his authority to take possession of a beautiful 'foreign' woman for his pleasure. He probably did it regularly, but this time it did not work because he was dealing with Yahweh, who gave him a vivid and unpleasant dream. In this third episode with Isaac no attempt at all is made on the woman and no supernatural activity is recorded, although we can see Yahweh's hand behind events. The one common factor of any importance is thus the activity of Yahweh.

With regard to duplicate names, history is littered with them, for names tended to be passed on in families within a generation. And as we have suggested throne names were automatically passed on.

We can consider how in Egyptian inscriptions Khnumhotep, the governor of Menat-Khufu has certain privileges under Amenemhet, and how in the next generation another Khnumhotep, governor of Menat-Khufu has the same privileges under another Amenehmhet, and it is clear that these cannot be duplicates. Or how Tuthmosis campaigned into Northern Syria, left a victory stela by the Euphrates and hunted elephants at Niy, and so did Tuthmosis his grandson.

So once we have discounted man's constant propensity to evil where women are concerned (especially if they are vulnerable foreigners), and their being ever on the watch for such opportunities, and the patriarchal practise of continually representing wives as sisters because of this propensity, what should surprise us is how totally different the stories are. The only really common feature is the protecting power of Yahweh and even this is exercised in different ways. Thus we have every grounds for accepting that the events happened each time as described. (The fact is that the patriarchal policy appeared to work most of the time for we only know of three occasions over a period of more than a hundred years when it did not).

Isaac and Abimelech - a Story of Wells (Genesis 26.12-33).

26.12 'And Isaac sowed in that land and found in that same year a hundredfold, and Yahweh blessed him. And the man became great (in riches) and grew more and more until he was very wealthy. And he had possessions of flocks, and possessions of herds and a large household, and the Philistines envied him.'

Isaac was now settled in Gerar and the famine had long passed. Good relations had been established with the local king and he began to sow seed in expectation of a considerable stay. And the seed prospered. We know today that this was particularly fertile land and it produced 'a hundredfold'. Moreover 'Yahweh blessed him'. Everything he touched seemed to flourish. His flocks expanded, his herds grew, and he added more and more servants to his 'household', his family tribe who were responsible for maintaining his wealth.

But there is always one problem with wealth. It produces envy in the heart of others, and that

is what happened here. And so he was asked to move on. His wealth, and the demands it made on local amenities, was causing a problem for the inhabitants.

26.15 '(Now all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them and filled them with earth).'

This very illuminating explanatory comment demonstrates both the attitude of these Philistine traders to relatively powerful semi-nomadic peoples and the reason why, when Abraham had prospered in this vicinity without it causing too much trouble, Isaac was unable to do so.

The wells of Abraham had been filled in. And why? Because when Isaac moved to Beer-lahai-roi on the death of Abraham, the Philistines decided they did not want anyone else to move in and filled in the surplus wells, which would have attracted roving semi-nomads like flies. But this was now why Isaac, with his great expansion, was proving to be such a burden on the local economy. They did not have sufficient water for him and themselves.

26.16 'And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Leave us. For you are much mightier than we." '

You are much mightier than we.' Possibly in numbers, especially of sheep and cattle, thus consuming much water.

The water shortage was causing problems. So the Philistines no doubt held a council. The result was that they decided to ask Isaac to move on. They no doubt recognised that he was fairly amenable (would they have dared to ask the same of Abraham?) and it is possible that it was they who pointed out to him where the previous wells had been and suggested he reopened them. And fortunately Isaac recognised the truth of what they were saying.

26.17-18 'And Isaac departed from there and encamped in the valley of Gerar, and dwelt there. And Isaac dug again the wells of water which they had dug in the days of his father. For the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham. And he called their names after the names by which his father had called them.'

This passage demonstrates how closely Isaac and his household had been living with the Philistines until they had become too large for the place. But now they move to a local valley and camp there. And they redig the wells first discovered by his father and call them by the previous names given by his father. This would not be quite as easy as it sounds for they had to be rediscovered. But local memory would no doubt assist in the matter.

This serves to demonstrate how traditions tend to stick to places over considerable numbers of years, for it was obviously fairly clearly remembered what names had been attached to what places. This information would no doubt be gathered from locals and confirmed by reference to their own covenant records and memories.

26.19-20 'And Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of spring water, and the herdmen of Gerar strove with Isaac's herdmen saying, "The water is ours." And he called the name of the well Esek (contention) because they contended with him.'

Verse 18 is now expanded on. He digs the first well that was Abraham's. But the inhabitants claim it as theirs. And it says much for Isaac's equable temperament that he allows them possession, for he could fairly have pointed out that he and his men had dug it and that it had once been ceded to his father. It is clear that Abraham had also called the well Esek (verse 18) so that it had been a bone of contention even then. But Abraham's response was probably different. (There are some people you do not argue with).

26.21 'And they dug another well, and they strove for that also. And he called the name of it Sitnah (enmity).'

The same thing is repeated, and Abraham had also clearly called this well Sitnah showing that he too had experienced enmity when he dug it.

But what a different person Isaac is from Abraham. When they sought to wrest a well from Abraham he went straight to the king and demanded it back (21.25). But Isaac is more peaceable and cedes the wells to the inhabitants (possibly for a good price). Abraham was 'the stronger', but was not Isaac the more Christlike? He had a strength of which Abraham knew nothing. And it made for friends rather than enemies.

26.22-23 'And he removed from there and dug another well, and for that they did not strive. And he called the name of it Rehoboth (broad places, room), and he said, "For now Yahweh has made room for us and we will be fruitful in the land." And he went up from there to Beersheba.'

Isaac continues redigging the wells that his father had dug and this time there was no contention. Perhaps the inhabitants were impressed by his peaceable behaviour and felt ready to welcome him now as a neighbour. And he called it Reheboth (broad places), because there was now room for both him and them.

His faith in Yahweh shines out. He had been sure all along that Yahweh would make a place for him and now he has been proved right. And this proves to him that Yahweh will bless him in this place.

Following the comment in verse 18 we must see this too as a name first given by Abraham, but what a different interpretation Abraham probably put on it. There is no suggestion that Abraham ever peacefully yielded a well that he had dug. He made room for himself. Different men behave in different ways because they are different, and they have different strengths, and different weaknesses requisite in different times.

'And he went up from there to Beersheba.' Note that Isaac already knows it as Beersheba before he goes there. This was naturally Isaac's next move for he knew that his father had dug a well at Beersheba, and had called it Beersheba. With the wealth and herds he had it was necessary to have more than one well.

26.24 'And Yahweh appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of Abraham your father. Do not be afraid, for I am with you, and will bless you and multiply your seed for my servant Abraham's sake."'

Once again Isaac has an awe-inspiring numinous experience of God in which the covenant is renewed, and which explains why these events were put in writing.

The grounds for the renewing of the covenant is that he is the son of Abraham. He shares in the blessing of Abraham. Abraham was the one chosen by God as His vehicle of blessing to the world, and Isaac as his seed carries on that purpose. He will thus enjoy God's blessing and will see his descendants multiplied. We too will enjoy blessing from the God of Abraham if we are Abraham's children through faith in Christ.

This thought is central to the book of Genesis. It is not too much to say it was why it was written. It is a proclamation of God's covenant with the world through Abraham and the guarantee of His future blessing. We may enjoy the stories but what was important was the covenants.

26.25 'And he built an altar there and called on the name of Yahweh, and pitched his tent there and there Isaac's servants dug for a well.'

'He built an altar there and called on the name of Yahweh.' In other words he established Beersheba as the centre of worship for his people where they could regularly worship Yahweh and offer sacrifices, with Isaac himself being the priest. As we know already, this was the very place where Abraham too had established the worship of God. In all things, both good and bad, Isaac follows in the steps of his father.

'He pitched his tent there.' In other words he established it as his base camp, and naturally began to look for the well that his father had previously dug and called Beersheba. Without the well the camp could not be permanent.

26.26 'Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzoth his friend, and Phicol the captain of his host.'

It was at Beersheba that the previous Abimelech had made a covenant under oath with Abraham. This may be the same Abimelech, in which case he was very old, but far more likely it is his son or grandson.

Abraham had won their confidence as a result of the incident with Sarah and the revelation that he was a prophet, and by his fighting strength and willingness to stand up for himself. Isaac has won it by his amenable disposition and his continual willingness not to use his strength but to be neighbourly and even beneficent. In the end his policy has worked.

'Ahuzzoth his friend.' His personal counsellor and adviser, and possibly scribe. **'Phicol the captain of his host.'** Phicol was probably the title by which they called their warleader at any time (as the Assyrians called theirs Tartan (2 Kings 18.17), although he might have been the grandson of the previous Phicol given the same name (something commonly done in those days). The presence of the general demonstrates the seriousness of the visit. This is an official deputation.

26.27 'And Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, seeing that you are not friendly with me and have sent me away from you?"'

Isaac may be amenable but it did not mean he could not be hurt. He clearly felt his friendship had been betrayed. Now he was puzzled as to why they were approaching him. Because of his friendly nature he did not consider that they were safeguarding their backs.

26.28-29 'And they said, "We have seen plainly that Yahweh was with you, and we said, Let there now be an oath between us, even between us and you, and let us make a covenant with you that you will do us no hurt, as we have not touched you, and as we have done to you nothing but good, and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of Yahweh."'

Their appreciation of Isaac's fighting strength is clear from the fact that they approach him voluntarily and peacefully. They have watched him prosper and seen him establish the cultic centre for Yahweh at Beersheba, clearly with a view to permanent settlement. They recognise he is a man of peace but they want to ensure that things remain peaceable.

'Yahweh is with you'. They recognised that his God Yahweh was effective and powerful. This was seen as proved by his growing prosperity and by his ability to find springs. **'You are now the blessed of Yahweh'**, as a result of establishing an altar and cultic centre to Yahweh. They were aware of the power of Isaac's God. Indeed they were presumably aware of the previous history from Abraham's time. Their connections go back a long way. They remembered

Yahweh the God of Abraham and they see He is now Isaac's God and effective on his behalf.

The result is that they want a treaty sealed by an oath, just as they had had with Abraham, a treaty of peace and mutual recognition. Isaac may not be Abraham but he is still to be feared because he is the chosen of Yahweh, and like Abraham has a private army.

26.30-31 'And he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. And they rose up early in the morning and swore to one another, and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace.'

The show of hospitality was an indication of friendly reception and peaceful intention and they ate and drank and rested in the camp. Then the solemn oath was sworn and they returned to their city with the peaceful settlement agreed between the parties. No doubt this was to Isaac the peacemaker's satisfaction. Isaac's methods had proved fruitful.

26.32-33 'And it happened the same day that Isaac's servants came and told him about the well which they had dug, and said to him, "We have found water." And he called it Shibah, therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day.'

The good news comes that they have rediscovered the Well of Sheba (seven) which had previously been so named Beer-sheba (the well of seven) by Abraham, and as his custom was Isaac renames it Shibah (the feminine of seven), thus 'beer Shibah' after Beersheba. This second giving of the same name followed Isaac's stated policy (26.18).

'We have found water.' The constant search for sources of water was a feature of life in Palestine. To find a good reliable source of water was like manna from Heaven.

The Blessing of Esau and Jacob (Genesis 26.34-45).

This passage was recorded in writing because it records the blessings given to Jacob and Esau which were in the nature of a binding covenant that could not be changed. They thus testified to the will of Isaac as declared in those blessings. Such a solemn blessing, made with death in view, was often looked on as most sacred and irreversible (compare Deuteronomy 23). That is how Isaac clearly saw it (27.33).

26.34-35 'And when Esau was forty years old he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite. And they were a bitterness of spirit to Isaac and Rebekah.'

Esau further demonstrates his contempt for his status when he marries two Hittite women. The tradition of marrying within the family meant little to him, and his acts brought great grief to Isaac and Rebekah. But as the eldest son he would have been expected to marry within the family. In the writer's eyes this introductory sentence is a silent commentary on why Esau loses his firstborn's blessing.

'When Esau was forty years old.' Again a round number indicating full maturity. If we take the numbers literally this would make Isaac about one hundred years old. But Isaac also married at forty. This would suggest that this round number is used to indicate marriageable age.

27.1-4 'And it happened that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called Esau his elder son and said to him, "My son." And he said to him, "Here I am." And he said, "Look, I am now old, I do not know the day of my death. Now therefore I pray you, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out into the open country and take

me venison, and make me savoury meat such as I love and bring it to me that I may eat it, that my soul may bless you before I die.” ’

‘When Isaac was old.’ We do not know his age at this time but it was before Jacob married. As Esau and Jacob were born when Isaac was ‘sixty’ and Esau married at ‘forty’, and has clearly been married some time, Isaac is well over a hundred years old. But sadly he has gone blind. Yet he certainly oversees the family tribe until Jacob returns, probably through a faithful steward with the help of Rebekah his very capable wife. As we do not know when Jacob married we do not know how long after Esau’s marriages this incident takes place.

But this is a solemn moment. Isaac feels he is near death and determines that he will give his deathbed blessing to Esau. (That he was in fact wrong about being near death comes out subsequently - 35.27, 29). This is no ordinary event. By it the ancients thought that he would officially determine Esau’s future. The news that this was to happen would quickly circulate round the camp. Deathbed words were considered to be especially effective, and even prophetic, and were treated very seriously. (See Genesis 48.1 etc; Deuteronomy 33.1 etc; 2 Samuel 23.1 etc).

So in order to prepare himself and put himself in the right state of body and mind, and in order to bind Esau to him by receiving gifts from his hand, Isaac asks his son to use his talents to bring him the food that he loves, wild game, possibly venison from the wild deer, properly cooked by Esau himself and ready for eating. This was clearly one of Esau’s recognised talents.

From what follows we will see that this was not only preparatory but part of the process of blessing. The meal will bond them in preparation for the blessing.

27.5 ‘And Rebekah heard when Isaac spoke to Esau his son. And Esau went into the open country to hunt for venison and to bring it.’

There was no reason why Rebekah should not have been in the tent when Isaac spoke to Esau. The giving of a blessing was not something that had to be done in secret. On the other hand she may have been lingering around outside, knowing what was on hand. As she saw Esau depart to carry out his father’s wishes her mind was racing. She no doubt remembered the promise made at their birth that the elder would serve the younger, and she wanted the blessing for her favourite son.

When we consider her next actions we should also consider that it seems that Isaac has no special blessing for his younger son. Both sons deserved to be blessed, but Isaac apparently thought only of Esau, and he certainly ignored what had been said at their birth. Furthermore the sale of the birthright was a legal fact and it is unlikely that Isaac did not know of it. But he considers he can override it (as his blessing demonstrates). How unfair people can get in old age when they are unable to help themselves and must look to others for everything. Rebekah on the other hand feels she cannot allow this to happen.

27.6-10 ‘And Rebekah said to Jacob her son, “Look, I heard your father speak to Esau your brother, saying, ‘Bring me venison and make me savoury meat that I may eat, and bless you before Yahweh before my death.’ Now therefore, my son, obey my voice just as I command you. Go now to the flock and fetch me from there two kids of the goats, and I will make them savoury meat for your father such as he loves. And you will bring it to your father that he may eat, so that he may bless you before his death.” ’

Rebekah’s plan is to replace Esau with Jacob, and she acts accordingly. Note the introduction of ‘before Yahweh’. Isaac had not said that, possibly because he knows Esau will not be impressed by it, but Rebekah knows that Jacob will be impressed by it (compare verse 20).

The subterfuge cannot be fully justified. Both Rebekah and Jacob should have trusted Yahweh to carry out His plans in His own way. But Jacob certainly feels that the firstborn's portion is his by right and probably felt that that included the blessing. As the blessing included lordship over the brothers he was probably right. He felt that he was about to be cheated. Rebekah also knew and felt the same. And Jacob was her favourite son. Thus they had at least partial justification and felt they were only doing what was right and preventing an injustice. They would both pay a heavy price in the future as a result of Jacob's 'banishment'.

On the other hand no credit is reflected on Isaac and Esau. Esau certainly knew that he had sold leadership in the tribe to Jacob, and even if Isaac did not know (which is unlikely) he should not have shown such blatant favouritism. He knew that what he was about to do was epoch-making, and showed the arrogance of an old man who thinks that because of his age he can do whatever he wants. Everyone comes out of this badly. But the reader of that day would probably come down on the side of Jacob. At least he had a valid oath on his side and was supported by a birth prophecy. 27.11 'And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, "Look. Esau is a hairy man and I am a smooth man. Perhaps my father will feel me and I will seem to him as a deceiver. And I will bring a curse on me and not a blessing." And his mother said to him, "On me be your curse my son, only obey my voice and go and fetch me them."

Jacob is wary. A deathbed curse was looked on as no light thing. And it would be so easy for Isaac to detect the subterfuge. But his mother assures him that she will stand between him and the curse. Her words suggest that this was looked on as a genuine possibility. But there is in fact only One Who can stand between us and our deserts.

In defence of Jacob we must remember here that he was used to obeying his mother. While his father was the patriarch the practical authority had long since devolved on Rebekah in many things, which was one reason why marrying someone with her background had been so important. And it was she who was urging him in the light of what both thought of as his unfairness and dotage.

27.14-17 'And he went and fetched what was required and brought them to his mother, and his mother made savoury meat such as his father loved. And Rebekah took the fine clothes of Esau her elder son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. And she put the skins of the kids of the goats on his hands and on the smooth of his neck, and she gave the savoury meat and the bread which she had prepared into the hands of her son Jacob.'

Rebekah had it all thought out. The hairy skin, the distinctive smell of the hunter, the tasty food and the certainty that blind Isaac's condition was such that he would not be too discerning. She carries the deception through to the end with the singlemindedness of a mother devoted to her favourite son, aware that legally her position is correct.

Note the mention of 'her elder son'. Previously Jacob has been described as 'her son'. There is disapproval in the writer's tone. Esau was her son as well, and the elder one at that.

27.18 'And he came to his father and said, "My father." And he said, "Here I am. Who are you my son?"

Jacob comes, no doubt trembling, to his father, honing the skills of deception that he will use so effectively later on. His father's reply reflects doubt. This does not sound like Esau. From this point on the writer skilfully builds up the tension for his hearers. Will Isaac see through the deception?

27.19 'And Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau, your firstborn. I have done as you bade me. Get up, I pray you, sit and eat of my venison that your soul may bless me."

The reply sounds right, but there is something Isaac does not like about the situation.

27.20-21 'And Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you found it so quickly, my son?" And he said, "Because Yahweh your God sent me good speed." And Isaac said to Jacob, "Come near, I pray you, that I may feel you my son, whether you are truly my son Esau or not."

Isaac is uneasy. The speed with which the venison has been found adds to his already growing doubts. And the reply makes him even more uneasy. It is not like Esau to speak with such piety. He would have expected that of Jacob. He knows he must use his hands and feel the speaker so as to ensure who it is.

27.22 'And Jacob went near to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." '

His son approaches and he feels his hands. There can be no doubt that they are hairy like Esau's. Certainly not Jacob's. He does not dream that his younger son would dare to deceive him. And how would Jacob know what he had asked Esau to do? But the voice, and the words spoken, they speak so much of Jacob. Yet in the end the hairiness decides it. That is decisive.

27.23 'And he did not work out who he was because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands. So he blessed him.'

The deception has worked. Isaac has been convinced. If we think he should have suspected we must remember he had no reason to suspect. And with his eyes blind and his illness, with his senses dulled (and he has not yet eaten), he accepts the evidence of the hairiness which can really not have any other explanation. The enormity of what Jacob has done is so great that Isaac probably would not have believed it was possible. Surely a son would not deceive his own father or a tribal member dare to deceive the patriarch? Yahweh Himself would pronounce on the iniquity of the man who deceives the blind (compare Leviticus 19.14; Deuteronomy 27.18 where the principle is in mind).

'So he blessed him.' A summary, speaking of what is to come indicating that he is now convinced. We have noted before this tendency to say briefly what happens before expanding on it, (see 26.1b; 26.18). We might paraphrase 'that is the main reason why he now enters the blessing process'.

27.24 'And he said, "Are you truly my son Esau?" And he said, "I am'.

Isaac now moves into the blessing process. The question is formal. He is not now voicing suspicion but simply asking for the recipient to confirm his title.

(The blessing process goes - confirmation of the recipient, partaking of the requested offering, a sealing kiss, the blessing).

27.25 'And he said, "Bring it near to me and I will eat of my son's venison that my soul may bless you." And he brought it near to him, and he ate, and he brought him wine, and he drank.'

Now he calls on him to do the son's part, bonding the unity between them. We can only imagine Jacob's apprehension as he carries through the charade wishing it would end, and probably hating what he was doing, but determined to carry it through so that he could have justice, all the while full of trepidation in case Esau arrives.

27.26-27a 'And his father Isaac said to him, "Now come near and kiss me, my son." And he

came near and kissed him. And he smelled the smell of his clothing, and blessed him.'

After receiving his offering now the sealing kiss. No longer suspicious he receives his son's kiss. He then smells his son's clothes, a further act of bonding. The smelling of the clothing is not done in suspicion but as leading into the blessing. He receives of his son that he may bestow blessing on him connected with the receiving.

27.27b-29 'And said, "See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which Yahweh has blessed. And God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and let your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you and blessed be everyone who blesses you."

The blessing is threefold, fruitfulness, power over peoples and authority over his brothers.

'Of the dew of heaven.' The heavy morning dew, largely caused by moist air from the sea, was looked on as a great blessing in a relatively dry country. It was especially abundant in the summer when there was no rain, and was beneficial to summer crops and the vine harvest (corn and wine). It is here looked on as an added blessing, given to the specially favoured (see Zechariah 8.12).

'And of the fatness of the earth.' This will refer to plentiful grazing so that his herds and flocks will prosper, as well as to good crops. Thus the earth is to give all that is needed for his prosperity abundantly.

'And plenty of corn and wine.' Not just food but provision for full enjoyment.

'Let people serve you and nations bow down to you.' Isaac has not forgotten Yahweh's promises - 'Your seed will possess the gate of his enemies' (22.17). But he expands it to include authority over many nations, even those not their enemies. Only thus can they be a blessing to the world as a whole.

'Be lord over your brothers, and let your mother's sons bow down to you.' He is to have the pre-eminent place in the family tribe. Perhaps he has in mind the words, 'Kings shall come from you' (17.6). His son is to be a 'king' over his brothers. In other words he is seeking for his son total pre-eminence. Thus Isaac is seeking to restore the damage done by the sale of the birthright, not realising that he is in fact confirming it. It is this perversity that gives some justification to Jacob's action.

'Your brothers.' This is then defined as 'your mother's sons'. This suggests that other sons have been born to Rebekah. Alternately it may be that this was a stereotyped phrase incorporated into the blessing by Isaac (but see verse 37).

'Cursed be everyone who curses you and blessed be everyone who blesses you.' The pronouncing of curses and blessings was a common feature of covenants. Abraham was promised the same thing in 12.3. So Isaac is confirming the covenant promises on his son. See also Numbers 24.9; Deuteronomy 27 and 28.

It is clear that once the blessing is given it cannot be withdrawn. The authority and promised blessing has been passed on and nothing can change it, 'yes, and he shall be blessed' (verse 33). So did Jacob ensure that he received the full benefit of the purchased birthright.

27.30-31a 'And it happened, as soon as Isaac had made an end of blessing Jacob, and Jacob was yet scarce gone out from the presence of his father, that Esau his brother came in from his

hunting. And he also made savoury meat, and brought it to his father.'

He left only just in time. Esau, confident of the benefits he is about to receive, arrives back at the camp and prepares the food for his father. Then he confidently strides into his father's tent. He is not too concerned about the fact that the blessing may counteract the oath he had made to Jacob. Once the blessing is given it cannot be taken away.

27.31b 'And he said to his father, "Let my father arise and eat of his son's venison, that your soul may bless me.'

Compare the similar words in verse 19. This was clearly the regular formula for opening the blessing procedures.

27.32 'And Isaac his father said to him, "Who are you?" And he said, "I am your son, your firstborn Esau."

'Who are you?' Isaac's mind is frozen with shock. He cannot believe what he is hearing. His previous mild suspicions now come back with full force.

Esau, completely unsuspecting makes the reply that he knows his father will expect. He is the firstborn, he is Esau. This gives away the fact that he knows that he is about to receive the firstborn's blessing, that he knows he is seeking to take something of what he had sold to Jacob. He is conscious that he is about to receive one of the rights of the firstborn, that birthright that he has sold. We do not know how far the two would be seen as officially interconnecting, but we cannot doubt that they do. It may indeed be that Esau's view is very different from Jacob's. That what he had meant by the contract was far different from what Jacob had intended. For he had probably dismissed what had happened as some peculiarity of Jacob's.

27.33 'And Isaac trembled very violently, and said, "Then who is he who has taken venison, and brought it to me, and I have eaten of all before you came, and have blessed him. Yes and he shall be blessed." '

Isaac is distraught. He realises that he has been deceived. But he is aware, as all are, that what has been given cannot be taken back. The seal has been made personally with Jacob, and the blessing has been given.

Isaac's words confirm the close connection between the eating and the blessing. They were all part of the same process, the bonding and then the blessing.

'Yes, and he shall be blessed.' There is no going back from what he has done.

27.34 'When Esau heard the words of his father he cried with an extremely loud and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me, even me also, oh my father."

Esau too is distraught. All he had hoped for has come to naught. Surely his father can do something to remedy the situation. Can he not have the blessing as well?

27.35 'And he said, "Your brother came with guile and has taken away your blessing."

The answer is basically, 'no'. What he has given he has given. He cannot take it back or change it in spite of the way in which it had been obtained.

27.36 'And he said, "Is he not rightly called Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times.

He took away my birthright, and see, now he has taken away my blessing.”

Esau makes a bitter play on words. The root idea behind the word ‘Jacob’ is protection. Jacob-el (the el is assumed) means ‘may God protect’. But a secondary root which indicates supplanting can also be read into the consonants (see on 25.26).

Esau claims to see birthright and blessing as two separate things, but had he thought it through he would have recognised that he was wrong. For as the wording of Isaac’s blessing made abundantly clear, in the firstborn’s case they are really two parts of the one privilege. While it is true that the birthright centred more on property and official position over the tribe, and the blessing concentrated more on the giving of something personal, in the case of the firstborn both were interconnected.

The blessing was specially directed in the light of the birthright. Had Esau received the blessing and yet yielded to Jacob the birthright both would have been in an impossible position. And Esau would probably have won, because the blessing would have been seen as empowering him in a way the birthright did not. If Esau did not see the implications behind the situation there can be no doubt that Jacob and Rebekah did.

There is therefore poetic justice in the fact that Esau, who was seeking to supplant his brother in spite of his oath, finds himself supplanted. Later he would in fact recognise the justice of it and be reconciled with his brother.

27.37 ‘And Isaac answered and said to Esau, “Behold I have made him your lord, and I have given to him all his brothers for servants, and I have sustained him with corn and wine. And what then shall I do for you, my son?”’

Isaac too finds himself helpless. Had he not intended such favour to his elder son that he gave him everything there would have been something left. But he had intended to leave nothing for Jacob. So there is nothing left.

It demonstrates what had been the singlemindedness of Isaac’s purpose that he thinks this. He knows what he had intended. Jacob was to be left out of the reckoning.

‘All his brothers for servants.’ This would seem to confirm that there were other brothers. Alternately it may signify the whole tribe as ‘brothers’ (consider Genesis 19.7 where it means fellow-citizens; 24.27 where it means kinsfolk; 31.46 where it means servant companions).

27.38 ‘And Esau said to his father, “Have you but one blessing my father. Bless me, even me also, oh my father.” And Esau raised his voice and wept.

In his disappointment and anguish Esau seeks for some crumb of comfort. Is there nothing that his father can give him? We must recognise that it is some official benefit that he seeks. His father could easily give him a general blessing.

27.39 ‘And Isaac his father answered and said to him, “Behold, from the fatness of the earth will be your dwelling, and from the dew of heaven from above. And by your sword you will live, and you will serve your brother. And it will happen, when you will break loose, that you will shake his yoke from off your neck.” ’

Isaac grants him one favour. Independence. He will release him from his debt of servitude to Jacob.

‘From the fatness of the earth will be your dwelling, and from the dew of heaven from above.’

'From' here probably means 'away from'. The fatness of the earth and the dew of heaven is to be given by God to Jacob (verse 28). But Esau is released from enjoying it. He may go away from his brother, away from God's provision. The land he will go to will not enjoy the same dewfall, and will not be as productive.

'And by your sword you will live and you will serve your brother.' His future will be in warfare and booty. He will be a raider at the head of warriors. 'You will serve your brother.' This may be partly ironic meaning try to give him his deserts. But in the end it is prophetic and will be fulfilled when Edom becomes subject to Israel (2 Samuel 8.14; Obadiah 1.18-20).

'And it will be that when you will break loose, that you will shake his yoke from your neck.' The submission will not be permanent and in the end Edom will be free of Israel's yoke.

Esau does indeed leave home in accordance with the blessing and establishes himself in the mountainous country of Seir where the dew is scarcer and the land not so productive. But he gathers a band of warriors (32.6; 33.1), builds up his own tribe, becomes wealthy in possessions (33.9) and is free to do whatever he wants.

He was a free spirit and he would never have been satisfied leading the family tribe and being beholden to the inhabitants of Canaan. The family tribe of Abraham might well have been turned into a band of brigands. So in fact he found a future which satisfied him and this helps to account for his willingness to forgive Jacob and treat him as a beloved brother (33.4). It also explains why God, Who foresaw the situation from his birth, allowed what He did.

But that is in the future. For the present things begin to look ugly.

27.41 'And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, "The days of mourning for my father are at hand. Then will I slay my brother Jacob."'

As we have seen earlier, Isaac thought he was near death, and it is clear Esau thought likewise. 'The days of mourning for my father are at hand' means exactly this. (Probably no one thought that Isaac would linger on another twenty years or more. But he did, and by the time he died all the differences had been settled).

Thus Esau decides to wait until then before carrying out his plan to kill Jacob. He does not want to distress his father. But he clearly lets his thoughts be known, for word gets back to Rebekah and she decides to send Jacob to a place of safety.

27.42-45 'And the words of Esau her elder son were told to Rebekah, and she sent and called Jacob her younger son and said to him, "Look, your brother Esau consoles himself about you with the thought of killing you. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice, and arise. Flee to my brother Laban, to Haran. And wait with him a few days until your brother's hot fury turns away, until your brother's anger turns from you and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I will send for you from there. Why should I be bereaved of you both in one day?"'

When Rebekah realises what Esau intends to do she decides to send Jacob to a place of safety. With her son she is honest. He must flee to her brother in Haran until Esau's anger has abated. 'A few days' is wishful thinking. Even in the best of circumstances it would take quite some time. Haran is not just round the corner. But she is trying to make it sound temporary. Neither she nor Jacob realise that they will never meet again.

The repetition of the phrase, with slight differences, about Esau's hot fury stresses how great a threat it is. But she is confident that the hot fury that has gripped him will subside, and that

eventually even his anger against Jacob will die down and what has happened will be unimportant. She knows her son and knows that both will happen. She knows his heart is on other things. (Repetitions such as we find here, almost word for word, are a constant feature of ancient literature).

'Why should I be bereaved of you both in one day?' If Esau murders Jacob then he too will become liable to death for fratricide, especially as Jacob is now the heir apparent. She still has love in her heart for Esau.

However Isaac must be told a different story. No one wants him upset by what is happening and he must not learn of his elder son's evil intent. It is clear that he is in his dotage and not up with things. He does not realise the storm that is growing around him. So Rebekah takes a different tack with him. She wants the initiative for Jacob's departure to seem to come from him.

And here we really come to the end of the Isaac stories. All that remains is his sending Jacob to Haran (28.1), twenty years of silence, and his welcoming back of Jacob at Mamre (35.27), followed immediately by his death (35.29).

Thus if we ignore the stories describing his childhood, the seeking of Rebekah and the birth and blessing of his sons, the only account of any length about Isaac is his activity at Gerar and Beersheba. And this out of one hundred and eighty years of life. And why is this? Because there were no covenant records.

Isaac passed a peaceable life, first at Beer-lahai-roi (25.11), then at Gerar and Beersheba (chapter 26), and finally at Mamre (35.27). He experienced few theophanies and made few covenants worth recording. Thus the silence about his life.

This demonstrates that the idea that Genesis contains camp fire stories passed down, with anecdotes about the lives of the patriarchs, just is not true. <