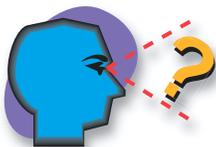




Genesis

Responses to the Questions



NOTE; BE SURE TO ANSWER ALL THE QUESTIONS YOURSELF BEFORE READING THE ANSWERS IN ORDER TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS STUDY.

Isaac and Rebekah Read Genesis 24

1. Abraham has two concerns: he wants Isaac to marry a woman from his own family as opposed to one from among the local Canaanites; and he does not want Isaac to leave the promised land. He is emphatic about this latter point, even going so far as to release his servant from his oath if the woman he finds is unwilling to leave her home and go to Isaac in Canaan. Abraham apparently does not want to take the risk that Isaac will be tempted to remain in his family's natural homeland and thereby forestall the fulfillment of God's promise to give them Canaan, even if it means not getting the wife he prefers.

2. Abraham not only wants a wife for his son from his own family, he wants one who will be willing to leave her homeland. Abraham seems to understand that God's call to leave everything and follow Him, to "[make] his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country," as Paul says in Hebrews 11:9, is not just for him but for his son also. The promise will not be fulfilled immediately, and not only Isaac but his wife as well will need to be able to live in hope, looking forward to the future.

The fact that Abraham releases Eliezer from the promise should the woman be unwilling to return with him, is evidence that Abraham has complete trust in God to keep His word. Isaac obviously needs a suitable wife if he is to have children in fulfillment of God's promise, but Abraham will not force the issue. He believes God will send an angel to prepare the way for Eliezer; if that doesn't work out, God will find another way.

3. Before Eliezer had even finished praying that God would guide him by sending a girl who offers to water his camels, God sent Rebekah to him. No wonder Eliezer "bowed and worshiped the Lord" and praised him, for the very first woman he laid eyes on after praying not only did what he asked of God, but she also was Abraham's grand-niece and a beautiful, eligible young woman at that. God's hand in the matter is confirmed by Laban and Bethuel when they offer Rebekah to Eliezer, saying "let her become the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has directed (vs.51).

4. The granddaughter of Abraham's brother Nahor, Rebekah has not only the requisite modesty and virtue of a potential bride, she is beautiful, thoughtful, and hospitable. She works quickly, is eager to help, and goes beyond what is expected to make others comfortable. God chose her to be mother of the man who would be Israel - Jacob, the father of the 12 tribes of Israel - as surely as he chose Abraham and Isaac, to play a part in carrying out His purposes.

In the same way, God chooses each one of us. St. Paul says that "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10)." And Jesus told his disciples that they did not choose him, "but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide (Jn. 15:16)." We are called into God's family that we might share in God's nature, in the fruitfulness of His love, and in His work.



Responses to the Questions (cont.)

Catholic Scripture Study

The Death of Abraham

Read Genesis 25:1-18

5. The author records three ways in which Isaac was preferred over his half-brothers as the true heir of not just Abraham's property but of the promise as well: he received the bulk of Abraham's inheritance; he made his home near Beer Lahai Roi, in Canaan, while the other sons were sent away to live outside the promised land; and he was the recipient of God's blessing after Abraham's death.

6. Consider for a moment the ultimate result had God blessed all of Abraham's sons equally (don't forget that far from abandoning them, God did bless and prosper the other sons for Abraham's sake): Anyone in Abraham's bloodline, whoever the mother, would have been heir to God's covenant promise. Far from extending the reach of the covenant, however great and numerous the other sons' families became, this would firmly establish one family, the natural children of Abraham, as the people of God - to the exclusion of everyone else on earth.

God's goal, however, is worldwide blessing. He means to restore all of mankind to His family. By choosing Isaac over Ishmael, God confirms that all people born of faith (as Isaac was born of his parents' faith in God's promise to do the impossible) are truly children of Abraham and thus heirs of the promise. This, too, may seem limiting - but in fact it is God saying, "Forget the circumstances of your birth. Anyone who comes to me in faith is mine!"

St. Paul expands on this in Romans 9:6-8: "...For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his descendants; but 'through Isaac shall your descendants be named.' This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are reckoned as descendants." We who are not Jews by birth should be thanking God from the bottom of our hearts that God chose Isaac, for that choice opened the door for us to become true Israelites through His Son; and members of His family in the Church.

The Birth of Jacob and Esau

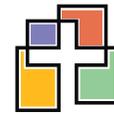
Read Genesis 25:19-26

7. If Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah, and 60 years old when she bore the twins, then he prayed for 20 years that Rebekah would conceive. Isaac was tested by God during this waiting period, even as Abraham was tested while waiting for the birth of Isaac. In both cases, the delayed answer demonstrated that the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham would come by grace, not by man's effort.

Isaac's prayer would have been based on what he knew was God's word and promise, and strengthened by what he knew of his own birth and his parents' prayers. It seems fitting that Isaac, the long-awaited child of the promise, would himself be strong in hope and faith that God would continue to do what He had started.

8. Rebekah went to the Lord to find the source and meaning of the discord in her womb. God told her that the twins she is carrying would father two nations. They would be unequal in strength, and the older would serve the younger. This revelation accurately predicts the future relationship between Israel and Edom, the nations that will spring from her sons.

9. Jacob, "he takes by the heel" or "he supplants," grabbed his twin by the heel as though trying to pull his way out before his brother. Jacob will find it difficult to leave things to God, instead striving to work circumstances to his own advantage and pull ahead by wiliness and his own effort.



Responses to the Questions (cont.)

Catholic Scripture Study

The Birth of Jacob and Esau (cont.)

10. God chose Jacob because He wanted to choose Jacob - not because of anything Jacob had done, good or bad. Jacob (and by extension Israel) was chosen by God before he was born, out of God's "sheer, gratuitous love (CCC 218)." This is the principle of election, which says that God's choice depends on His sovereign will and mercy toward us. God chose the younger of Isaac's twin boys just as He chose the second son of Abraham and would later bypass Jacob's oldest sons: to showcase His power, His sovereignty, His work in fulfilling His promises.

As the Apostle Paul shows in Romans, the same thing is true today: God chooses us not because we're born a Jew (or Catholic!) or because of anything we do, but out of His love and will and mercy.

Esau Sells His Birthright Read Genesis 25:27-34

11. Esau is interested in satisfying his own needs, and thus sold his future for a meal; according to vs. 34 he not only did not appreciate the value of his birthright, he despised it. His number-one priority is himself, and the needs and pleasures of the moment, whereas Jacob will do anything to get the future, lasting benefit that the birthright will provide.

Isaac and Abimilech Read Genesis 26

12. God's plan was to give Isaac and his descendants the land of Canaan, and He meant them to set down roots there. This sounds like it might be a test of Isaac's faith; this is, after all, the second time Isaac has a compelling reason to leave, but has been told to stay (the first was when it was time for him to find a wife from among his people). Will Isaac stay in the place where God wants him, even though it is as a stranger and there is a famine in the land? Now it is Isaac's turn to trust God's word when he can't see the reasoning behind it. We aren't given the details that we were with Abraham; we don't know if he struggled. We do know that God promised to be with Isaac and bless him if he stayed, and that God confirmed his intention to carry out all he had promised Abraham, through Isaac. And we know that Isaac trusted those promises, for he stayed in Gerar (vs. 6).

13. God says he will multiply Isaac's descendants, and give them the land, and make them a source of blessing to the world - "because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws." Clearly, obedience to God's commands is not just something God expected of Abraham. It is a condition of staying within the covenant relationship. Now Isaac is to obey God also, and the promise will continue through him. (And Isaac does obey God, as vs. 6 makes clear.)

14. In Gen. 21 Abimilech, recognizing that God is with Abraham in all that he does, forged a treaty with Abraham. In Gen. 26 he may be protecting Isaac in honor of that treaty. He may also be afraid to act against someone who is "now the blessed of the Lord," as he calls Isaac in vs. 29. That God is with Isaac is clear even to other nations (vs.28).

15. Isaac gives up his right to the disputed wells, moving on until he finds a place over which there is no argument. And even though Abimelech has sent him away, Isaac is conciliatory and accepts the oath that Abimelech proposes to establish peace between them.



Responses to the Questions (cont.)

Catholic Scripture Study

Isaac and Abimelech (cont.)

God rewards Isaac by providing water and room to flourish (vs.22). He also appears to Isaac, comforting and strengthening him against discouragement over the fact that still they do not have land of their own. For Abraham's sake, God will be with Isaac and bless him and multiply his descendants, so he need not fear.

16. God identifies Himself to Isaac as "the God of Abraham your father." God is not so far removed as to forget His people. By calling Himself "the God of Abraham your father," God is showing Himself to be a personal God, a God who not just appears to people to give orders but who has a special personal relationship with them and who blesses them and those who belong to them.