

**Hebrews 11:20**  
**“Isaac’s Blessing”**

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**I. Introduction**

Over the next few weeks we will examine three more patriarchs of faith in Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. The purpose of the illustration is again aimed at answering another reason why some of these Hebrews refused to trust in Jesus as their Messiah. Each of these three only *inherited the promises* as none of them ever received the promises passed onto them by their fathers. *Yet none of these three became discouraged or disillusioned when the promises of God went unrealized. In fact, these three became more determined to believe in God’s promises as they treated the promises of God as an inheritance to the next generation even though they themselves never experienced the promises themselves!*

*Death didn’t detour their faith, nor did it lessen the value of the promises.* That is what was happening to some of these Hebrews as they could believe God’s promises through Jesus because they hadn’t materialized during their life. *Hebrews 11:20-22 goes back and examines in detail what verses 13-16 only summarized.* When you go back and look at the volume of information given to “*these patriarchs*” in Genesis you see something very interesting: *Abraham, Jacob and Joseph each have about 12 chapters dedicated to their life; whereas Isaac only has around 2 ½ chapters that focus on his life.* Then looking directly at Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their lives seem to be centered around three distinct activities that each is known for: “*Building altars, digging wells and pitching tents*”!

- **Abraham *Builds altars***: Four times we are told that he did so. Altars were places of worship, and Abraham's life seems to have centered on the worship of God. Yet it is recorded that he only dug 1 well and pitched 2 tents, (*accept for 26:15 where it is obvious that he dug many wells*)!
- **Isaac *Digs wells***: Five times we are told that he dug wells and each time he seems to re-dig the ones that his father had dug. Wells of water in scripture seem to always point to God's provisions for a healthy spiritual life. In John 4:1-4 Jesus told the women, "*Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst!*" Isaac is a man that emulates the spiritual life of faith of his father. Yet we are told that Isaac builds only one altar and only pitches his tent twice.
- **Jacob *pitched tents***: Four times we are told that he pitched his tent. Tents are used to symbolize a person's abode during their spiritual journey. Jacob is a guy who no matter where he was made his home in the Lord. Yet, as far as the other three activities of his forefathers, he built only one altar and dug no wells.

My point is that we too ought to be "*altar builders, well diggers and tent pitchers*" in our lives. People who:

- Long to sit at the feet of the Lord to worship Him.
- Come and dig deep in His word to be refreshed by Him.
- And find that wherever He has placed us, we are at home.

Our examination this morning will only be Isaac and even though in Hebrews in only comprises one verse the story involves two points I believe the writer wishes to make:

1. Vs. 20a Isaac and the life the reader would have known about him found in Genesis chapter 26.
2. Vs. 20b The direct illustration of the blessing by Isaac of Jacob and Esau in Genesis chapter 27.

## II. Vs. 20a The moving of Isaac

Vs. 20a Too the original reader Isaac's name in the list of people who exhibited faith might have been a bit surprising and similar to the mention of Sarah in verse 11. To look at this example, we need to go to Genesis 26 as his life looks a lot like that of his father who had been dead for some time. And unfortunately for Isaac the footsteps of his father Abraham that he chose to emulate were not Abraham's best foot forward! Yet God was faithful just as He was in Abraham and continued to move Isaac towards the place of blessing. According to Genesis 26:2-3 Isaac, spent far too much time in "*boarder land*" in between the land of promise and the world until God led him back to a place of His

presence. This is the 1<sup>st</sup> time in over 50 years that we are told that God appeared to Isaac, the last time we are told so was the time on Calvary where God confirmed the covenant He made with Abraham. The surprising thing is that Isaac ends up going to Gerar located 10 miles from Gaza on the border with Egypt. As such God has to **warn Isaac not to “go down to Egypt” but rather “stay in the land”**. Isaac was to go where God directed and not where the situation dictated! The only way Isaac would know where to dwell was to be nearer the Lord! Gerar was a border town afar cry from “Beer-sheba” or the well of oath where God would move him by verse 23. Isaac first moved towards where he thought the situation dictated before he goes where the Lord directed him. With all the places Isaac could have chosen to live in the land of promise he chose the closest place to where God told him he could not go. It’s no wonder that he repeats the same sin of lying about his wife as did his father? It isn’t until later in his life that we see that the closer he came to the “well of oath” the more blessed he became. And in Genesis 26:12-14 we see the Lord blessing Isaac in-spite of him as he became “very prosperous” but the outcome of such prosperity was that “The Philistines envied him”. And it was this that the Lord used to move him to where He wanted him. Isaac’s intent was to make each place he moved a place to set down his roots but each time a dispute arises which forces him to move. Isaac did not realize it, but God was leading him home one well at a time. He re-dug the wells his father dug naming them the same thing and in so doing he was unknowingly following the faith steps of his father. It’s also interesting to see that Isaac’s journey towards where the Lord wanted him cause him to dig new wells and their names reveal that God was leading him away from:

- Vs. 20 “contention”
- Vs. 21 “opposition”

- Vs. 22 towards “roominess”

The first two wells were good but in the wrong land, but when Isaac came into where God wanted him to be the wells fit as it was “roominess”. Upon further looking at this in 26:23-25 we find that this well of “roominess” was the first place Isaac and Abraham went to upon leaving the mountain of sacrifice in chapter 22:19. **Isaac finally came to see with his heart where his feet had already been taking him: The land of promise and sweet fellowship with the Lord.** There we are told in verse 25 that he does four things he hadn’t ever done before:

- Built an altar
- Called on the name of the Lord
- Pitched his tent
- Dug a well

***Before this time in his life he had always sought to be refreshed before he had worshiped now he knows that refreshment comes when he sat at the altar. No matter what the circumstance the best place for him to make his home was at the altar, that’s always the best place to dig a well.***

### III. Vs. 20b The birthright

Vs. 20b That takes us to the direct illustration of Isaac’s blessing. First we needed go back to Genesis 26:29-34 as this story is set up by the events that are recorded here. The understand of rests upon two things:

1. What was the significance of the birthright?
2. To whom did the birthright normally go?

**First**, the birthright customarily involved a double portion of the inheritance but also

involved the leadership or headship of the family. Thus the birthright carried with it a twofold blessing “**physical blessings**” with “**spiritual responsibility**”. The “*birthright*” determined who would inherit the covenant promises that God made with Abraham, which involved a future nation, all the land and the lineage of the Messiah. Esau very much wanted the “*physical blessing*” but without the “*spiritual responsibilities*”.

**Second**, normally the “*birthright*” went to the eldest son except in case where the father would transfer it to a more deserving son. In this case we have three factors that should have indicated to Isaac that the “*birthright*” should have been Jacob’s and not Esau’s:

- a. **God had told them while they were yet unborn which one He had chosen to receive the birthright.**
- b. **They were twins**: Age was not a determining factor in this case as age didn’t indicate maturity as they were only minutes apart not years.

c. **Jacob was much more spiritually and emotionally mature than was Esau.**

Esau had no heart for the things of God as Jacob did.

In verses 31-34 all of the above was demonstrated as true revealing that Jacob should have been given the birthright as Esau had no heart for the “*spiritual responsibilities*” as future head of the family. Jacob was cooking a stew of lentils when Esau came in faint with hunger. His response to Jacob is “*let me gulp down some of that red stuff*” where he received his nickname “Red”. Esau’s response to Jacob’s offer was to say, “*I’m going to die one day anyway so what use is the birthright to me.*” Esau saw that the birthright only gained him only temporal advantages and would be lost upon death and didn’t want it, not so with Jacob. In Genesis 26:34-35 we see further evidence of what God knew before the womb of Rebekah that Esau was not to be in the lineage of the Messiah as Hebrews 12:6 calls him “*a person just outside the temple*”. Esau had no regard for the things of God as seen in his choice of brides, seeing that he left the practice of monogamy and marries not one but TWO Hittite women whose culture was extremely wicked & idolatrous.

That brings us up to the actually blessing of Jacob in Genesis 27:18-40 which was all preceded by: ***Isaac and Esau tried to do the wrong thing for the wrong reason and Rebekah and Jacob tried to accomplish the right thing the wrong way. And in the end God produced the right outcome but not for their reasons or employing their methods.*** I notice that Isaac was deceived even though he tested Jacob using his five senses: Sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. We often think that if we can touch, see, hear, smell or taste something then it must be as it appears. ***Empirical evidence is great but it does not always guarantee that we won’t get deceived that is why illusionists are so good at what they do. The problem was not in Isaac’s ability to weigh the evidence rather it was in***

*his heart that wanted it to be so!* The worst of Jacob's lies was verse 20 where he claims that it was God who was the One leading him to deceive. Yet still in spite of his doubt Isaac still is led down the path of deception because of his own heart's wish! In verses 25-27 with the convincing lie Isaac was now ready to bless whom he believes is Esau. The use of the words "My son" in verse 26 in Hebrew means my "favorite" son, which means finally someone told the truth of what was really in their heart. Jacob could now justify all of his deception because of what his father just said. Isaac's blessing of who he thought was Esau is twofold:

- a. Vs. 29 That who he thought was Esau would be master over Jacob. By saying these words Isaac thinks he can annul God's will and validate his own. Yet in doing so he unwittingly validates what God wanted all along.
- b. In using this blessing we see that it was the same one bestowed upon Abraham in chapter 12:3 with one exception the words "And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." That is the Messianic element of the blessing, stating that through this person the Messiah will be born. Isaac's own words betrayed what he knew in his heart, Esau had no heart for the things of God. Interestingly after the veil of deception was lifted Isaac bestows these words upon Jacob, (28:4).

Hebrews 12:16-17 comments upon Esau's tearful repentance in Genesis 27:34, 38 by saying, "Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears." It sounds as if God did not allow Esau to repent but the word "repentance" means a change of heart and mind, thus what is meant here is that there was no possibility of undoing what had been done. God's mind was made up even though Esau shed tears it was not enough to give him the birthright. The truth was that Esau did not like what he sowed and what he wanted was to change the outcome of his actions.

This is the story the Holy Spirit chose to use to illustrate the faith of Isaac the "reluctant patriarch" as the only time he acted in faith was when he realized that God's blessing was going to go to God's choice regardless of his attempt to change it. **Though the story is clouded by Isaac's action it non-the-less proves the point of the writer and that is how much Isaac valued and regarded the promises of God even though he never possessed them, as he wanted to make sure they went to the person he wanted them too got towards!**