

Genesis 26:1-27:40 – Isaac Blesses Jacob

Review

In Genesis 25, we found the story of Abraham’s death and the birth of twin sons Esau and Jacob to Abraham’s son Isaac and his wife Rebekah. We saw that Isaac and Rebekah each favored one of the boys over the other – Isaac favoring Esau due to his hunting prowess and the tasty game Esau provided, while Rebekah loved Jacob the younger of the twins. We also looked at the tradition for the firstborn son to receive a double portion of the inheritance from the father and read the story of Esau selling this birthright to Jacob in exchange for some red lentil stew.

Isaac’s Later Life

¹Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines. ²And the LORD appeared to him and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. ³Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. ⁴I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, ⁵because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.” Genesis 26:1-5 (ESV)

Look at the [Patriarchs in Canaan](#) map. Recall from [our study of Genesis 20](#) that Isaac’s father Abraham had also sojourned in Gerar. Abraham also had dealings with Abimelech, king of the Philistines. The noun Abimelech (אַבִּימֶלֶךְ *’ābîmelek*) means “my father is king” and is both a proper name and a title like Pharaoh. We have no way of knowing whether Abimelech king of the Philistines during Isaac’s time was the same Abimelech with whom Abraham made the oath at Beersheba or whether Isaac’s Abimelech was his son. Later in this study, we will learn that Phicol was commander of the Philistine army in both cases. It is possible that both men were named after their fathers and were the sons of the two men with whom Abraham negotiated, but we have no way to verify that from the Biblical text alone. The answer is truly unimportant.

What **is** important here is that God reiterated to Isaac the same promise he made to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 that through Abraham’s Seed – our Lord Jesus the מָשִׁיחַ *māšîaḥ* – all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Notice that God emphasized to Isaac that He made this reiterated promise in response to Abraham’s obedience in faith. In particular, Abraham had obeyed God’s call to leave his father’s house in Haran and journey to Canaan (Genesis 12), he had fulfilled his part of the covenant of circumcision (Genesis 17), and had obeyed the test of his faith when God called him to sacrifice Isaac the heir of promise (Genesis 22). But most importantly, Abraham had believed God’s promise of an heir from his own body in his old age (Genesis 15), and God credited Abraham’s faith in that promise as righteousness (Genesis 15:6).

⁶So Isaac settled in Gerar. ⁷When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, “She is my sister,” for he feared to say, “My wife,” thinking, “lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah,” because she was attractive in appearance. ⁸When he had been there a long time,

Genesis 26:1-27:40 – Isaac Blesses Jacob

Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw Isaac laughing with ^[רנן שָׁחַק] Rebekah his wife. ⁹So Abimelech called Isaac and said, “Behold, she is your wife. How then could you say, ‘She is my sister?’” Isaac said to him, “Because I thought, ‘Lest I die because of her.’” ¹⁰Abimelech said, “What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us.” ¹¹So Abimelech warned all the people, saying, “Whoever touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.” Genesis 26:6-11 (ESV)

As the old saying goes, “The acorn doesn’t fall far from the tree.” Isaac learned how to lie to people about Rebekah from his father Abraham. You remember Abraham. He’s the one whose faith (ironically in the promise of Isaac) God credited as righteousness. In his turn, Isaac lied to Abimelech’s people about Rebekah just as Abraham had lied about Isaac’s mother to Pharaoh and Abimelech years before. This silly strategy worked just as well for Isaac as it had for Abraham.

The well-known proverb promises that children raised properly will carry their upbringing into adulthood.

⁶Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it. Proverbs 22:6 (ESV)

Conversely, teach your children bad habits and unrighteous behavior, and they’ll fall into the same self-made traps you did before them.

Recall from Genesis 20:12 that when Abimelech chastised Abraham about his deception concerning Sarah, Abraham gave the lame (possibly true) excuse that Sarah was indeed his (half) sister, but he had neglected to share with Abimelech and his people that she was also his wife. Isaac didn’t have that option since Rebekah was his second cousin.

ASIDE – Isaac was 40 when he married Rebekah three years after his mother Sarah died. Although we are not told precisely how old Rebekah was when she left Haran to marry Isaac, she was very likely still a teenager less than half Isaac’s age.

In Genesis 26:8 we find once more the Hebrew word ^{רנן שָׁחַק} *śāḥaq*. Quite a few of the English translations render this word as “caressing” in this verse. It is the same word we saw in Genesis 21:9, when Ishmael was caught laughing at Isaac during the celebration of Isaac’s weaning. Recall in that case, these same translations rendered ^{רנן שָׁחַק} *śāḥaq* as “mocking” or “scoffing.” But regardless of what Abimelech saw Isaac and Rebekah doing, he was clearly convinced that Isaac had been lying about his true relationship with Rebekah, and Isaac didn’t bother to deny it.

Assuming Isaac’s Abimelech was the same as Abraham’s, it wasn’t the first time he’d been lied to in this regard, so he probably wasn’t too surprised when he caught Isaac and Rebekah doing whatever they were doing. He also doubtless recalled God’s unvarnished threat of death to anyone who sexually approached Sarah, so he would also have assumed the same would apply to Rebekah. Small wonder then that he was so blunt in his rebuke of Isaac and harsh in his warning to his people.

¹²And Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. The LORD blessed him, ¹³and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy. ¹⁴He had possessions of flocks and

Genesis 26:1-27:40 – Isaac Blesses Jacob

herds and many servants, so that the Philistines envied him. Genesis 26:12-14
(ESV)

Despite Isaac's dishonorable behavior, God nevertheless blessed and prospered him as we read here. In this, we see a model of God's grace toward us.

⁶For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:6-8 (ESV)

But while Isaac may not have been any more deserving of God's grace than any other wretched sinner, God nevertheless blessed him. In this, we should remember that God had determined to bring forth Jesus His **מָשִׁיחַ** *māšîaḥ* through Isaac just as He promised Abraham and reiterated to Isaac.

¹⁵(Now the Philistines had stopped and filled with earth all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father.) ¹⁶And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we."¹⁷So Isaac departed from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there. ¹⁸And Isaac dug again the wells of water that had been dug in the days of Abraham his father, which the Philistines had stopped after the death of Abraham. And he gave them the names that his father had given them. ¹⁹But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of spring water, ²⁰the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." So he called the name of the well Esek [עֶסֶק 'ēseq - contention], because they contended with him. ²¹Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that also, so he called its name Sitnah [שִׁטְנָה śitnâ - strife]. ²²And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth [רְחֹבֹת rîḥōbôt - wide spaces], saying, "For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land." Genesis 26:15-22 (ESV)

Recall from our studies of [Genesis 20](#) and [Genesis 21](#) that even after Abraham lied to the Philistines about Sarah, Abimelech nevertheless invited Abraham to dwell anywhere he liked in the Philistine territory and gave Abraham gifts of livestock and servants. Afterward, when contention arose between Abraham's herdsmen and Abimelech's herdsmen over water, Abimelech and Abraham made a covenant of peaceful coexistence and water use. As formalization of that covenant, Abraham gave Abimelech seven ewe lambs. Therefore, the well where they made this covenant was called **בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע** *b'ēr šeba* – well of the seven-fold oath.

But after Abraham died, Abimelech and the Philistine people apparently didn't feel compelled to honor the oath they made at Beersheba with Abraham's son Isaac. Contention once more arose between Isaac's herdsmen and Abimelech's herdsmen over water. The names of the wells over which the herdsmen argued were **עֶסֶק** *'ēseq* - contention and **שִׁטְנָה** *śitnâ* – strife. I find it quite odd that the Philistines had filled in the wells that Abraham's people had dug. Water is scarce in the Negev just as it is throughout the Levant. One would think that they might better have simply used the wells themselves while preventing Isaac's herdsmen and any other strangers from using them. Perhaps they

Genesis 26:1-27:40 – Isaac Blesses Jacob

believed the wells dug by Abraham's people were somehow sullied and unusable. More likely though, they filled in the wells to force Isaac and his family away from Philistine land. Isaac moved his flocks and herds away from the Philistines and dug a new well at Rehoboth (רְהוֹבוֹת *rĥōbōt* - wide spaces).

²³From there he went up to Beersheba. ²⁴And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake." ²⁵So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the LORD and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac's servants dug a well. Genesis 26:23-25 (ESV)

Look again at the [Patriarchs in Canaan map](#). Note the locations of the altars built by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

It is intriguing that we see God reiterating His promise to Isaac here for the second time in this chapter. God knew that Isaac needed this reassurance just as He knew the reassurance Abraham's servant needed when he was seeking a wife from Abraham's family in Haran (Genesis 25). I'm reminded of the times when God knew that I needed reassurance in my own life, and He was faithful to provide exactly the reassurance I needed to persevere in His calling.

In the upper room on the night He was betrayed, Jesus knew that His disciples would be scattered, forlorn, and fearful in response to His crucifixion and death. Jesus gave them the reassurance they would need until He came to them after His resurrection.

¹⁵"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

¹⁸"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." John 14:15-21 (ESV)

²⁶When Abimelech went to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol the commander of his army, ²⁷Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?" ²⁸They said, "We see plainly that the LORD has been with you. So we said, let there be a sworn pact between us, between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, ²⁹that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the LORD." ³⁰So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. ³¹In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths. And Isaac sent them on their way, and they departed

Genesis 26:1-27:40 – Isaac Blesses Jacob

from him in peace. ³²That same day Isaac’s servants came and told him about the well that they had dug and said to him, “We have found water.”

³³He called it Shibah [שִׁבְחָא šib’â – an oath]; therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day. Genesis 26:26-33 (ESV)

This passage is so similar to Genesis 21:22-34 it almost seems like a copy and paste error on the part by one of the many scribes who have copied Genesis over the millennia. Recall that God generously blessed Isaac even after he lied to Abimelech about Rebekah. Abimelech and his advisors didn’t miss the significance of that blessing. They recognized Isaac was blessed of the LORD just as they recognized that Abraham was a man of God. Therefore, they wisely chose to be at peace with Isaac and his clan if they could. This is reminiscent of Paul’s admonition to the church in Rome.

¹⁸If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Romans 12:18 (ESV)

We today would also do well to focus on living peaceably – especially with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus promised that doing so will bring a blessing.

⁹“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Matthew 5:9 (ESV)

³⁴When Esau was forty years old, he took Judith [יְהוּדִית y’hûdîṭ - praised] the daughter of Beerî [בְּרִיאִי b’ērî – my well] the Hittite to be his wife, and Basemath [בַּסְמַת bāsmaṭ - spice] the daughter of Elon [אֵילֹן ’élôn – terebinth, mighty] the Hittite, ³⁵and they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah. Genesis 26:34-35 (ESV)

We’ll take a closer look at Esau’s wives and his descendants in Genesis 36. For now, we just need to note Isaac’s and Rebekah’s irritation with Esau’s Hittite wives. Rebekah later used the bitterness in their family caused by Esau’s wives to convince Isaac to send Jacob away to Paddan-Aram in search of a wife from among Rebekah’s family.

Isaac Blesses Jacob

¹When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called Esau his older son and said to him, “My son”; and he answered, “Here I am.” ²He said, “Behold, I am old; I do not know the day of my death. ³Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me, ⁴and prepare for me delicious food, such as I love, and bring it to me so that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die.” Genesis 27:1-4 (ESV)

Recall from [our study of Genesis 25](#) that as the firstborn son Esau was entitled to a double-portion of the inheritance from Isaac his father. Inheritance in ancient Hebrew society was promulgated through the father’s pronouncement of blessings upon his sons. Although – praise God – none of us knows exactly the hour of our death, Isaac realized that he would not live much longer. As it turned out, Isaac didn’t die for another twenty years, but he had determined to pronounce his blessings upon his sons well beforehand.

Genesis 26:1-27:40 – Isaac Blesses Jacob

We also saw in Genesis 25 that Esau was Isaac's favorite of his two sons, while Jacob was Rebekah's favorite. What Isaac didn't know was that Esau had sold his birthright to Jacob some time before. But that was a private conversation between the two boys. Jacob had no way to prove that Esau had forsaken his birthright. In any case, the pronouncement of the inheritance blessing was the prerogative of the father alone regardless of what kind of deal the two sons had cooked up between themselves. Without doubt, Isaac intended to give the double-inheritance blessing to Esau his firstborn son.

⁵Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it, ⁶Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "I heard your father speak to your brother Esau, ⁷'Bring me game and prepare for me delicious food, that I may eat it and bless you before the LORD before I die.'⁸Now therefore, my son, obey my voice as I command you. ⁹Go to the flock and bring me two good young goats, so that I may prepare from them delicious food for your father, such as he loves. ¹⁰And you shall bring it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies." Genesis 27:5-10 (ESV)

Recall that Rebekah's name – רִבְקָה *ribqâ* – means ensnarer. She had no intention of allowing her husband Isaac to pronounce the double-portion blessing upon Esau rather than her favorite son Jacob. So, she set a trap for Isaac to fool him into giving the firstborn blessing to Jacob although Jacob was born after his twin brother Esau.

¹¹But Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, "Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. ¹²Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him and bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing."¹³His mother said to him, "Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, bring them to me."

¹⁴So he went and took them and brought them to his mother, and his mother prepared delicious food, such as his father loved. ¹⁵Then Rebekah took the best garments of Esau her older son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. ¹⁶And the skins of the young goats she put on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. ¹⁷And she put the delicious food and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob. Genesis 27:11-17 (ESV)

Jacob, whose name – יַעֲקֹב *ya 'ăqōb* – means heel holder or supplanter, wasn't above conspiring with his mother to deceive Isaac – far from it. As we shall see, Jacob had few qualms about doing anything to place himself in an advantageous position. Jacob's only concern was that he might be caught in the subterfuge, and Isaac would curse and disinherit Jacob altogether instead of giving Jacob the double-inheritance blessing.

¹⁸So he went in to his father and said, "My father." And he said, "Here I am. Who are you, my son?"¹⁹Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, that

Genesis 26:1-27:40 – Isaac Blesses Jacob

your soul may bless me.” ²⁰*But Isaac said to his son, “How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?” He answered, “Because the LORD your God granted me success.”* ²¹*Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not.”* ²²*So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, who felt him and said, “The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.”* ²³*And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau’s hands. So he blessed him.* ²⁴*He said, “Are you really my son Esau?” He answered, “I am.”* ²⁵*Then he said, “Bring it near to me, that I may eat of my son’s game and bless you.” So he brought it near to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank.* Genesis 27:18-25 (ESV)

Once Jacob was committed to something, he was in it all the way. He was certainly bold in his deceit. Jacob lied twice to his father’s direct questions whether he truly was Esau. Even worse, Jacob blasphemed the Name of the LORD saying God had given him quick success in the hunt.

Of course, Isaac, Rebekah, and Jacob couldn’t know what we do with the benefit of hindsight and the written narrative. All of them were acting in accordance with God’s will to accomplish His purpose to bring forth Jesus His **מָשִׁיחַ** *māšîaḥ* for the salvation of all mankind through the line of Jacob. As we will see next time, God Himself confirmed this to Jacob in a dream as he was fleeing from the wrath of his brother Esau. How tragic it is that so many of Jacob’s descendants failed to recognize their promised **מָשִׁיחַ** *māšîaḥ* when He appeared among them centuries later.

²⁶Then his father Isaac said to him, “Come near and kiss me, my son.” ²⁷*So he came near and kissed him. And Isaac smelled the smell of his garments and blessed him and said,*

*“See, the smell of my son
is as the smell of a field that the LORD has blessed!*

*²⁸May God give you of the dew of heaven
and of the fatness of the earth
and plenty of grain and wine.*

*²⁹Let peoples serve you,
and nations bow down to you.
Be lord over your brothers,
and may your mother’s sons bow down to you.
Cursed be everyone who curses you,
and blessed be everyone who blesses you!”* Genesis 27:26-29 (ESV)

Once again, we who benefit from hindsight can recall God’s fulfillment of Isaac’s prophetic blessing. Indeed, peoples and nations did bow down and serve Jacob’s descendants Israel in the time of King David and King Solomon before they fell into idolatry and God raised up Babylon to chastise them. More importantly, billions of people have bowed down and served Jesus God’s **מָשִׁיחַ** *māšîaḥ* who came forth through Jacob’s line.

Isaac’s wording in this blessing is intriguing. Thinking he was blessing Esau not Jacob, Isaac spoke of his son (Esau) being lord over his brothers. Isaac also said his son’s (Esau’s) mother’s sons would bow down

Genesis 26:1-27:40 – Isaac Blesses Jacob

to him (Esau). The only sons of Isaac and Rebekah mentioned in God’s Word are the twins Esau and Jacob. But the words of Isaac’s blessing seem to indicate they had other children.

30As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, Esau his brother came in from his hunting. 31He also prepared delicious food and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, “Let my father arise and eat of his son’s game, that you may bless me.” 32His father Isaac said to him, “Who are you?” He answered, “I am your son, your firstborn, Esau.” 33Then Isaac trembled very violently and said, “Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all before you came, and I have blessed him? Yes, and he shall be blessed.” Genesis 27:30-33 (ESV)

It is clear from this passage that Jacob and Rebekah had completely hoodwinked Isaac with their deceitful impersonation. What may be difficult to grasp is why Isaac didn’t then call Jacob back to him, curse him, disinherit him altogether as Jacob feared, and bless Esau with his entire estate. Instead, Isaac persisted in the blessing he had already mistakenly given to Jacob rather than Esau.

But if we consider it carefully using the benefit of hindsight, we realize that God had determined since before the beginning of creation that Isaac would bless Jacob the younger brother and then bring forth Jesus His **מָשִׁיחַ** *māšîaḥ* through the line of Jacob’s son Judah. All the players in this little farce were unknowingly acting to fulfill God’s preordained purposes.

34As soon as Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry and said to his father, “Bless me, even me also, O my father!” 35But he said, “Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing.” 36Esau said, “Is he not rightly named Jacob [יַעֲקֹב ya ‘āqōḇ - usurper]? For he has cheated me these two times. He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing.” Then he said, “Have you not reserved a blessing for me?” Genesis 27:34-36 (ESV)

We feel for Esau in his anguish over losing his father’s blessing, but in all fairness to Jacob, Esau himself handed over his birthright (albeit privately) to Jacob in exchange for a single meal of Jacob’s red lentil stew. In a sense, Esau only had himself to blame for losing his birthright. Nevertheless, it is true that Jacob deceitfully received Isaac’s blessing instead of Esau. In that sense, Esau was rightfully bitter, reminding his father of the meaning of Jacob’s name – **יַעֲקֹב** *ya ‘āqōḇ* – usurper.

With all that said though, we still need to remember that this entire wretched scene was played out exactly as God had ordained since eternity past.

37Isaac answered and said to Esau, “Behold, I have made him lord over you, and all his brothers I have given to him for servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son?” 38Esau said to his father, “Have you but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father.” And Esau lifted up his voice and wept. 39Then Isaac his father answered and said to him:

Genesis 26:1-27:40 – Isaac Blesses Jacob

“Behold, away from the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be, and away from the dew of heaven on high.

⁴⁰By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother;

but when you grow restless

you shall break his yoke from your neck.” Genesis 27:37-40 (ESV)

Here now once again, Isaac speaks of all Jacob’s brothers. This lends credence to the idea that Isaac and Rebekah had other children not mentioned specifically in God’s Word at all. This seems a little odd given the thoroughness of the Biblical genealogies we’ve encountered up until now in our study, but it would explain why Isaac mentioned Jacob ruling over his brothers rather than the single brother we know of – Esau.

See the [Uzziah and Jeroboam II map](#). During the reigns of David and Solomon, Jacob’s descendants did indeed rule over Esau’s descendants the Edomites. But after Solomon died, the kingdom was divided – ten tribes under the rule of one king known as Israel or the “northern” kingdom, and two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) under the reign of a separate king known as Judah or the “southern” kingdom. The rebellion of Edom from the rule of Judah that Isaac prophesied here in Genesis 27:40 took place during the reign of King Jehoram (a.k.a. Joram) of Judah (2 Kings 8, 2 Chronicles 21). An excellent summary of the rebellions of David and Solomon’s vassal nations and the associated Biblical cross-references may be found at -

<https://biblemapper.com/blog/index.php/2023/07/22/resurgence-of-israel-and-judah/>

Looking Ahead

Next time, we’ll see that Jacob ran away from the wrath of his brother Esau to his mother Rebekah’s family in Paddan-Aram. While there, he married four wives who bore him the twelve sons who would become the progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel.