

READ

Genesis 25

REFLECT

Children often wonder if their parents have favorites. In the case of Isaac and his siblings (there are many now, since Abraham remarried after Sarah's death and his new wife had six additional children), there wasn't any question – they all knew Isaac was the favorite. Isaac received the most significant inheritance; the others received small gifts and were told to hit the road. These additional children represent tribes of people from the Arabian Peninsula and the Levant, so the names may have meant more to much older audiences of this scripture. Ismael also receives a genealogy, also placing his descendants in context with location. It's also notable that Isaac and Ismael together (but none of the other siblings) reunite to bury Abraham – had they even seen each other since Isaac was a nursing infant?

Focus abruptly switched to Isaac – he was the favorite son, after all – and his family. His marriage to Rebekah was late in life, at 40, but he didn't have his children until he was 60. Without an effective means of birth control, it would have been strange to be childless that long, pointing to a problem. These difficulties conceiving apparently ran in the family since Sarah also struggled. But Rebekah was finally able to become pregnant, to twins no less, and she had a difficult time with it – the babies fought even in the womb. Esau was born first and Jacob second; but Jacob gripped his brother's heel on the way out of the womb, setting up a fierce sibling rivalry. Time then jumps to when they'd grown into men. Esau was a man's man who loved hunting while Jacob was more of a homebody, and for those reasons Isaac and Rebekah each had their own favorite children, too. It would have been advantageous to be the father's favorite because he decided who received what inheritance, but Jacob, Rebekah's favorite, was a schemer. He knew he couldn't change his personality to win his father's affection, so he came up with another plan. While he was cooking one day, Esau was hungry and Jacob offered him some of the stew he was cooking if he could have Esau's birthright, and Esau did it. It's a simple bowl of stew that changes the course of history!

REACT

- Genesis often has a lot happening in a relatively short amount of space. In a single chapter readers learn that Abraham had more kids, that he died and was buried, are introduced to Ishmael's family tree, hear of the birth of Jacob and Esau, and learn how Jacob acquired Esau's birthright. It's overwhelming how much happens in only 34 verses. Action mostly focuses on Isaac and his family, though, and that's where our attention should stay – it's through Isaac that Israel is born – though there are many references to all these extra names in later books of the Bible.
- Difficulty conceiving is a common theme in scripture, and it's always "cured" when God decides to "open the woman's womb." Those texts can frequently become painful to read for couples who struggle having children today. How have you dealt with friends or family who have struggled with conception? Did you or others point to stories like Isaac and Rebekah and instruct the couple to just pray harder? How did that go over? Are there other ways to be kind and loving to those experiencing an ongoing trauma besides weaponizing scripture?
- The sibling rivalry between Esau and Jacob started even before they were born. If you have siblings, what have your fights been about? Do you remember getting into arguments as children? Have those fights carried over into adulthood?

RESPOND

Sharing a family recipe: *Esau sells his birthright for a bowl of stew – he must have really been famished! But more often, throughout scripture and in life, shared meals create unity rather than division. Think back to a favorite recipe in your family, one that is tied to good memories. Remake it and share it with someone you love. Allow that wonderful food to be a way to draw closer together!*