

עץ חיים

ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY
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¹⁹This is the story of Isaac, son of Abraham. Abraham begot Isaac. ²⁰Isaac was forty years old when he took to wife Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean. ²¹Isaac pleaded with the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD responded to his plea, and his wife Rebekah conceived. ²²But the children struggled in her womb, and she said, "If

וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת יִצְחָק בֶּן־אַבְרָהָם
אַבְרָהָם הוֹלִיד אֶת־יִצְחָק: ²⁰וַיְהִי יִצְחָק
בֶּן־אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בְּקַחְתּוֹ אֶת־רִבְקָה בַּת־
בְּתוּאֵל הָאֲרָמִי מִפְּדַן אֲרָם אָחוֹת לְבָן
הָאֲרָמִי לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה: ²¹וַיַּעֲתֵר יִצְחָק
לַיהוָה לְנַכַּח אִשְׁתּוֹ כִּי עֲקָרָה הִוא
וַיַּעֲתֵר לוֹ יְהוָה וַתֵּהָר רִבְקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ:

ISAAC, FATHER OF TWO NATIONS (25:19–34)

THE BIRTH OF JACOB AND ESAU (vv. 19–26)

19. This is the story of Isaac This introductory formula serves as the general title for the narrative cycle that concludes with 35:29.

Abraham begot Isaac This note, seemingly redundant after the foregoing "Isaac son of Abraham," actually serves to emphasize Isaac's role as the sole successor to Abraham, in fulfillment of the promise of 21:12: "it is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued for you."

20. Isaac was forty years old Rebekah's age is omitted because, unlike Sarah, she was not beyond the age of childbearing.

Bethuel the Aramean According to 22:22, Bethuel was one of the Nahorite tribes, and Aram was his nephew.

Paddan-aram This place-name is found only in Genesis. It is either another name for Aram-naharaim, mentioned in 24:10, or a town within that region.

21. she was barren Once again we encounter the motif of the barren wife of the patriarch.

22. struggled in her womb Rebekah experiences an unusually difficult pregnancy. The fetal movements are spasmodic and she has fears of miscarrying.

If so, why do I exist? The Hebrew, an incomplete sentence, is saying something like, "Why then did I yearn and pray to become pregnant?" or "Why do I go on living?"

She went to inquire of the LORD She sought divine guidance in a moment of great perplexity and anguish. Generally, one would go to a spe-

CHAPTER 25

The sixth *parashah* of Genesis tells about the birth and early years of Isaac and Rebekah's twin sons, Jacob and Esau. Often in ancient tales, twins who are not identical are complementary, each twin representing one-half of a complete personality, each having qualities the other lacks and lacking qualities the other possesses. Jacob represents the gentle, cerebral side of a person, reaching goals by persuasion or cleverness. Esau represents the active, physical side. When the Torah describes them as struggling within Rebekah's womb and continues to portray them as rivals growing up, it may be

telling us that these two sides of many people are struggling within each individual for dominance.

19. Isaac, son of Abraham Isaac's life is defined by his being Abraham's son more than by any other single factor (*Ha-amek Davar*).

Abraham begot Isaac As Isaac was proud of his father, Abraham was proud of his son (Gen. R. 63:2).

21. Isaac does not pray for himself, for the fulfillment of his own needs, but for his wife. Rather than urging her to be content with her lot, he prays that she find fulfillment where it means most to her.

HALAKHAH L'MA-ASEH

25:21 Isaac pleaded . . . because she was barren The tragedy of infertility need not be borne alone. The Conservative Movement has created a ritual for coping with infertility, published in its *Moreih Derekh*, to provide the infertile couple the support of their community (see Gen. 1:28, 30:14).

so, why do I exist?" She went to inquire of the LORD,²³ and the LORD answered her,

"Two nations are in your womb,

Two separate peoples shall issue from your body;

One people shall be mightier than the other,

And the older shall serve the younger."

²⁴When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. ²⁵The first one emerged red, like a hairy mantle all over; so they named him Esau. ²⁶Then his brother emerged, holding on to the heel of Esau; so they named him Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when they were born.

²⁷When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the outdoors; but Jacob was a mild man who stayed in camp.

²⁸Isaac favored Esau because he had a taste

וַיִּתְרַצְצוּ הַבָּנִים בְּקֶרְבָּהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אִם־
כֵּן לָמָּה זֶה אֲנֹכִי וַתִּלְךָ לְדַרְשׁ אֶת־
יְהוָה: ²³וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לָהּ
שְׁנֵי גֵיִים גּוֹיִם בְּבֶטְנְךָ
וּשְׁנֵי לְאֻמִּים מִמֵּעֶיךָ יִפְרְדּוּ
וּלְאֵם מְלֵאָם יֵאמָץ
וְרֵב יַעֲבֹד צְעִיר:

²⁴וַיִּמְלְאוּ יָמֶיהָ לֵלְדֹת וְהִנֵּה תוֹמִם*
בְּבֶטְנָהּ: ²⁵וַיֵּצֵא הָרִאשׁוֹן אֲדָמוֹנִי כָּלֹ
בְּאֶדְרֵת שֶׁעַר וַיִּקְרְאוּ שְׁמוֹ עֵשָׂו:
²⁶וַאֲחֵרֵיכֵן יָצָא אָחִיו וַיִּדְוֶה אֶחָזֶת בְּעֵקֶב
עֵשָׂו וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב וַיִּצְחַק בֶּן־שָׁשִׁים
שָׁנָה בְּלֹדֹת אֹתָם:

²⁷וַיִּגְדְּלוּ הַנְּעָרִים וַיְהִי עֵשָׂו אִישׁ יָדַע צִיד
אִישׁ שֹׁדֵה וַיַּעֲקֹב אִישׁ תָּם יֹשֵׁב אֶהְלִים:
²⁸וַיֵּאָהֵב יִצְחָק אֶת־עֵשָׂו בְּיָצִיד בְּפִיו

v. 24. חסר א י

cific sanctuary or to some charismatic personage of recognized authority.

23. the LORD answered her God's response is oracular in style and poetic in form, and the message is conveyed in four concise phrases.

25. red A ruddy complexion. The Hebrew term "*admoni*" is also used—admirably—in descriptions of David (1 Sam. 16:12, 17:14).

like a hairy mantle Hairiness was popularly taken as a sign of uncouthness. The Hebrew word *sa-ir* (hairy) is a wordplay on *Seir*, the name of Edom, associated with Esau.

Esau "The mantled one," possibly from the Arabic verb *gh-s-w*, "to cover, envelop."

26. holding on to the heel This has been understood as an attempt to thwart the prior birth of his twin.

Jacob The name is here derived, by folk etymology, from the Hebrew noun *akev*, "heel." In reality, however, the Hebrew name *ya-akov* stems from a Semitic verb עקב, "to protect."

Thus, in its origin, the name Jacob is a plea for divine protection of the newly born.

THE SALE OF THE BIRTHRIGHT (vv. 27–34)

The struggle between the twins for seniority continues into adulthood. Jacob seizes a chance to pressure Esau into transferring the birthright to him. In the ancient Near East, an heir could barter away his inheritance. A tablet records how a man parted with his birthright in return for three sheep he received immediately from his brother.

27. When the boys grew up The description of Esau as a hunter and as one who lives by the sword (Gen. 27:40) reflects an early stage in the history of Edom. Hunting as a way of life was held in low esteem in ancient Israel, where sacrifice was restricted to domesticated animals.

a mild man Jacob, a quiet man, does not carry weapons.

who stayed in camp Literally, "who dwelt in tents." He is a pastoralist.

23. the LORD answered her God charges Rebekah with the responsibility of seeing to it that the Covenant is entrusted to the more worthy, not necessarily the elder, child.

28. Isaac favored Esau Perhaps he raised Esau to do many of the things he had never been able to do when he was growing up, asking Esau to fill in the blank spaces in his own life, and he

for game; but Rebekah favored Jacob. ²⁹Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the open, famished. ³⁰And Esau said to Jacob, “Give me some of that red stuff to gulp down, for I am famished”—which is why he was named Edom. ³¹Jacob said, “First sell me your birthright.” ³²And Esau said, “I am at the point of death, so of what use is my birthright to me?” ³³But Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴Jacob then gave Esau bread and lentil stew; he ate and drank, and he rose and went away. Thus did Esau spurn the birthright.

וּרְבֵקָה אֲהָבָת אֶת־יַעֲקֹב׃ ²⁹וַיִּזְדַּ וַיִּבֹא עֲשׂו מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה וְהוּא עָיֵף׃
³⁰וַיֹּאמֶר עֲשׂו אֶל־יַעֲקֹב הֲלִעִיטָנִי נָא מִן־
הָאָדָם הָאָדָם הַזֶּה כִּי עָיֵף אֲנִכִּי עַל־כֵּן
קָרָא שְׁמוֹ אֶדוֹם׃ ³¹וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב מִכֶּרֶה
כִּי־וּמ אֶת־בְּכֻרְתְּךָ לִי׃ ³²וַיֹּאמֶר עֲשׂו הֲנִיחָה
אֲנִכִּי הוֹלֵךְ לָמוּת וְלִמְהֵרָה לִי בְכֻרְהָ׃
³³וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב הֲשָׁבַעָה לִי כִּי־וּמ וַיִּשָּׁבַע
לוֹ וַיִּמְכֹּר אֶת־בְּכֻרְתּוֹ לְיַעֲקֹב׃ ³⁴וַיִּבְעַקֵּב
נָתַן לְעֲשׂו לֶחֶם וּנְזִיד עֲדָשִׁים וַיֹּאכַל
וַיִּשְׂתֵּה וַיִּקָּם וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיִּבֹז עֲשׂו אֶת־הַבְּכֻרָה׃ ס

28. but Rebekah favored Jacob No reason is given for her preference.

29. cooking a stew The nature of the dish is at first left vague and is disclosed only in stages—first as “red stuff,” then as “lentil stew.”

famished The Hebrew word *ayef*, traditionally rendered “faint,” actually means to be in desperate need of food and drink.

30. Give me . . . to gulp down This is an indication of Esau’s boorish manners.

red stuff The Hebrew “*adom*” (red) is a wordplay on Edom.

31. sell Jacob exploits his brother’s misery to gain what he thought an accident of birth had denied him. The Bible uses the verb translated as “sell” (מכר) for both sale and barter.

32. I am at the point of death Literally, “I am going to die.” His statement is an exaggerated report of his condition.

33. Swear to me first Esau’s reply indicates

that he agrees to the transaction. But Jacob, not trusting his brother, wants an oath. In the ancient world, an oath was a sacred act that rendered a transaction irrevocable.

34. lentil One of the first plants cultivated in the Near East and an important staple in the daily diet. The color of the lentil is normally yellowish red or light brown.

he ate and drank, and he rose and went away. Thus did Esau spurn This is a translation of five short Hebrew verbs in abrupt succession, which effectively reproduce the chilling, sullen atmosphere.

Thus did Esau spurn the birthright These words express the feelings of the narrator. Having finished the broth, Esau does not quarrel with Jacob but goes about his business, with no apparent regard for the sacred institution of the firstborn.

loved his physically gifted son for being what he had never been.

The Sages envision a day when God will come to judge the Jewish people for their sins, and Isaac will rise to defend them. Why Isaac? Because he will be entitled to say to God, “I had a wicked child and I loved him. Can You not do the same?” (BT Shab. 89b).

29. famished Soloveitchik sees Esau as desperately tired and hungry, not just because of the exertion of hunting but because he lacks a sustaining faith to give meaning to his life on bleak days. He is weary of the pointlessness of life and the inevitability of death. Or it may simply be that a person who is very hungry

lacks the capacity to be concerned with covenants and religious obligations.

The reader may wonder why Jacob exacts a price for the stew rather than act like a brother and give Esau what he needs. Jacob may resent Esau’s privileges, based on his being older by a matter of minutes. Or he may have felt (encouraged perhaps by his mother and the prophecy she recalls) that he was more worthy of being Isaac’s heir.

32. I am at the point of death Some people, contemplating their mortality, are moved to live their lives thoughtfully, to invest their energies in things that truly matter. Others, like Esau, say, “Why need I worry about morality

26 There was a famine in the land—aside from the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham—and Isaac went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines, in Gerar. ²The LORD had appeared to him and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land which I point out to you. ³Reside in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; I will assign all these lands to you and to your heirs, fulfilling the oath that I swore to your father Abraham. ⁴I will make your heirs as numerous as the stars of heaven, and assign to your heirs all these lands, so that all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your heirs—⁵inasmuch as

כו ויהי רעב בארץ מלבלד הרעב הראשון אשר היה בימי אברהם ויילך יצחק אל-אבימלך מלך-פלשתים גררה: ²וירא אליו יהוה ויאמר אל-תִּרְד מִצְרַיִם שָׁכֵן בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אָמַר אֵלֶיךָ: ³גֹר בְּאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת וְאֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ וְאֶבְרַכְךָ כִּי-לֹךְ וְלִזְרַעְךָ אֶתֶּן אֶת-כָּל-הָאֲרָצוֹת הָאֵל וְהִקְמֹתִי אֶת-הַשְּׂבָעָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאַבְרָהָם אָבִיךָ: ⁴וְהִרְבִּיתִי אֶת-זְרַעְךָ כְּכּוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְנָתַתִּי לְזְרַעְךָ אֶת כָּל-הָאֲרָצוֹת הָאֵל וְהִתְבְּרַכּוּ בְּזְרַעְךָ כָּל גּוֹיֵי הָאֲרֶץ: ⁵עַקֵּב אֲשֶׁר-שָׁמַע

THE ADVENTURES OF ISAAC (26:1–35)

REAFFIRMATION OF THE COVENANT

(vv. 1–5)

The desperate need for forage and water forces Isaac to undertake a journey through the land of the Philistines to Egypt. Along the way, he stops at Gerar, a Philistine royal city certain to have storage facilities.

1. Abimelech This king bears the same name as the king Abraham dealt with more than 75 years earlier.

2. stay The verb translated as “stay” (שָׁכֵן) means, literally, “to tent.”

3. Reside The Hebrew root translated as “reside” (גֹר) refers to one who has the status of an alien, devoid of legal rights and wholly dependent on the goodwill of the local community (see 23:4).

I will be with you It is to Isaac’s alien status

that this promise of God’s protection is addressed.

and bless you You will prosper even in time of famine.

all these lands The use of the plural is unusual and may reflect the idealized boundaries of the promised land as set forth in 15:18–21 and elsewhere: the territories of Sidon, Tyre, Byblos, the Hermon, and Lebanon, as well as the land of the Philistines.

4. shall bless themselves by your heirs This is one of the major themes of Genesis and is repeated to each of the patriarchs in turn: The well-being of humanity is intertwined with the destiny of the people Israel.

5. Abraham obeyed Me By his fidelity, Abraham represents the ideal standard of obedience to the will of God.

and religion since I will die soon anyway?” (Hafetz Hayyim).

CHAPTER 26

Isaac, who was introduced in the opening words of the *parashah* as “son of Abraham,” finds himself reliving many of the events of his father’s life: traveling south in time of famine, passing his wife off as his sister out of fear for his own safety, coming into conflict with

his neighbors, and being reconciled with them. Verse 18 describes him as redigging the same wells his father had dug and calling them by the same names. Isaac’s pilgrimage is a familiar one to many middle-aged men and women who find themselves coming more and more to resemble their parents in appearance and behavior as they mature and coming to understand why their parents did some of the things they did.

Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge: My commandments, My laws, and My teachings.”

⁶So Isaac stayed in Gerar. ⁷When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, “She is my sister,” for he was afraid to say “my wife,” thinking, “The men of the place might kill me on account of Rebekah, for she is beautiful.” ⁸When some time had passed, Abimelech king of the Philistines, looking out of the window, saw Isaac fondling his wife Rebekah. ⁹Abimelech sent for Isaac and said, “So she is your wife! Why then did you say: ‘She is my sister?’” Isaac said to him, “Because I thought I might lose my life on account of her.” ¹⁰Abimelech said, “What have you done to us! One of the people might have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us.” ¹¹Abimelech then charged all the people, saying, “Anyone who molests this man or his wife shall be put to death.”

¹²Isaac sowed in that land and reaped a hundredfold the same year. The LORD blessed him, ¹³and the man grew richer and richer until he was very wealthy: ¹⁴he acquired flocks and herds, and a large household, so that the Phil-

אֲבְרָהָם בְּקִלִּי וַיִּשְׁמֹר מִשְׁמֵרָתִי מִצְוֹתַי חֻקֹּתַי וְתוֹרָתַי:
 שְׁנֵי ⁶וַיֵּשֶׁב יִצְחָק בְּגֵרָר: ⁷וַיִּשְׁאַלוּ אַנְשֵׁי הַמָּקוֹם לְאִשְׁתּוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אַחֲתִי הוּא כִּי יֵרָא לֵאמֹר אִשְׁתִּי פְּוִי-יְהִרְגֵנִי אַנְשֵׁי הַמָּקוֹם עַל-רִבְקָה כִּי-טוֹבַת מְרֵאָה הִיא:
⁸וַיְהִי כִּי אָרְכוּ-לוֹ שָׁם הַיָּמִים וַיִּשְׁקֹף אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ מִלְּפָנָי מֶלֶךְ פְּלִשְׁתִּים בְּעַד הַחַלּוֹן וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה יִצְחָק מִצְחֵק אֶת רִבְקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ: ⁹וַיִּקְרָא אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ לְיִצְחָק וַיֹּאמֶר אַךְ הִנֵּה אִשְׁתְּךָ הוּא וְאֵיךְ אָמַרְתָּ אַחֲתִי הוּא וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו יִצְחָק כִּי אָמַרְתִּי פֶן-אָמוּת עָלַיָּה: ¹⁰וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ מַה-זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ לָּנוּ כִּמְעַט שָׁכַב אֶחָד הָעַם אֶת-אִשְׁתְּךָ וְהִבֵּאתָ עָלֵינוּ אִשָּׁם: ¹¹וַיִּצַו אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ אֶת-כָּל-הָעָם לֵאמֹר הַנֹּגֵעַ בְּאִישׁ הַזֶּה וּבְאִשְׁתּוֹ מוֹת יוּמָת:
¹²וַיִּזְרַע יִצְחָק בְּאֶרֶץ הַהוּא וַיִּמְצָא בַשָּׁנָה הַהוּא מֵאָה שְׁעָרִים וַיִּבְרַכְהוּ שְׁלִישִׁי יְהוָה: ¹³וַיִּגְדֵּל הָאִישׁ וַיִּלְךָ הָלוֹךְ וַיִּגְדֵּל עַד כִּי-יִגְדֵּל מְאֹד: ¹⁴וַיְהִי-לּוֹ מִקְנֵה-צֹאן וּמִקְנֵה בָקָר וְעֶבְדָּה רַבָּה וַיִּקְנָאוּ אֹתוֹ

POSSIBLE PERIL TO REBEKAH (vv. 6–11)

The episode that follows must have occurred before the birth of the twins. Otherwise it is hardly likely that Rebekah could have been passed off as a sister.

7. She is my sister The meaning of this stratagem is discussed in the Comment to 12:13.

8. fondling The verb translated as fondling” (*m'tzahkek*) is a wordplay on the name Isaac (*yitzhak*), and refers to sexual dalliance.

10. might have lain In reproving Isaac, the king inadvertently confirms the patriarch’s assessment of the low moral standards of the local inhabitants.

brought guilt upon us The entire community would have been blamed, as in the two previous stories about a matriarch in peril (12:17, 20:7–9).

11. who molests The Hebrew verb נגע has the sense of “causing harm,” “coming into physical contact with,” or “sexually harassing.”

ISAAC’S PROSPERITY (vv. 12–16)

Isaac reaps a bountiful harvest in a time of famine, clearly a fulfillment of God’s blessing. His prosperity provokes the envy of some of the local people.

12. Isaac sowed Pastoral nomads engaged in small-scale agriculture from time to time. Isaac’s experience was probably occasioned by the famine and encouraged by the favorable agricultural conditions in the low-lying plains of the region of Gerar, situated between the settled country and the grazing land of the nomads.

reaped a hundredfold The crop yield in relation to the unit of seed planted was 100 for 1.

istines envied him. ¹⁵And the Philistines stopped up all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of his father Abraham, filling them with earth. ¹⁶And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you have become far too big for us."

¹⁷So Isaac departed from there and encamped in the wadi of Gerar, where he settled. ¹⁸Isaac dug anew the wells which had been dug in the days of his father Abraham and which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham's death; and he gave them the same names that his father had given them. ¹⁹But when Isaac's servants, digging in the wadi, found there a well of spring water, ²⁰the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." He named that well Esek, because they contended with him. ²¹And when they dug another well, they disputed over that one also; so he named it Sitnah. ²²He moved from there and dug yet another well, and they did not quarrel over it; so he called it Rehoboth, saying, "Now at last the LORD has granted us ample space to increase in the land."

15. the Philistines stopped up Prevented by the king from physically abusing Isaac, the townsfolk attempt to force him out by denying him access to water.

in the days of . . . Abraham See 21:25,30. The digging of wells or cisterns, usually in the dry beds of rivers, streams, and brooks, was essential to the survival of the pastoralists. After the winter floods would silt them up, they would have to be cleaned out. The Philistines spitefully refilled them with dirt.

16. Go away from us Given the hostility of his subjects to the foreigners, the king feels that he can no longer guarantee the safety of his guests and so requests their departure.

ISAAC'S WELLS (vv. 17–22)

Isaac submits to the expulsion order and moves

פְּלִשְׁתִּים: ¹⁵וְכָל־הַבְּאֵרֹת אֲשֶׁר חָפְרוּ
עַבְדֵי אָבִיו בְּיַמֵי אַבְרָהָם אָבִיו סָתְמוּם
פְּלִשְׁתִּים וַיִּמְלְאוּם עֵפֶר: ¹⁶וַיֹּאמֶר
אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ אֶל־יִצְחָק לֵךְ מֵעִמָּנוּ כִּי־
עַצְמָתְךָ מְמַנּוּ מְאֹד:

¹⁷וַיֵּלֶךְ מִשָּׁם יִצְחָק וַיַּחַן בְּנַחַל־גֶּרָר וַיֵּשֶׁב
שָׁם: ¹⁸וַיִּשָׁב יִצְחָק וַיַּחְפֹּר | אֶת־בְּאֵרֹת
הַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר חָפְרוּ בְּיַמֵי אַבְרָהָם אָבִיו
וַיְסַתְּמוּם פְּלִשְׁתִּים אַחֲרֵי מוֹת אַבְרָהָם
וַיִּקְרָא לָהֶן שְׁמוֹת בְּשֵׁמֹת אֲשֶׁר־קָרָא
לָהֶן אָבִיו: ¹⁹וַיַּחְפְּרוּ עַבְדֵי־יִצְחָק בְּנַחַל
וַיִּמְצְאוּ־שָׁם בְּאֵר מַיִם חַיִּים: ²⁰וַיִּרְיִבוּ
רְעֵי גֶרָר עִם־רְעֵי יִצְחָק לֵאמֹר לָנוּ הַמַּיִם
וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם־הַבְּאֵר עֵשֶׂק כִּי הִתְעַשְׂקוּ
עִמּוֹ: ²¹וַיַּחְפְּרוּ בְּאֵר אַחֲרֹת וַיִּרְיִבוּ גַם־
עֲלֶיהָ וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמָהּ שִׁטְנָה: ²²וַיַּעֲתֵק
מִשָּׁם וַיַּחְפֹּר בְּאֵר אַחֲרֹת וְלֹא רָבוּ עֲלֶיהָ
וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמָהּ רְהוֹבוֹת וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי־עַתָּה
רַבִּיעִי הֶרְחִיב יְהוָה לָנוּ וַפְּרִינוּ בְּאֶרֶץ:

his family beyond the urban limits of Gerar to the same region in which his father had once made a prolonged stay (21:34).

19. A well of spring water A well of this type was especially valuable. In this instance it should belong to the finder, because there was no memory of its owner.

20. Esek Literally, "contention."

21. Sitnah Literally, "hostility" or "harassment."

22. He moved from there Once again Isaac avoids strife and moves away from the communal grazing ground.

Rehoboth The present-day town of Ruheibeh, located about 19 miles (30.5 km) southwest of Beer-sheba. There are wells of great antiquity in the area and traces of early agricultural settlements.

15. One commentator understands that the Philistines stopping up the wells was symbolic, not physical. They tried to block the dissemina-

tion of Abraham's ideas about God and human behavior—the need for human beings to live righteously (*Ha-K'tav V'ha-Kabbalah*).

²³From there he went up to Beer-sheba. ²⁴That night the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Fear not, for I am with you, and I will bless you and increase your offspring for the sake of My servant Abraham." ²⁵So he built an altar there and invoked the LORD by name. Isaac pitched his tent there and his servants started digging a well. ²⁶And Abimelech came to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his councilor and Phicol chief of his troops. ²⁷Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, seeing that you have been hostile to me and have driven me away from you?" ²⁸And they said, "We now see plainly that the LORD has been with you, and we thought: Let there be a sworn treaty between our two parties, between you and us. Let us make a pact with you ²⁹that you will not do us harm, just as we have not molested you but have always dealt kindly with you and sent you away in peace. From now on, be you blessed of the LORD!"

רביעי ²³ויעל משם באר שבע: ²⁴ויירא אליו יהוה בלילה ההוא ויאמר אנכי אלהי אברהם אביך אל-תירא כִּי-אתך אנכי וברכתִיךָ והרביתי את-זרעך בעבור אברהם עבדי: ²⁵ויבן שם מזבח ויקרא בשם יהוה ויטשם אהלו ויכרושם עבדי-יצחק באר: ²⁶ואבימלך הלך אליו מגרר ואחזת מרעהו ופיכל שר-צבאו: ²⁷ויאמר אלהם יצחק מדוע באתם אלי ואתם שנאתם אתי ותשלחוני מאתכם: ²⁸ויאמרו ראו ראינו כי-יהיה יהוה עמך ונאמר תהי נא אלה בינותינו בינינו ובינך ונברכתה ברית עמך: ²⁹אם-תעשה עמנו רעה כאשר לא נגענוך וכאשר עשינו עמך רק-טוב ונשלחך בשלום אתה עתה

A REVELATION AT BEER-SHEBA (vv. 23–25)

Isaac finally abandons the region of Gerar and returns to Beer-sheba.

24. I am See Comment to 15:7.

the God of your father The designation affirms God's role as the guarantor of the promises: He is the same one who spoke with Abraham.

My servant This title is used in the Torah only of the Patriarchs, Moses, and Caleb; and, later, only of David and Job.

for the sake of . . . Abraham Here, for the first time, we encounter the notion of "the merit of the fathers" (*z'kbut avot*). The righteousness of ancestors creates a fund of spiritual credit that may sustain their descendants.

ISAAC'S PACT WITH ABIMELECH (vv. 26–33)

Abimelech, uneasy over the presence of a powerful clan of pastoralists on the fringes of his king-

dom, seeks to regulate his relationship with Isaac. Because Isaac is now the stronger party, the king initiates the pact.

26. his councilor Literally "his friend." The title "king's friend" has no emotional allusion and refers to one who counseled the king in matters of state. Here the king has brought along his chief civilian and military officers.

28. the LORD has been with you He ascribes Isaac's success in agriculture to God.

a sworn treaty The Hebrew term for "a sworn treaty" (*alah*) is also the word used for the curse that accompanies a treaty sealed by an oath. It constitutes its sanction and is meant to ensure fidelity to the treaty's terms.

29. as we have not molested you The king cites the incident described in verses 7–11 and boasts that no harm had befallen Isaac.

be you blessed of the LORD A final greeting of goodwill, intended to allay the bitterness produced by the previous expulsion order.

24. Why does God appear to Isaac now? From God's message, it would seem that Isaac was discouraged, perhaps because of the repeated conflicts with neighbors, perhaps with

the resigned recognition of a middle-aged man that he would never match the achievements of his father. God assures him that his life is still rich with meaning and purpose.

³⁰Then he made for them a feast, and they ate and drank.

³¹Early in the morning, they exchanged oaths. Isaac then bade them farewell, and they departed from him in peace. ³²That same day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well they had dug, and said to him, "We have found water!" ³³He named it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beer-sheba to this day.

³⁴When Esau was forty years old, he took to wife Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite; ³⁵and they were a source of bitterness to Isaac and Rebekah.

27 When Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see, he called his older son Esau and

חמישי בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה: ³⁰וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם מִשְׁתֶּה וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׂתּוּ:

³¹וַיִּשְׁכְּמוּ בַבֶּקֶר וַיִּשְׁבְּעוּ אִישׁ לְאָחִיו וַיִּשְׁלַחֵם יִצְחָק וַיֵּלְכוּ מֵאִתּוֹ בְּשָׁלוֹם: ³²וַיְהִי | בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וַיִּבְאוּ עַבְדֵי יִצְחָק וַיַּגִּדוּ לוֹ עַל-אֲדוֹת הַבְּאֵר אֲשֶׁר חָפְרוּ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ מָצָאנוּ מַיִם: ³³וַיִּקְרָא אֶתְהָ שְׁבַעָה עַל-כֵּן שֵׁם-הָעִיר בְּאֵר שְׁבַע עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה: ס

³⁴וַיְהִי עָשׂו בֶן-אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה וַיִּקַּח אִשָּׁה אֶת-יְהוּדִית בַּת-בְּעָרִי הַחִתִּי וְאֶת-בְּשֵׁמֶת בַּת-אֵילָן הַחִתִּי: ³⁵וַתְּהִינָּה מֵרַת רוּחַ לְיִצְחָק וּלְרֵבְקָה: ס

כז וַיְהִי כִּי-זָקֵן יִצְחָק וַתְּכַהֵן עֵינָיו מֵרַאת וַיִּקְרָא אֶת-עֵשָׂו | בְּנֵו הַגָּדֹל

30. a feast In the ancient world, treaty making often was accompanied by a ceremonial meal, to create an atmosphere of harmony and fellowship for the pact to go into effect.

31. they exchanged oaths The pact is concluded by oaths that most likely also embodied the curse mentioned in verse 28.

32. That same day This narrative about Isaac, Shibah, and Beer-sheba contains wordplay on *shivah* (seven, as in v. 33) and *sh'vu'ah* (oath). The wordplay is best understood in the context of the earlier account involving Abraham and Abimelech (21:22–34), in which the number seven figures prominently.

ESAU'S HITTITE WIVES (vv. 34–35)

This passage reinforces the idea of Esau's unworthiness to be Isaac's heir. He commits two offenses. He breaks with social convention by contracting the marriage himself rather than leaving the initiative to his parents, and he marries outside the kinship group.

34. Esau was forty years old On the basis of 25:20,26.

Judith She is not mentioned in the second list of Esau's wives found in 36:2–3, and no offspring of hers is recorded.

35. they were a source of bitterness The reason is not stated, but the fact is important for the development of the narrative (27:46ff.).

JACOB DECEITFULLY ACQUIRES THE BLESSING (27:1–28:9)

Birthright and blessing were separate institutions. Esau rightly expected to receive the blessing even though he admitted losing the birthright.

ISAAC AND ESAU (27:1–4)

1. When Isaac was old He is 100 years old. **his eyes were too dim** His blindness, or perhaps some illness, prompts him to decide on his

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26:35 *they were a source of bitterness* See Comment to 24:3.

said to him, “My son.” He answered, “Here I am.”²And he said, “I am old now, and I do not know how soon I may die. ³Take your gear, your quiver and bow, and go out into the open and hunt me some game. ⁴Then prepare a dish for me such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my innermost blessing before I die.”

⁵Rebekah had been listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau had gone out into the open to hunt game to bring home, ⁶Rebe-

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו בְּנֵי וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הֲגַנִּי: ²וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְהִינָא זָקְנִיתִי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי יוֹם מוֹתִי: ³וְעַתָּה שְׂאֵנָא כְּלִיךָ תְּלִיךָ וְקִשְׁתְּךָ וְצֵא הַשְּׂדֵה וְצוּדָה לִי צִידָה צִיד: ⁴וְעִשָׂה-לִי מְטַעֲמִים כַּאֲשֶׁר אֶהְבֵּתִי וְהִבִּיאָה לִי וְאִכְלָה בְּעִבּוּר תְּבָרְכֶךָ נַפְשִׁי בְּטֶרֶם אָמוּת: ⁵וְרִבְקָה שְׁמַעַת בְּדַבֵּר יִצְחָק אֶל-עֵשָׂו בְּנוֹ וַיִּלֶךְ עֵשָׂו הַשְּׂדֵה לְצוּד צִיד לְהָבִיא:

successor at this time. The loss of vision is crucial to the narrative.

his older son The narrator avoids calling Esau the “firstborn” because the term carries with it social and legal implications that Esau no longer has because he sold his birthright.

3. gear A general term for “quiver and bow.” The arrow was kept in a lightweight container, a quiver, that hung over the hunter’s shoulder.

4. prepare a dish The repeated emphasis given to the meal suggests inducing not just a means of physical well-being and the proper mood for the occasion but also a ritual closely connected with the act of blessing.

my innermost blessing Literally, “that my being (*nefesh*) may bless you.” Isaac summons from the depths of his soul all the vitality and energy at his command to invoke God’s blessing on his son. The literal meaning of *nefesh* is “throat,” “appetite.” That is, Isaac’s vitality will be strengthened by food, making his blessing more forceful.

REBEKAH AND JACOB (vv. 5–17)

5. Rebekah had been listening Rebekah, alert to the interests of her favorite son, makes it her business to know what is going on when Isaac summons Esau.

CHAPTER 27

1. his eyes were too dim to see Several commentators understand Isaac’s blindness as emotional, not physical. Because he loved and envied Esau, he was blind to Esau’s faults. He could not recognize that Esau’s shortcomings disqualified him from being the heir to Abraham’s teachings. One *midrash* connects this incident to the passage (in Deut. 16:19) warning judges not to accept gifts, lest they distort the clarity of the judges’ vision (Tanḥ.). Isaac’s judgment is clouded by Esau’s bringing him his favorite foods. Another *midrash* recalls Isaac lying on his back on the altar at the time of the

Akedah, glimpsing the light of heaven when the angel appears to spare his life, and suggests that Isaac was never able to see events on earth clearly after that (Gen. R. 65:10). Having been afforded a glimpse of heaven, Isaac was naively blind to lying and deceit on earth. He could no more recognize the transparent lies of Jacob than he could recognize the unworthiness of Esau.

Rebekah resorts to duplicity because she has no other way of bringing about what she knows is right and what God told her (in Gen. 25:23). She cannot persuade Isaac that he is wrong about the respective merits of their two sons. Once again, as so often in the Torah, God’s

HALAKHAH L’MA’ASEH

27:2 I am old now Those who tend to the dying must ask them whether they have put their affairs in order. In order not to be discouraging, caregivers should emphasize that they hope for recovery and are just taking precautions in case recovery does not occur (S.A. YD 335:7). In addition to arranging for the disbursement of their assets, people should be encouraged to fill out an Advanced Directive for Health Care, as approved by the CJLS, and to compose an ethical will for their relatives, recounting their life story and expressing their convictions, hopes, and love.

kah said to her son Jacob, "I overheard your father speaking to your brother Esau, saying, ⁷'Bring me some game and prepare a dish for me to eat, that I may bless you, with the LORD's approval, before I die.' ⁸Now, my son, listen carefully as I instruct you. ⁹Go to the flock and fetch me two choice kids, and I will make of them a dish for your father, such as he likes. ¹⁰Then take it to your father to eat, in order that he may bless you before he dies." ¹¹Jacob answered his mother Rebekah, "But my brother Esau is a hairy man and I am smooth-skinned. ¹²If my father touches me, I shall appear to him as a trickster and bring upon myself a curse, not a blessing." ¹³But his mother said to him, "Your curse, my son, be upon me! Just do as I say and go fetch them for me."

¹⁴He got them and brought them to his mother, and his mother prepared a dish such as his father liked. ¹⁵Rebekah then took the best clothes of her older son Esau, which were there in the house, and had her younger son Jacob put them on; ¹⁶and she covered his hands and the hairless part of his neck with the skins of the kids. ¹⁷Then she put in the hands of her son Jacob the dish and the bread that she had prepared.

¹⁸He went to his father and said, "Father." And he said, "Yes, which of my sons are you?"

7. with the LORD's approval Literally, "in the presence of the LORD." Rebekah adds this phrase to Isaac's words to impress on Jacob the importance and solemnity of the occasion.

12. a trickster Jacob seems to be more concerned with the consequences of detection than with the morality of the act.

13. his mother said Rebekah, recalling the oracle she received that the older son was destined to serve the younger (25:23), confidently brushes aside Jacob's fears.

14. He got them and brought them The

6 וְרִבְקָה אָמְרָה אֶל־יַעֲקֹב בְּנֵה לְאֹמֶר הַנֶּה שְׁמַעְתִּי אֶת־אָבִיךָ מְדַבֵּר אֶל־עֵשָׂו אָחִיךָ לֵאמֹר: 7 הֲבִיֵאָה לִי צִיד וְעֲשֵׂה־לִי מִטְעָמִים וְאֹכְלָה וְאִבְרַכְכָּה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה לִפְנֵי מוֹתִי: 8 וְעַתָּה בְנִי שְׁמַע בְּקֹלִי לְאָשֶׁר אָנִי מְצוּהָ אֹתָךְ: 9 לָךְ־נָא אֶל־הַצֹּאֵן וְקַח־לִי מִשָּׁם שְׁנֵי גְדִיִּי עֲזִים טָבִים וְאֲעֲשֵׂה אֹתָם מִטְעָמִים לְאָבִיךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר אָהָב: 10 וְהִבֵּאתָ לְאָבִיךָ וְאָכַל בְּעֶבֶר אֲשֶׁר יְבָרְכֶךָ לִפְנֵי מוֹתוֹ: 11 וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל־רִבְקָה אִמּוֹ הֵן עָשׂוּ אָחִי אִישׁ שָׁעַר וְאֹנְכִי אִישׁ חֶלֶק: 12 אֹולִי יִמְשְׁנִי אָבִי וְהִיִּיתִי בְעֵינָיו כְּמַתְעַתֵּעַ וְהִבֵּאתִי עָלַי קִלְלָה וְלֹא בְרָכָה: 13 וְתֹאמֶר לוֹ אִמּוֹ עָלַי קִלְלָתְךָ בְנִי אַף שְׁמַע בְּקֹלִי וְלֹךְ קַח־לִי: 14 וַיִּלְךָ וַיִּקַּח וַיָּבֵא לְאִמּוֹ וַתַּעַשׂ אִמּוֹ מִטְעָמִים כַּאֲשֶׁר אָהָב אָבִיו: 15 וַתִּקַּח רִבְקָה אֶת־בְּגָדֵי עֵשָׂו בְּנֵה הַגָּדֹל הַחֲמֹדֹת אֲשֶׁר אִתָּהּ בְּבַיִת וַתַּלְבֵּשׂ אֶת־יַעֲקֹב בְּנֵה הַקָּטָן: 16 וְאֵת עֹרֹת גְּדֵיֵי הָעֲזִים הַלְפִישָׁה עַל־יָדָיו וְעַל חֶלְקֹת צוּאָרָיו: 17 וַתִּתֵּן אֶת־הַמִּטְעָמִים וְאֶת־הַלֶּחֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשְׂתָה בְיַד יַעֲקֹב בְּנֵה: 18 וַיָּבֵא אֶל־אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי וַיֹּאמֶר הַנְּנִי

Hebrew here is a staccato succession of three short verbs: "He went, he took, he brought." The effect is a picture of Jacob performing the deed with nervous haste.

15. the best clothes These probably were reserved for special occasions.

ISAAC AND JACOB (vv. 18–20)

18. Father Jacob, deeply apprehensive, can utter only a single word.

which of my sons are you? Either Jacob's attempt to mime Esau is not quite successful or

work is carried out by the least powerful members of society, women and younger sons.

18. The Hebrew literally asks, "Who are you, my son?" This can be understood to mean

¹⁹Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau, your first-born; I have done as you told me. Pray sit up and eat of my game, that you may give me your innermost blessing.” ²⁰Isaac said to his son, “How did you succeed so quickly, my son?” And he said, “Because the LORD your God granted me good fortune.” ²¹Isaac said to Jacob, “Come closer that I may feel you, my son—whether you are really my son Esau or not.” ²²So Jacob drew close to his father Isaac, who felt him and wondered. “The voice is the voice of Jacob, yet the hands are the hands of Esau.” ²³He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau; and so he blessed him.

²⁴He asked, “Are you really my son Esau?” And when he said, “I am,” ²⁵he said, “Serve me and let me eat of my son’s game that I may give you my innermost blessing.” So he served him

Isaac is so suspicious that he has to verify which one of his sons is before him.

20. the LORD your God Jacob invokes God’s name in an outright lie!

21. Come closer Deprived of his eyesight, Isaac summons to his aid the remaining senses of hearing, touch, taste, and smell.

22. the voice The distinctive quality of Jacob’s voice puts his impersonation of Esau in jeopardy, but the skin disguise is effective and saves the day. Isaac decides to bless his son.

מִי אַתָּה בְּנִי: ¹⁹וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל-אָבִיו אֲנֹכִי עָשׂוּ בְּכֻרְךָ עָשִׂיתִי כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ אֵלַי קוֹם-נָא שֹׁבָה וְאָכְלָה מִצִּידִי בְּעִבּוֹר תְּבָרַכְנִי נְפֹשׁךָ: ²⁰וַיֹּאמֶר יַצְחָק אֶל-בְּנוֹ מִהֲזֶה מְהֵרָת מְהֵרָת לְמַצָּא בְּנִי וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי הֲקָרָה יְהוָה אֲלֵהֶיךָ לְפָנָי: ²¹וַיֹּאמֶר יַצְחָק אֶל-יַעֲקֹב גְּשָׁה-נָא וְאִמְשָׁךְ בְּנִי הֲאִתָּה זֶה בְּנִי עָשׂוּ אִם-לֹא: ²²וַיִּגָּשׁ יַעֲקֹב אֶל-יַצְחָק אָבִיו וַיִּמְשָׁהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר הֲקֹל קוֹל יַעֲקֹב וְהִידִים יְדֵי עָשׂוּ: ²³וְלֹא הִכִּירוּ כִּי-הָיוּ יָדָיו כַּיְדֵי עָשׂוּ אָחִיו שְׁעֵרֶת וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ:

²⁴וַיֹּאמֶר אַתָּה זֶה בְּנִי עָשׂוּ וַיֹּאמֶר אָנִי: ²⁵וַיֹּאמֶר הַגֹּשָׁה לִי וְאָכְלָה מִצִּיד בְּנִי לְמַעַן תְּבָרַכְךָ נְפֹשִׁי וַיִּגְשֶׁ-לוֹ וַיֹּאכַל

24. He asked At the last moment Isaac renews his probing, once again seized by a vague disquiet.

I am Again at the critical moment, Jacob can utter only a single word.

25. Serve me In demanding the meal at this point, Isaac imposes the test of taste. His repeated emphasis on the meat being prepared in accordance with his special preference suggests a recipe used with skill by Esau that helped endear him to his father.

not only “which of my sons are you?” but “what sort of person are you?” Jacob will spend many years pondering that question: “Who are you?”

20. the LORD your God granted me good fortune This answer troubles Isaac. Esau usually did not speak that way, thanking God for his good fortune. Indeed, when Esau arrives (in v. 31), he speaks in a very different tone. (The translation cannot quite capture the flavor of Esau’s speech: short, blunt, demanding words.) The reader cannot help but suspect that Isaac realizes it is Jacob before him and either acquiesces to the substitution (for when did Isaac ever protest when others determined the course

of his life?) or else realizes that Jacob does indeed deserve the blessing.

22. The voice is the voice of Jacob This familiar verse has prompted many comments, some on the essential differences between the descendants of Jacob and the descendants of Esau, others on the hypocrisy of people whose deeds do not match their words. “So long as the voice of Jacob is heard in prayer and study, the hands of Esau are powerless against him” (Gen. R. 65:20). “Esau wields power with his hands, with physical force, so he can only have an effect on what he can reach. But Jacob’s power is in his words, his ideas, which can reach anywhere on earth” (Tanḥ. B.).

and he ate, and he brought him wine and he drank. ²⁶Then his father Isaac said to him, “Come close and kiss me, my son”; ²⁷and he went up and kissed him. And he smelled his clothes and he blessed him, saying, “Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of the fields that the LORD has blessed.

²⁸“May God give you

Of the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth,

Abundance of new grain and wine.

²⁹Let peoples serve you,

And nations bow to you;

Be master over your brothers,

And let your mother’s sons bow to you.

Cursed be they who curse you,

Blessed they who bless you.”

³⁰No sooner had Jacob left the presence of his father Isaac—after Isaac had finished blessing Jacob—than his brother Esau came back from his hunt. ³¹He too prepared a dish and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, “Let my father sit up and eat of his son’s game, so that you may give me your innermost blessing.” ³²His father Isaac said to him, “Who are you?” And he said, “I am your son, Esau, your first-born!” ³³Isaac was seized with very violent trembling. “Who was it then,” he de-

וַיָּבֵא לוֹ יַיִן וַיִּשְׁתָּ: ²⁶וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו יִצְחָק
אָבִיו גְּשֶׁה־נָּא וּשְׂקֵה־לִּי בְּנִי: ²⁷וַיֵּגֶשׁ
וַיִּשְׁקֶל־לוֹ וַיִּרַח אֶת־רִיחַ בְּגָדָיו וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ
וַיֹּאמֶר רְאֵה רִיחַ בְּנִי כְרִיחַ שָׂדֵה אֲשֶׁר
בֵּרַכְו יְהוָה:

²⁸וַיִּתֶּן־לֶךָ הָאֱלֹהִים ששי

מִטֵּל הַשָּׁמַיִם וּמִשְׁמַנֵּי הָאָרֶץ
וְרֹב דְּגָן וְתִירֹשׁ:

²⁹יַעֲבֹדוך עַמִּים

וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ לְךָ לְאֻמִּים

הוּוֶה גְבִיר לְאַחֶיךָ

וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ לְךָ בְּנֵי אִמְךָ

אֲרָרֶיךָ אֲרוּר

וּמְבָרְכֶיךָ בָּרוּךְ:

³⁰וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר כָּלָה יִצְחָק לְבָרֶךְ אֶת־

יַעֲקֹב וַיְהִי אָף יֵצָא יֵצָא יַעֲקֹב מֵאֵת פְּנֵי

יִצְחָק אָבִיו וַעֲשׂו אָחִיו בָּא מְצִידוֹ:

³¹וַיַּעַשׂ גַּם־הוּא מִטַּעַמִּים וַיָּבֵא לְאָבִיו

וַיֹּאמֶר לְאָבִיו יָקָם אָבִי וַיֹּאכַל מְצִיד בְּנִי

בְּעֵבוֹר תְּבָרַכְנִי נַפְשֶׁךָ: ³²וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ יִצְחָק

אָבִיו מִי־אַתָּה וַיֹּאמֶר אָנִי בְנֶךָ בְּכֹרֶךָ

עֲשׂו: ³³וַיִּחַרְדּוּ יִצְחָק חֲרָדָה גְדֹלָה עַד־

מְאֹד וַיֹּאמֶר מִי־אֲפֹא הוּא הַצֶּד־צִידֶיךָ

27. he smelled his clothes The clothes of the shepherd reek of the flock and the herd, whereas those of the hunter are redolent of the fields, which Isaac relished.

and he blessed him Isaac now communicates the decisive blessing, which really relates to national destiny rather than to the fate of an individual. It is unique in the patriarchal narratives thus far, in that it contains no promises of progeny or land. For this reason, it may better be viewed as Isaac’s personal blessing rather than a covenantal blessing. For that, see 28:3–4.

28. the dew of heaven This is a metaphor for abundance, reinvigoration, and God’s beneficence. Throughout most of the rainless summer months, it is dew that serves as the major

source of moisture for crops in many places in the land of Israel.

the fat of the earth The finest fruits of the soil.

29. master over your brothers Israel’s military might and political power will give it pre-eminence over its hostile neighbors.

Cursed In the ancient Near East, the curse was considered a powerful weapon against an enemy.

ISAAC AND ESAU (vv. 30–41)

There can be no doubt that the sympathies of the narrator are with Esau, portrayed here as the innocent victim of a cruel scheme.

32. Who are you This time, Isaac does not

manded, “that hunted game and brought it to me? Moreover, I ate of it before you came, and I blessed him; now he must remain blessed!”³⁴ When Esau heard his father’s words, he burst into wild and bitter sobbing, and said to his father, “Bless me too, Father!”³⁵ But he answered, “Your brother came with guile and took away your blessing.”³⁶ [Esau] said, “Was he, then, named Jacob that he might supplant me these two times? First he took away my birthright and now he has taken away my blessing!” And he added, “Have you not reserved a blessing for me?”³⁷ Isaac answered, saying to Esau, “But I have made him master over you: I have given him all his brothers for servants, and sustained him with grain and wine. What, then, can I still do for you, my son?”³⁸ And Esau said to his father, “Have you but one blessing, Father? Bless me too, Father!” And Esau wept aloud.³⁹ And his father Isaac answered, saying to him,

וַיָּבֵא לִי וְאָכַל מִכָּל בְּטָרִם הַתְּבוֹא
וְאִבְרַכְהוּ גַם-בְּרוּךְ יִהְיֶה׃³⁴ בְּשִׁמְעֵ עֵשָׂו
אֶת-דְּבָרַי אָבִיו וַיִּצְעַק וַיִּצְעַק גְּדֹלָה
וַמָּרָה עַד-מָאֵד וַיֹּאמֶר לְאָבִיו בְּרַכְנִי גַם-
אֲנִי אָבִי׃³⁵ וַיֹּאמֶר בָּא אֲחִיךָ בְּמַרְמָה
וַיִּקַּח בְּרַכְתְּךָ׃³⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר הֲכִי קָרָא שְׁמוֹ
יַעֲקֹב וַיִּעַקְבֵנִי זֶה פַעַמִּים אֶת-בְּכֹרְתִי
לָקַח וְהִנֵּה עַתָּה לָקַח בְּרַכְתִּי וַיֹּאמֶר
הֲלֹא-אֶצְלָתָ לִי בְרַכָּה׃³⁷ וַיֵּעַן יִצְחָק
וַיֹּאמֶר לְעֵשָׂו הֲנָן גְּבִיר שְׁמִתִּיו לָךְ וְאֶת-
כָּל-אֲחָיו נָתַתִּי לּוֹ לְעַבְדִּים וְדָגַן וְתִירֵשׁ
סָמַכְתִּיו וּלְכֹה אֶפֹּא מָה אֶעֱשֶׂה בְנִי׃
³⁸ וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו אֶל-אָבִיו הֲבִרַכְהָ אַחַת
הוּא-לְךָ אָבִי בְרַכְנִי גַם-אֲנִי אָבִי וַיִּשָּׂא
עֵשָׂו קִלּוֹ וַיִּבֶךְ׃³⁹ וַיֵּעַן יִצְחָק אָבִיו
וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו

call the speaker “my son” because he cannot conceive of having been deceived by his own offspring.

33. he must remain blessed Isaac is overwhelmed with dismay but then realizes, in keeping with the concept of the time, that the blessing he has given now possesses a potency and dynamism all its own. The destiny that has been conferred on his younger son is irreversible (v. 37). For that reason, Esau does not ask his father to rescind the blessing, only to bless him as well.

36. Was he, then, named Jacob In his misery, Esau resorts to bitter sarcasm that expresses itself in wordplays. He reinterprets the name Jacob (*ya-akov*) as deriving from the stem עקב, meaning “to supplant” (see 25:26). He also

puns on *b'khorah*, “birthright,” and *b'rakhah*, “blessing.”

he took away my birthright Esau blurts out the loss of his birthright, which Isaac apparently does not yet know.

39. saying to him The pronouncement is strangely enigmatic and ambiguous. The prefix letter *mem* in each of the two key words for “fat” and “dew” can mean that Esau will *share in* the richness of the earth. It can also mean, “your abode shall be *far from* the fat of the earth, / And *far from* the dew of heaven above.” The land of Edom was never very fruitful, and the nature of its topography deprives it of all but negligible rain.

40. by your sword Edom’s sustenance shall

34. wild and bitter sobbing The Sages generally regarded Esau as a villain and the archetypical anti-Semite, the spiritual ancestor of Imperial Rome and all the other European persecutors of Jews. Here, however, they sympathize with his tears and his pain at being cheated and are uncomfortable with Jacob’s

having gained the blessing by fraudulent means. “Years later, our people will have to shed tears for what the descendants of Esau (the Edomites who helped destroy the First Temple and the Romans who destroyed the Second Temple) did to them, as retribution for the day Jacob made Esau cry” (Gen. R. 67:4).

“See, your abode shall enjoy the fat of the earth

And the dew of heaven above.

⁴⁰Yet by your sword you shall live,

And you shall serve your brother;

But when you grow restive,

You shall break his yoke from your neck.”

⁴¹Now Esau harbored a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing which his father had given him, and Esau said to himself, “Let but the mourning period of my father come, and I will kill my brother Jacob.” ⁴²When the words of her older son Esau were reported to Rebekah, she sent for her younger son Jacob and said to him, “Your brother Esau is consoling himself by planning to kill you. ⁴³Now, my son, listen to me. Flee at once to Haran, to my brother Laban. ⁴⁴Stay with him a while, until your brother’s fury subsides—⁴⁵until your brother’s anger against you subsides—and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I will fetch you from there. Let me not lose you both in one day!”

⁴⁶Rebekah said to Isaac, “I am disgusted with my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries a Hittite woman like these, from among the native women, what good will life

come not from pastoral or agricultural pursuits but from violence and pillage, raiding its neighbors and plundering the caravans that pass through its land.

serve your brother Edom will be a vassal of Israel for a long time.

break his yoke Eventually, however, it will free itself of Israelite domination.

41. Esau said to himself The Hebrew simply means that his mind was made up, not that he kept his thoughts to himself.

the mourning period Out of filial respect, Esau employs a euphemism for death.

REBEKAH AND JACOB (vv. 42–45)

Rebekah seems to have misjudged the intensity of Esau’s outrage. She is now clearly alarmed.

הִנֵּה מִשְׁמַנֵּי הָאָרֶץ יִהְיֶה מִוֹשְׁבֶיךָ
וּמִטַּל הַשָּׁמַיִם מֵעַל:

וְעַל־חֲרִבֶיךָ תַחֲיֶה* ⁴⁰

וְאֶת־אֲחִיךָ תַעֲבֹד

וְהִיָּה כְּאֲשֶׁר תִּרְיֵד

וּפְרַקְתָּ עָלָיו מֵעַל צְוֹאֲרֶךָ:

⁴¹וַיִּשְׁטֹם עֵשָׂו אֶת־יַעֲקֹב עַל־הַבְּרָכָה

אֲשֶׁר בֵּרַכוּ אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו בְּלִבּוֹ

יִקְרְבוּ יָמַי אֲבַל אָבִי וְאֶהְרֹגֶה אֶת־יַעֲקֹב

אָחִי: ⁴²וַיִּגְדַּל לְרַבֶּקָּה אֶת־דְּבָרֵי עֵשָׂו

בְּנֵה הַגְּדֹל וַתְּשַׁלַּח וַתִּקְרָא לְיַעֲקֹב בְּנֵה

הַקָּטָן וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הִנֵּה עֹשֶׂו אָחִיךָ

מִתְנַחֵם לָךְ לְהַרְגֶךָ: ⁴³וְעַתָּה בְּנִי שְׁמַע

בְּקֻלִי וְקוּם בְּרַח־לָךְ אֶל־לָבָן אָחִי חָרְנָה:

⁴⁴וַיִּשְׁבֹּת עִמּוֹ יָמִים אֲחָדִים עַד אֲשֶׁר־

תָּשׁוּב חֲמַת אָחִיךָ: ⁴⁵עַד־שׁוּב אֶף־אָחִיךָ

מִמֶּךָ וְשָׂכַח אֶת אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂיתָ לוֹ וְשָׁלַח־תִּי

וּלְקַח־תִּיךָ מִשָּׁם לָמָּה אֲשַׁבֵּל גַּם־שְׁנֵיכֶם

יּוֹם אֶחָד:

⁴⁶וַתֹּאמֶר רַבֶּקָּה אֶל־יִצְחָק קְצֹתִי* בְּחַיִּי

מִפְּנֵי בָנוֹת חַת אִם־לִקַּח יַעֲקֹב אִשָּׁה

מִבְּנוֹת־חַת כְּאֵלֶּה מִבְּנוֹת הָאָרֶץ לָמָּה

⁴⁰ v. 40. למדינחאי חצי הספר בפסוקים

⁴⁶ v. 46. ק' ועירא לפי נוסחים מקובלים

42. she sent for . . . Jacob He may have been in hiding.

REBEKAH AND ISAAC (v. 46)

Rebekah realizes that Jacob must be sent away at once. But to do that she will need her husband’s agreement. She dare not divulge the true reason: She wishes to spare Isaac further anguish, and she fears that her own involvement in the deception might be exposed. She hits on the pretext of Jacob’s need to get married.

46. I am disgusted Her argument is decisive, because, as 26:34–35 have already informed us, Esau’s union with the local women has become intolerable to his parents.

28 be to me?” ¹So Isaac sent for Jacob and blessed him. He instructed him, saying, “You shall not take a wife from among the Canaanite women. ²Up, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel, your mother’s father, and take a wife there from among the daughters of Laban, your mother’s brother. ³May El Shaddai bless you, make you fertile and numerous, so that you become an assembly of peoples. ⁴May He grant the blessing of Abraham to you and your offspring, that you may possess the land where you are sojourning, which God assigned to Abraham.”

⁵Then Isaac sent Jacob off, and he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban the son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, mother of Jacob and Esau.

ISAAC AND JACOB (28:1-5)

1. and blessed him By this act, Isaac confirms Jacob’s title to the birthright. Jacob is now recognized as the true heir to the Abrahamic covenant, which is why he must not marry outside the family.

2. Up, go Isaac knows nothing of the real reason for Jacob’s journey. That is why he uses “go” in contrast to Rebekah’s “flee” in 27:43.

Paddan-aram See Comment to 25:20.

take a wife there The patriarch has the right

to decide whom the members of his clan shall marry.

3. bless you This blessing adds to the earlier one the dimensions of nationhood and national territory. It cites the divine promises to Abraham as given in chapter 17, even to the extent of using the divine name El Shaddai with which that section begins.

5. mother of Jacob and Esau Jacob is given precedence. At the same time, Esau is mentioned in order to smooth the connection with the following verses.

כח לִי חַיִּים: ¹וַיִּקְרָא יִצְחָק אֶל-יַעֲקֹב וַיַּעֲבֹד וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ לֹא-תִקַּח אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן: ²קוּם לֵךְ פְּדָנָה אֶרֶם בֵּיתָה בְּתוֹאֵל אָבִי אַמְּךָ וְקַח-לָךְ מִשָּׁם אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת לְבָן אָחִי אַמְּךָ: ³וְאֵל שְׁדַי יְבָרֶךְ אֶתְךָ וַיַּפְרֶךְ וַיַּרְבֶּךָ וְהָיִיתָ לְקָהָל עַמִּים: ⁴וַיִּתֶּן-לְךָ אֶת-בְּרִכַּת אַבְרָהָם לָךְ וּלְזַרְעֶךָ אֶתְךָ לְרִשְׁתָּךְ אֶת-אֶרֶץ מְגֹרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר-נָתַן אֱלֹהִים לְאַבְרָהָם:

⁵וַיִּשְׁלַח יִצְחָק אֶת-יַעֲקֹב וַיֵּלֶךְ פְּדָנָה אֶרֶם אֶל-לָבָן בֶּן-בְּתוֹאֵל הָאֲרָמִי אָחִי רֵבְקָה אִם יַעֲקֹב וַעֲשׂו:

CHAPTER 28

4. Now that Isaac knows for a certainty which of his sons he is blessing, his words to Jacob invoke the promises (see 12:7, 13:14-17, and 17:8) to Abraham.

5. Why does the text emphasize that Rebekah was the mother of Jacob and Esau, something we already knew? She sends Jacob away not only to spare his life but to save Esau from becoming a murderer. Although she favored Jacob for the blessing, they were both her chil-

dren and she loved them both (*Tzeidah La-Derekh*).

If the reader is left troubled by Jacob’s apparently getting away with lying and deceit, fooling his father, and fraudulently depriving his brother of the intended blessing, one need only read on in the next *parashah* to see Jacob’s punishment. It is not the way of the Torah to moralize over questionable behavior but rather to show its consequences in people’s lives. Jacob soon will find out what it feels like to be deceived and defrauded.

⁶When Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him off to Paddan-aram to take a wife from there, charging him, as he blessed him, “You shall not take a wife from among the Canaanite women,” ⁷and that Jacob had obeyed his father and mother and gone to Paddan-aram, ⁸Esau realized that the Canaanite women displeased his father Isaac. ⁹So Esau went to Ishmael and took to wife, in addition to the wives he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael son of Abraham, sister of Nebaioth.

וַיֵּרָא עֵשָׂו כִּי־בֵרַךְ יִצְחָק אֶת־יַעֲקֹב וְשָׁלַח אֹתוֹ פָּדָןָה אֲרָם לְקַח־לוֹ מִשָּׁם אִשָּׁה בְּבָרְכוֹ אֹתוֹ וַיֹּצֵו עָלָיו לֵאמֹר לֹא־תִקַּח אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן׃ ⁷וַיִּשְׁמַע יַעֲקֹב אֶל־אָבִיו וְאֶל־אִמּוֹ וַיֵּלֶךְ פָּדָןָה אֲרָם׃ ⁸וַיֵּרָא עֵשָׂו כִּי רָעוֹת בְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן בְּעֵינָיו יִצְחָק אָבִיו׃ ⁹וַיֵּלֶךְ עֵשָׂו אֶל־יִשְׁמָעֵאל וַיִּקַּח אֶת־מַחְלַת ׀ בַּת־יִשְׁמָעֵאל בִּן־אֲבֵרָהָם אַחֹת נְבִיּוֹת עַל־נָשָׁיו לֹ לְאִשָּׁה׃ ט

ESAU'S ISHMAELITE WIFE (vv. 6–9)

6. When Esau saw Realizing that his marriages outside the kinship group and his alliances with the native women have contributed to his loss of the blessing, Esau now weds the daughter of his father's brother. That act will later be paralleled by Jacob's marriage to the daughter of his mother's brother.

9. Ishmael The tribe; the man himself was no longer alive.

Mahalath She is not mentioned among Esau's wives in 36:2–3. There, Basemath is cited as the daughter of Ishmael and sister of Nebaioth. The two names may have belonged to the same person. The Aramaic stem חלם means “sweetness,” a more appropriate meaning than “sickness,” which is the usual understanding derived from the Hebrew.

Nebaioth The firstborn of Ishmael. The clan with that name was pre-eminent in the Ishmaelite tribal league.

הפטרות תולדות

HAFTARAH FOR TOL'DOT

MALACHI 1:1–2:7

This *haftarah* recalls the rivalry between Jacob and Esau, as it focuses on the ongoing historical strife between their descendants—Israel and Edom. The prophet, speaking in the 5th century B.C.E., illustrates some aspects of religion and culture in the early years of the Second Temple.

The overall ritual content of the *haftarah* leaves little room for moral rebuke. Morality is not entirely outside of Malachi's message (see 3:5), but it is not the focus of his concern here. Indeed, even when he expresses antagonism over the people's theft of animals (along with their deception and disobedience), the emphasis is on ritual faults (1:13). Malachi puts special stress on the priests' duties of piety and purity before the Lord. In a striking statement, the prophet contrasts the perversity of the priests of Israel with the faithful among the nations who offer "incense and pure oblation" to the Lord—thus doing Him honor throughout the world, "from where the sun rises to where it sets" (1:10–13). The piety of pagans is also a feature of the late book of Jonah (1:14; 3:5–9).

RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE PARASHAH

A link between the *haftarah* and the *parashah* is established at the outset. Malachi announces that God has "accepted," (i.e., loved) Jacob, but "rejected" Esau (1:2–3). He notes that "Esau is Jacob's brother" (v. 2) and presents them as the ancestors of the nations of Israel and Edom (vv. 4–5). In similar fashion, the *parashah* emphasizes Rebekah's love for Jacob (Gen. 25:25), whom she prefers over Esau. These two fraternal "nations" in her womb (v. 23) are later designated Israel and Edom (Gen. 36:1,43). A divine oracle guarantees the superiority of the younger brother; it vindicates Rebekah's scheme in patri-

archal times as well as God's choice in Malachi's day. The divine word in the prophetic text reinforces and actualizes the promise made ages before. At the same time, just as Esau "spurned" (*va-yivez*; stem בזה) his birthright through an imprudent act involving food (Gen. 25:34), the latter-day heirs of Jacob "scorn" (*bozei*) God through impious treatment of the food of sacrifice (Mal. 1:6–7). The use of the same Hebrew verb in both texts subtly suggests that Jacob has become like his hated twin.

Since the 2nd century C.E. (specifically, since the time of Hadrian's edicts and the revolt at Bethar, 132–35 C.E.), Edom has been a symbol for Rome in Jewish tradition. Thus Simeon bar Yoḥai interpreted "the voice of Jacob" and "the hands of Esau" in the *parashah* (Gen. 27:22) with reference to the screams of Jews being slaughtered in Bethar at the hands of Romans. The promised destruction of the "wild oxen" (*r'emim*) of Edom in Isa. 34:7 was interpreted by Meir to allude to Rome (*romiyyim*). Clearly, biblical interpretation was exploited for political protest. Another trenchant homily, on the divine oracle concerning the "two nations" (*shnei goyyim*) in Rebekah's womb (Gen. 25:23), declares that this predicts the future of "two proud" (*ge'im*) kingdoms (the Jews, typified by Solomon, and the Romans, typified by Hadrian). One of the "two" (*shnei*) will be "rejected" (*sanny*). By invoking Mal. 1:3—"I . . . have rejected" (*saneiti*)—the preacher further informs his audience that the hated one is Edom-Rome (Gen. R. 63:7). The *haftarah* thus provided scriptural assurance that Edom and all its evil historical incarnations were condemned by God.

The annual recitation of this *haftarah* as interpreted throughout the ages thus serves to reinforce national and religious hope. Jews could rest assured in the promise of God's ancient and eter-

nal love for Israel, as Joshua ibn Shu'eib of 14th-century Spain pointedly preached. Through the mouth of Malachi, then, divine love expresses an

absolute confirmation of Israel's covenantal destiny, with reverence for God and loyalty in His service being the fitting response.

1 A pronouncement: The word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi.

²I have shown you love, said the LORD. But you ask, "How have You shown us love?" After all—declares the LORD—Esau is Jacob's brother; yet I have accepted Jacob ³and have rejected Esau. I have made his hills a desolation, his territory a home for beasts of the desert. ⁴If Edom thinks, "Though crushed, we can build the ruins again," thus said the LORD of Hosts: They may build, but I will tear down. And so they shall be known as the region of wickedness, the people damned forever of the LORD. ⁵Your eyes shall behold it, and you shall declare, "Great is the LORD beyond the borders of Israel!"

⁶A son should honor his father, and a slave his master. Now if I am a father, where is the honor due Me? And if I am a master, where is the reverence due Me?—said the LORD of Hosts to you, O priests who scorn My name. But you ask, "How have we scorned Your name?" ⁷You offer defiled food on My altar. But you ask, "How have we defiled You?" By saying, "The table of the LORD can be treated with scorn." ⁸When you present a blind animal

Malachi 1:1. A pronouncement Hebrew: *massa*; often translated "burden," on the assumption that this is the word that the prophet had to "carry" to the people (Rashi). The term refers to prophecy (Ibn Ezra) and is used to indicate the taking up of a speech (Num. 23:7,18; 24:3).

2. accepted Literally, "I loved" (*va-ohav*). This term continues the theme of favor for Jacob, as against the hatred and disfavor of Esau. In this context, the love is expressed through the giving of the land (Rashi, Radak).

א מֵשָׂא דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיַד מְלָאכִי:

אָהַבְתִּי אֶתְכֶם אָמַר יְהוָה וְאַמַּרְתֶּם בְּמָה אָהַבְתָּנוּ הֲלוֹא־אָח עֵשָׂו לִיעֶקֶב נָאִים־יְהוָה וְאַהֲבָה אֶת־יעֶקֶב: ³ וְאֶת־עֵשָׂו שָׂנֵאתִי וְאֲשִׁים אֶת־הָרִיו שְׂמָמָה וְאֶת־נַחְלָתוֹ לַתְּנוּת מִדְּבָר: ⁴ כִּי־תֹאמַר אָדוֹם רָשָׁנוּ וְנָשׁוּב וְנִבְנֶה חֲרֻבוֹת כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת הִמָּה יִבְנוּ וְאֲנִי אֶהְרֹס וְקִרְאוּ לָהֶם גְּבוּל רְשָׁעָה וְהָעַם אֲשֶׁר־זָעַם יְהוָה עַד־עוֹלָם: ⁵ וְעֵינֵיכֶם תִּרְאִינָה וְאַתֶּם תֹּאמְרוּ יִגְדַל יְהוָה מֵעַל לַגְּבוּל יִשְׂרָאֵל:

⁶ בֶּן יִכְבֵּד אָב וְעֶבֶד אֲדֹנָיו וְאִם־אָב אָנֹכִי אֵינִי כְבוֹדִי וְאִם־אֲדוֹנִים אָנֹכִי אֵינִי מוֹרְאִי אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת לָכֶם הִפְחִינִים בּוֹיֵי שָׁמַי וְאַמַּרְתֶּם בְּמָה בְּזִינוּ אֶת־שִׁמְךָ: ⁷ מִגִּישִׁים עַל־מִזְבְּחֵי לָחֶם מִגֹּאֵל וְאַמַּרְתֶּם בְּמָה גִּאלְנוּךָ בְּאַמְרֶכֶם שְׁלַחַן יְהוָה נִבְוָה הוּא: ⁸ וְכִי־תִגְשׁוּן עוֹר לִזְבַּח

6. A son should honor his father All the terms of this passage (father–son, master–slave, honor–reverence), which recur throughout the book of Malachi, have extended overtones: The father–son pair alludes to the divine–human relationship (cf. Mal. 2:10; 3:17), the master–slave pair alludes to the divine–worshiper relationship (3:1,14,17), and the honor–reverence pair sets the terms of positive piety against which the language of scorn and curse are counterposed, often through puns (see *mora*, "reverence," and *m'erab*, "curse," in 2:2).

for sacrifice—it doesn't matter! When you present a lame or sick one—it doesn't matter! Just offer it to your governor: Will he accept you? Will he show you favor?—said the LORD of Hosts. ⁹And now implore the favor of God! Will He be gracious to us? This is what you have done—will He accept any of you?

The LORD of Hosts has said: ¹⁰If only you would lock My doors, and not kindle fire on My altar to no purpose! I take no pleasure in you—said the LORD of Hosts—and I will accept no offering from you. ¹¹For from where the sun rises to where it sets, My name is honored among the nations, and everywhere incense and pure oblation are offered to My name; for My name is honored among the nations—said the LORD of Hosts. ¹²But you profane it when you say, “The table of the Lord is defiled and the meat, the food, can be treated with scorn.” ¹³You say, “Oh, what a bother!” And so you degrade it—said the LORD of Hosts—and you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; and you offer such as an oblation. Will I accept it from you?—said the LORD.

¹⁴A curse on the cheat who has [an unblemished] male in his flock, but for his vow sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord! For I am a great King—said the LORD of Hosts—and My name is revered among the nations.

2 And now, O priests, this charge is for you: ²Unless you obey and unless you lay it to heart, and do honor to My name—said the LORD of Hosts—I will send a curse and turn your blessings into curses. (Indeed, I have turned them into curses, because you do not lay it to heart.) ³I will put your seed under a ban, and I will strew dung upon your faces, the dung of your festal sacrifices, and you shall be carried out to its [heap].

אֵין רָע וְכִי תִגִּישׁוּ פֶסֶחַ וְחִלָּה אֵין רָע
הִקְרִיבֵהוּ נָא לְפָנֶיךָ הִירְצֶךָ אוֹ הַיֵּשֵׁא
פְּנִיךָ אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת: ⁹וְעַתָּה חֲלוּ-נָא
פְּנֵי-אֵל וַיִּחַנְנוּ מִיַּדְכֶם הֲיִתָּה זֹאת הַיֵּשֵׁא
מִכֶּם פְּנִים

אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת: ¹⁰מִי גַם-בְּכֶם וַיִּסְגֹּר
דְּלָתַיִם וְלֹא-תֹאֲרִירוּ מִזִּבְחֵי חֲנֹם אֵין-לִי
חֶפֶץ בְּכֶם אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת וּמִנְחָה
לֹא-אֶרְצֶה מִיַּדְכֶם: ¹¹כִּי מִמְזֻרַח-שִׁמְשׁ
וְעַד-מְבוֹאוֹ גְּדוֹל שָׁמַיִם בְּגוֹיִם וּבְכָל-מְקוֹם
מְקַטֵּר מִגֵּשׁ לְשָׁמַיִם וּמִנְחָה טְהוֹרָה כִּי-
גְּדוֹל שָׁמַיִם בְּגוֹיִם אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת:
¹²וְאַתֶּם מְחַלְלִים אוֹתוֹ בְּאַמְרֹכֶם שְׁלַחַן
אֲדֹנָי מִגָּאֵל הוּא וְנִיבוֹ נְבוּזָה אָכְלוּ:
¹³וְאַמַּרְתֶּם הִנֵּה מִתְלַאָּה וְהִפְחַתֶּם
אוֹתוֹ אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת וְהִבַּאתֶם גְּזוּל
וְאֶת-הַפֶּסֶחַ וְאֶת-הַחֹלֶה וְהִבַּאתֶם אֶת-
הַמִּנְחָה הָאֶרְצֶה אוֹתָהּ מִיַּדְכֶם אָמַר
יְהוָה: ^ס

¹⁴וְאָרֹר נוֹכַל וַיֵּשׁ בְּעִדְרוֹ זָכַר וְנָדַר וְזָבַח
מִשְׁחַת לְאֲדֹנָי כִּי מֶלֶךְ גְּדוֹל אָנִי אָמַר
יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת וְשָׁמַיִם נוֹרָא בְּגוֹיִם:

ב וְעַתָּה אֲלֵיכֶם הַמְצֹנָה הַזֹּאת
הַפְּהֵנִים: ²אִם-לֹא תִשְׁמְעוּ וְאִם-לֹא
תִשְׁמְעוּ עַל-לֵב לְתַת כְּבוֹד לְשָׁמַיִם אָמַר
יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת וְשִׁלַּחְתִּי בְכֶם אֶת-הַמְאָרָה
וְאָרוֹתַי אֶת-בְּרִכּוֹתֵיכֶם וְגַם אָרוֹתַי כִּי
אֵינְכֶם שָׁמַיִם עַל-לֵב: ³הֲנִי גֹעַר לְכֶם
אֶת-הַזֶּרַע וְזוּרִיתִי פָרַשׁ עַל-פְּנֵיכֶם פָּרַשׁ
חֲגִיבְכֶם וְנִשָּׂא אֶתְכֶם אֲלָיו:

⁴Know, then, that I have sent this charge to you that My covenant with Levi may endure—said the LORD of Hosts. ⁵I had with him a covenant of life and well-being, which I gave to him, and of reverence, which he showed Me. For he stood in awe of My name.

⁶Proper rulings were in his mouth,
And nothing perverse was on his lips;
He served Me with complete loyalty
And held the many back from iniquity.
⁷For the lips of a priest guard knowledge,
And men seek rulings from his mouth;
For he is a messenger of the LORD of Hosts.

Malachi 2:4. My covenant with Levi The priest is exalted for the perfection of his service and reverence for God's holy name—the opposite of the situation here (cf. 1:6). The precise "covenant" is not specified. Num. 25:12–13 refers to a pact with the Aaronid clan, descendants of the priest Phinehas. A covenant of peace is mentioned, both in Numbers and here. The text here, however, has the whole tribe of Levi in mind (note the variant "covenant of the Levites" in Mal. 2:8), not just one priestly line.

6. Proper rulings Literally, "the Law of truth" (*Torat emet*). The priestly role in instruc-

4 וַיִּדְעֶתֶם כִּי שְׁלַחְתִּי אֵלֵיכֶם אֶת הַמְצוּוֹה
הַזֹּאת לְהִיּוֹת בְּרִיתִי אִתְּלֹוֹי אָמַר יְהוָה
צָבָאוֹת: 5 בְּרִיתִי | הָיְתָה אִתּוֹ הַחַיִּים
וְהַשְּׁלוֹם וְאַתְנֶם-לוֹ מוֹרָא וַיִּירָאֵנִי וּמִפְּנֵי
שְׁמִי נָתַת הוּא:

6 תּוֹרַת אֱמֶת הָיְתָה בְּפִיהוּ
וְעוֹלָה לֹא-נִמְצָא בְּשִׁפְתָיו
בְּשָׁלוֹם וּבְמִישׁוֹר הִלֵּךְ אִתִּי
וּרְבִים הֵשִׁיב מֵעוֹן:
7 כִּי-שִׁפְתָיו כֹּהֵן יִשְׁמְרוּ-דַעַת
וְתוֹרָה יִבְקְשׂוּ מִפִּיהוּ
כִּי מְלַאֲךְ יְהוָה-צָבָאוֹת הוּא:

tion is emphasized here and in verse 7. Instruction in ritual matters is found in Lev. 10:10–11. The role of the priests is extended to jurisprudence in Deut. 17:8–10. Ezekiel combines both functions (Ezek. 44:23–24). The tribe of Levi received the blessing of instruction in Deut. 33:8,10.

7. a messenger of the LORD of Hosts The exalted perfection of the true priests gave them the status of a "messenger" or an "angel" of God (*mal-akh*). This notion is dramatically portrayed in a postexilic vision of Zechariah (Zech. 3:1–7).