The Blindness of Isaac
Dr. Wilson L. Thompson

Isaac built wisely upon the foundation that Abraham had laid. He was firmly in control of Isaac Enterprises when Abraham died. He led God’s people in a successful venture into agriculture which broke the famine fostered by the lazy Philistines. As Isaac “waxed great [in] possession of herds, and great store of servants” (Genesis 26:14), he also drew upon Abraham’s experience and renegotiated a peace treaty with envious Philistines at Beer-sheba (Genesis 21:22-32; 26:26-33). Unhappily, Isaac went blind and foolishly sought to bless Esau as his successor (Genesis 27:1-5). In the ensuing crisis, his master shepherd, Jacob, was driven out and Isaac Enterprises went into a period of extended economic decline.

Isaac had a huge blind spot regarding his son, Esau. In her troubled pregnancy, Rebekah had inquired of God. “And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, . . . and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger” (Genesis 25:23). But, Isaac, whose work kept him indoors a lot, bonded with Esau the outdoors man. Similarly, Abraham had favored his eldest son and pleaded with God, “O that Ishmael might live before thee!” (Genesis 17:18). But, Sarah demanded that Ishmael and his mother, Hagar, be expelled. Abraham, despite his grief, obeyed God who directed that he “hearken unto her [Sarah’s] voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called” (Genesis 21:12).

Isaac, however, stubbornly resisted the prophecy despite the signs of Esau’s lack of competence in business. As the prophecy unfolded, Jacob grew to be a plain/perfect man overseeing the work of Isaac’s servants from his headquarters in tents (Genesis 25:27). Under Laban, the fields per force became his “office” (Genesis 30:16; 31:3-4,40). But, Esau became instead a recreational, hungry hunter who ended up selling Jacob his birthright for a mess of red beans. Edom (“Red”) as Esau was thereafter known, “did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright” (Genesis 25:34). Furthermore, when he was forty, Esau married not one but two heathen women who grieved both Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 26:34-35). Still, Isaac “loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison” (Genesis 25:28). His obsession resembled those Paul later decried “whose God is their belly” (Philippians 3:19).

At last, some 37 years later, Isaac called Esau to hunt and prepare venison “that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die” (Genesis 27:4). Rebekah intervened to help her husband, as did Abigail centuries later for Nabal (Genesis 27:6-29; I Samuel 25:18-37). Rebekah sought to shock Isaac to his senses and avert Edomization of Isaac Enterprises. She partially succeeded. When her judicial ruse was revealed, “Isaac trembled very exceedingly” (Genesis 27:30-33). Later, one of the Lord’s names was “the fear of Isaac” (Genesis 31:42). Isaac again blessed Jacob and sent to him Padanaram to seek a wife (Genesis 28:1-4). And, the Lord confirmed Isaac’s blessing with the vision of the ladder at Luz (Genesis 28:12-15).

But the damage was done. Refusal to heed God’s prophecy to Rebekah cost Isaac services of Jacob, under whose care Laban’s livestock holdings multiplied (Genesis 30:27-34). Esau stayed and recruited hundreds of Isaac’s able servants into Edom (Genesis 32:6) despite resistance from Rebekah and Isaac. Over 20 years later, by God’s grace, Jacob was restored to Isaac (Genesis 31:13). He returned to Canaan with extensive holdings in livestock having overcome Laban’s exploitation (Genesis 31:36-55). Jacob negotiated a peaceful re-entry into Canaan with Edom (Genesis 33:1-15). “Jacob came unto Isaac his father [at] . . Hebron” and, years later, with Esau Jacob buried Isaac in the cave of Machpelah nearby (Genesis 35:27,29). And, Esau finally moved to Mt. Seir “from the face of his
brother Jacob” (Genesis 36:6).