

Jacob Steals Esau's Blessing (Genesis 25:27-27:46)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Genesis

I. Review of Prior Lesson (Isaac Marries Rebekah; Birth of Esau and Jacob)

- a. Abraham sends his servant to Haran, to get a wife for Isaac from his people. The servant's prayers are answered. He brings back Rebekah, daughter of Abraham's nephew Bethuel, for Isaac to marry. (**Genesis 24**) Note that Rebekah is also the sister of Laban, who will become very important in the lessons that follow.
- b. After 20 years of childless marriage, Rebekah conceives twins. It is prophesied that the two struggling in her womb are two nations; the older will serve the younger. (**Genesis 25:1-26**)
- c. The first-born of the twins, who is red and hairy, is named Esau. The second-born is found grasping the heel of his brother, and is named Jacob (Jacob = *the supplanter*, as explained in **Genesis 27:36**).

II. Esau Sells His Birthright to Jacob

- a. Read **Genesis 25:27-33**.
- b. Elements of this part of the story
 - i. The two brothers are very different!
 1. Esau is an outdoorsman, a rugged hunter. Loved by his father because Isaac liked to eat the wild game that Esau captured.
 2. Jacob preferred to stay at home, in the tents; was loved by his mother, Rebekah.
 - ii. Esau is famished and asks for the red stew that Jacob had prepared.
 - iii. Jacob offers a deal: He will give Esau the stew IF Esau gives him his birthright (in ancient times, benefits typically accruing to the firstborn).
 - iv. Esau accepts the deal to get the stew, and swears to hand over his birthright to Jacob. Esau gains the name Edom (based on Hebrew word for 'red'). This is a name that will be carried by his descendants, the Edomites (who settled in an area characterized by red sandstone rock formations).

- c. What do we learn about Jacob's *spiritual character* from this story? Does he exemplify the attributes that Jesus and the apostles later hold up, in the New Testament? Consider:
 - i. Does Jacob follow the second greatest commandment, to love his neighbor as himself? (No)
 - ii. Does Jacob share his food with those in need? (Definitely not)
 - iii. Or was Jacob selfish, manipulative, crafty, cunning, and taking advantage of his brother when his brother is in need? (Yes!)

III. Isaac and Rebekah Live Among the Philistines (Genesis 26:1-33)

- a. Isaac fears the Philistine men. (Read **Genesis 26:1-14**)
 - i. Summary of the account.
 1. Famine in the land. Isaac goes to the land of Abimelech, king of the Philistines, in Gerar.
 2. The Lord tells Isaac to stay in that land; he is not to go down to Egypt. The Lord repeats the promise *that Isaac and his descendants would receive the blessings promised to Abraham*; they would later inherit that land.
 - a. This is significant as the Christians, Muslims, and Jews, who disagree whether the blessing given to Abraham continued through Abraham's first son (Ishmael) or through his second son (Isaac). In this passage we see again that the blessing given to Abraham would be fulfilled through the descendants of *Isaac, his second son*.
 3. Isaac is afraid that the men of that land would kill him to take his beautiful wife, so he says, "She is my sister".
 4. After Isaac had lived there a long time, King Abimelech looks out his window one day and catches Isaac being affectionate with Rebekah. The king concludes that she is his wife, not his sister. Abimelech confronts Isaac, who offers the excuse that he was afraid men would kill him to take his beautiful wife.
 5. The Lord blesses Isaac, and he becomes wealthy.
 - ii. Note that this is very similar to what Abraham did twice with Sarah: in Egypt in **Genesis 12**, and then later under Abimelech, king of Gerar in **Genesis 20**. (We can assume this is a different 'king Abimelech' than the one mentioned **Genesis 26**, which occurred many years before.)

- iii. Isaac was driven to do what he did (lying about his wife; not protecting her) out of fear of men and what they could do to him.
- b. Conflict breaks out between Isaac's herdsmen and the herdsmen of the Philistines, over the ownership of water wells. (**Genesis 26:15-33**)
 - i. In the midst of that, the Lord appears to Isaac one night to reassure him. Read **Genesis 26:23-25**.
 1. God reassures Isaac that through Isaac the blessing given to Abraham (his seed would be multiplied) would be fulfilled through Isaac. Recall that Isaac is an old man at this point, and only has two children.
 2. God tells him, "I am the God of your father, Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you."
 - a. For that reason, Isaac should not fear the Philistines.
 - b. Good lesson for us, as it is so very easy to give in to fear.
 3. **Question:** Do we really grasp that God is with us, the same God who was with our father, Abraham? If so, how should we handle temptations in life to be fearful of people and challenges in life, and temptations to be anxious? Consider the following Scriptures in that light.
 - a. "In affliction, I called upon the Lord, and He heard me in a broad place. The Lord is my helper; I shall not be afraid of what man will do to me." (**Psalms 118:5**)
 - b. Moses encouraged the people before he died, saying, "Be valiant and strong, do not fear nor be afraid of them, nor be terrified before them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes before you and with you and among you. He will not leave you nor forsake you." (**Deuteronomy 31:6**)
 - c. After the death of Moses, the Lord reassured Joshua:
 - i. "No man shall be able to oppose you all the days of your life, and as I was with Moses, thus I will be also with you. I will not forsake you nor disregard you.
 - ii. "Be strong and courageous for you will divide this land which I swore to your fathers to give them. Be strong, therefore, and courageous to guard yourself and to do as Moses My servant

commanded you; then you will not turn away from them, to the right nor to the left. In this way, you will have understanding and whatever you do. The book of this law shall not depart from your mouth, and you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may have the understanding to do all the things written therein. Then you will both prosper and make your ways prosperous, and have understanding. Behold, I have commanded you. Be strong and courageous. Do not be cowardly or fearful, for the Lord your God is with you in all things, wherever you go.” (**Joshua 1:5-9**)

d. In the New Testament we are assured that this promise from the past, that God will be with his people, also applies to us, today.

i. “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’” (**Hebrews 13:5-6**; citing both **Deuteronomy 31:6** and **Psalms 118:5**)

c. Esau marries two Hittite women, causing strife to his parents. Read **Genesis 26:34-35**.

IV. Isaac Steals the Blessing Intended for Esau

a. Rebekah conspires with Jacob to deceive Isaac. Read **Genesis 27:1-17**.

i. Summary of storyline.

1. Isaac is old and blind; he assumes that his death is near (however, he ends up living decades longer).
2. Isaac tells Esau to hunt for game, prepare his favorite food; then he will give Esau the blessing.
3. Rebekah overhears the conversation; she comes up with a plan to deceive her husband Isaac. (What happened to the romantic relationship between Isaac and Rebekah, after 60+ years of marriage?)
4. Jacob at first objects to his mother’s plan. (Not because it is wrong to deceive his father and steal from his brother; he

reasons, ‘*What if I get caught by my father? Then I will be cursed by him!*’)

5. Rebekah tells Jacob to obey her; that any curse will fall on her. She puts Esau’s clothes on Jacob so that he will *smell* like Esau, and animal skins on his arms and neck so that he will *feel* like Esau. She makes the stew from the kids of their flock and seasons it so that it will *taste* like Esau’s game stew.
- ii. Jacob has his mother’s character: deceitful and crafty. They conspire together.
- b. Jacob lies to his father repeatedly, deceives him, and obtains the blessing. Read **Genesis 27:18-24**
- i. Summary of the storyline.
 1. Isaac asks who has come. Jacob tells the first lie to his father:
 - a. “I am Esau your firstborn; I have done just as you told me.” (**Genesis 27:19**)
 2. Isaac asks how he was able to kill the game so quickly. Jacob tells the second lie:
 - a. “Because the Lord your God brought it to me.” (**Genesis 27:20**)
 3. Isaac still has his doubts; asks his son to come closer, so that he may feel him. Notices that while the hands are rough like Esau’s, the voice sounds like that of Jacob. He asks point-blank, “Are you my son, Esau?” Jacob tells the third lie:
 - a. “I am.” (**Genesis 27:24**)
 - c. Isaac blesses Jacob. Read **Genesis 27:25-29**.
 - i. Isaac eats and drinks, smells the clothing of his son, is deceived, and gives the great blessing for the firstborn to Jacob.
 - ii. The blessing included (**Genesis 27:29**):
 1. He (Jacob) would be lord over his brethren; all his mother’s sons (Esau) would bow down to him.
 2. “*Cursed be everyone who curses you and blessed be those who bless you*”
 - d. Esau shows up second. Read **Genesis 27:30-40**.

- i. Storyline summary.
 1. Esau arrives in Isaac's room immediately after Jacob departs.
 2. Isaac trembles with anger when he realizes that his son Jacob had deceived him.
 3. Esau remarks:
 - a. His brother's name 'Jacob', meaning the supplanter, was indeed appropriate. Jacob had now supplanted Esau twice. The first time, Esau says, "*He took away my birthright*" (blaming his brother).
 - b. Esau weeps in despair; he asks his father if there might be a blessing reserved for him to receive.
 4. Isaac gives Esau a lesser blessing, that includes:
 - a. Esau would live by the sword.
 - b. He would serve his brother, Jacob. (That doesn't sound like much of a 'blessing' to Esau!)
 - c. Eventually, "when you become restless" Esau would break the yoke of his brother (Jacob) from his neck.
- e. **Question:** after finding out he was deceived, why didn't Isaac simply revoke the first blessing and curse Jacob?
 - i. This was what Jacob was worried about prior to the scam, based on his earlier discussions with his mother. Jacob had been concerned that Isaac would find out the deception, and end up cursing him instead!
 - ii. Were blessings like this unconditional and irrevocable? That is one possibility.
 - iii. Another possibility: the terms contained within Isaac's blessing blocked him from cursing his son and changing the blessing. After all, he did say, "*cursed be everyone who curses you*"! (**Genesis 27:29**)
 1. Based on that, it would appear that even Isaac himself was now prohibited from cursing his son Jacob.
- f. How did Esau react to being cheated out of his blessing? Read **Genesis 27:41-46**.
 - i. Esau hated his brother, and wanted to kill him.

- ii. In light of his father's blessing, he might have thought something along the line of, "I am feeling pretty 'restless' right now; as soon as my father dies I'd like to break not only that 'yoke' from my neck, but also break my brother's neck, too!"
 - 1. Notice that he is just waiting for his father to die (not for his mother to die, too).
- iii. Rebekah overhears Esau's plan to kill his brother, and warns Jacob to flee to Haran.
 - 1. She says he can stay with her brother Laban. (After all, 'Uncle Laban' *certainly* would take good care of Jacob, *wouldn't he?*)
 - 2. She thought this all should blow over in a short time. Right after Isaac dies and Esau gets over his anger, Rebekah will send word that it is safe for Jacob to return home.
 - 3. Rebekah also hates the Hittite wives that Esau took, and hopes that Jacob will not follow suit and instead find a good wife.

V. Any Lesson from This for Us?

- a. **Question:** which brother do you think was worse, Jacob or Esau?
 - i. Let's consider Jacob:
 - 1. Liar and deceiver (3x to his father)
 - 2. Thief, stealing the blessing intended for his brother.
 - 3. No compassion for his hungry brother; takes advantage of his extreme hunger and weakness to trick him into taking an oath to sell his birthright.
 - 4. Selfish and manipulative.
 - 5. A 'mother's boy': obeys his mother over his father.
 - ii. Now, let's consider Esau.
 - 1. Maybe not that smart (outmaneuvered by his brother).
 - 2. An outdoorsman, favored by his father.
 - 3. Chose two wives from the local Hittites; apparently not the best choice; however at the time not disobeying a command of God.
 - 4. Angry and vengeful toward his brother after being cheated (understandable, under the circumstances).

iii. Which of these two brothers do *YOU* think was really the worst?

b. Now, let us consider God's perspective. Read **Hebrews 12:14-17**.

- i. "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears."
- ii. God's view: Esau was by far the worst. He was a profane person who sold his birthright for a single meal. We are called to make sure that no one in the church follows his example. The Hebrew writer ties this to the sin of fornication.
- iii. This is the classic choice that we are faced with, every day of our lives, to either:
 1. Gratify the desires of our flesh for pleasure right now, such as:
 - a. Immediate sexual gratification (fornication, adultery, pornography, perversion)
 - b. Gluttony
 - c. Wealth, praise, popularity, adulation, worldly accolades, avoiding persecution.
 2. Versus self-control and denying the flesh now because we are looking for the eternal reward, our inheritance that is reserved for us, eternal life.
 - a. Which will require self-control, denying the flesh, resisting temptation
 - b. May involve suffering, persecution, and rejection.
 - c. Unlike Esau, Jacob valued the birthright and the inheritance, the long-term rewards that really mattered. This is a great example for us.
 - d. This is the same perspective Paul had in view when he wrote, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable." (**1 Corinthians 15:19**)

- iv. This was the choice that Moses made successfully. In that regard, he is worthy for us to imitate.
 - 1. “By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.” (**Hebrews 11:24–27**)
- v. Other great examples of men who faced similar choices include:
 - 1. Joseph, when tempted by Potiphar’s wife;
 - 2. Phinehas, in the face of rampant sexual immorality with the Midianites;
 - 3. Daniel, threatened with being cast into the lions’ den;
 - 4. Daniel’s 3 friends, when threatened by the fiery furnace; and
 - 5. All the heroes of old mentioned in **Hebrews 11**, our great cloud of witnesses “of whom the world was not worthy”, who faced suffering, persecution, prison and death because they were looking forward to a better resurrection, and promises of things to come.
- vi. The war against our flesh will continue until death. Esau is the ‘poster child’ or classic example showing us that we too will be rejected if we choose to despise our inheritance for some short-term pleasure. We do not want to be like him, crying out and shedding tears after it is too late.
- vii. Later God would deal with Jacob’s sin, as we will see in our next lesson; Jacob did not ‘get away with’ anything. However, for a profane, godless person who chooses to live like Esau, there is no hope unless that person repents before it is too late.