

Isaac’s Blessing of Jacob

I. REVIEW OF LAST WEEK

Abraham continued to show faith that God would take an active role in establishing His family. He sends his servant to obtain a wife for Isaac from among his people.

God chose Rebekah, a woman who was ready to leave her home for a strange land and unknown husband God chose for her, to mother the father of the future nation of Israel.

God's blessing fell on Isaac after Abraham's death.

God did not immediately keep His promise to give Isaac children. He had to wait on God for twenty years, to show that the promise would come by grace, not by man's effort.

Just as He chose Isaac over his older brother Ishmael, God chose Isaac's younger son Jacob to succeed him as patriarch.

He revealed to Rebekah that she was bearing twins who would always be at odds with each other, and that the younger would be stronger than - and be served by - the elder.

This illustrates the principle of election, whereby God chooses not based on natural birthright or man's effort or deeds but based on His sovereign will and mercy.

The covenant promises God made to Abraham because of his obedient faith, God confirmed to Isaac for Abraham's sake. The promises are to continue through Isaac as he continues in obedient to God's direction to stay in the Promised Land even though circumstances tempt him to leave.

Introduction

I. BLESSING AND BIRTHRIGHT

Last week's session gave us a brief introduction to Isaac's sons Jacob and Esau. Few details are given of their lives. Chapter 27 picks up their story some 40 years after their birth.

But the circumstances surrounding their birth and naming, and the way Jacob obtained the birthright, speak volumes about the two boys and prepare us for what happens next.

The word for "birthright" in Hebrew is *bekorah*; "blessing" is *berakah*.

- Throughout this account, the sacred author plays these two words and ideas [blessing and birthright] against each other.
- They both involve the inheritance of the "firstborn," which was a position or title and not just a word denoting birth order.

II. RIGHTS OF THE FIRSTBORN

The firstborn became head of the family on his father's death, and as such was both leader and spiritual head of the tribe.

- He received a double portion of his father's inheritance (cf. Deut 21:17)
- along with a blessing: in this case leadership, prosperity and - the ultimate blessing;
- God's promises originally given to Abraham.

III. ESAU AND JACOB

The word God gave to Rebekah about her sons was born out in their temperaments and actions.

Esau, who by all rights should have received the birthright and accompanying blessing, did not appreciate either the position or the privileges associated with it or he would not have held it so lightly as to sell it for a bowl of stew.

And Jacob lives out his name "he supplants," as he first bought the birthright and then deceived Isaac into blessing him over his older brother, thus legally sealing the transfer of position and inheritance.

IV. ISAAC’S ROLE

Isaac's role in the drama is not often mentioned, but it must be asked why, knowing God's words to Rebekah, he determined to bless Esau. His haste and secrecy in arranging the blessing seem out of place for such a grave occasion. Clearly Isaac loves his eldest son - and just as clearly, God intends to bless and promote the younger.

While Scripture does not justify Rebekah's scheme or Jacob's deception, God uses them to further His plan to elevate the undeserving Jacob. The birthright, inheritance, and blessing all are gifts of God, given by His grace and not due to any merit on the part of the recipient.

V. JACOB STEALS ISAAC’S BLESSING

Read: Genesis 27:1-29

[1] When 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."

[2] He said, "Behold, I am old; I do not know the day of my death.

[3] Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and hunt game for me,

[4] and prepare for me savory food, such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat; that I may bless you before I die."

[5] Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it,

[6] Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "I heard your father speak to your brother Esau,

[7] 'Bring me game, and prepare for me savory food, that I may eat it, and bless you before the LORD before I die.'

[8] Now therefore, my son, obey my word as I command you.

[9] Go to the flock, and fetch me two good kids, that I may prepare from them savory food for your father, such as he loves;

[10] and you shall bring it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies."

[11] But Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, "Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man.

[12] Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him, and bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing."

[13] His mother said to him, "Upon me be your curse, my son; only obey my word, and go, fetch them to me."

[14] So he went and took them and brought them to his mother; and his mother prepared savory food, such as his father loved.

[15] Then 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;

[16] and the skins of the kids she put upon his hands and upon the smooth part of his neck;

[17] and she gave the savory food and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob.

[18] So he went in to his father, and said, "My father"; and he said, "Here I am; who are you, my son?"

[19] Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your first-born. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, that you 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, "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 to me, that I may eat of my son's game and bless

you." So he brought it to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank.

[26] Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come near and kiss me, my son."

[27] So he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his garments, and blessed him, and said, "See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the LORD has blessed!

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

[29] Let 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!"

VI. DID JACOB HAVE ANY RIGHTS TO ISAAC'S BLESSING

Jacob has traded with Esau for the birthright; now he goes for the blessing.

- Did Jacob have any rights, humanly speaking, to these things?
- Why do you think Rebekah pushed Jacob to deceive Isaac and get the blessing?

As the second-born son, Jacob had no right to expect blessing or birthright as long as his older brother lived and was in his father's favour. Presumably he knew the circumstances of his birth that led to his name, and possibly Rebekah had told him of the Lord's words to her as well: "The older will serve the younger."

A. Rebekah Plans to Deceive

Rebekah loved Jacob more than his brother (Gen. 25:28) and she would have held God's words close in her heart those 40 years. She is determined that Jacob - and not Esau - will get his father's blessing, and is even willing to take the risk of being cursed to make sure he gets it (Gen. 27:13).

Rebekah will pay a bitter price for her deception!

B. Example of Abraham and Sarah

Where else in Genesis have we read of someone trying to achieve God's will and purpose through his or her own efforts? And what were the results?

Abraham and Sarah took things into their own hands and tried to produce the promised son through Sarah's maid Hagar (Gen. 16). They were successful in the sense that they had a child, but it was not the son God intended and although God did bless Ishmael, the promises were not fulfilled through him.

The results of Abraham and Sarah's efforts were bitterness and discord in the family; division between them; and long lasting trouble between the descendants of Ishmael and Isaac.

Rebekah's and Jacob's efforts to bring about God's will by their own efforts would be equally destructive to their family. Their actions would force Jacob to flee his brother's anger and be separated from his family for 20 years, and he would never see his mother again.

Rebekah's (and Jacob's) actions are not justified; a good end even if promised by God does not justify the use of trickery to get there. But God will make good come of it.

(NOTE: we will read in Gen. 48 of a younger twin being blessed - by a blind Jacob this time - over the older without any trickery or double-dealing.)

VII. ISAAC BLESSES JACOB

Isaac blesses Jacob with richness and abundance from God; he will rule over not just nations and people but over his brothers as well.

- Those who curse him will be cursed, and those who bless Jacob will be blessed.

This benediction of fruitfulness, leadership and blessing echoes God's blessing on Abraham and its promise of a great name and nation and of blessing/cursing on those who bless/curse him.

I. ESAU PLEADS FOR A BLESSING

Read: Genesis 27:30-40

[30] As 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.

[31] He also prepared savory 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."

[32] His father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" He answered, "I am your son, your first-born, Esau."

[33] Then Isaac trembled 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."

[34] When 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!"

[35] But he said, "Your brother came with guile, and he has taken away your blessing."

[36] Esau said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted 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?"

[37] Isaac answered Esau, "Behold, I have made him your lord, 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?"

[38] Esau 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.

[39] Then Isaac his father answered him:

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

*[40] By your sword you shall live,
and you shall serve your brother;
but when you break loose
you shall break his yoke from your neck."*

II. ARE ESAU’S PLEAS EFFECTIVE?

Are Esau's poignant pleas effective? Why or why not?

Esau cries bitterly and begs for even a single blessing that his father may have held back from Jacob, whom he clearly sees as deceiving him out of not just the blessing but the birthright as well.

Esau's sorrow seems to be over his loss; he does not appear to see his own fault in the matter or that he lost his birthright because he did not value it. Instead, he falsely accuses Jacob of having tricked him out of it. It's a case of too little too late for Esau.

Now that he sees what he's lost, it's too late to get it back and he is "rejected."
(Heb. 12:17)

However hard Esau might cry and plead, his father's blessing cannot be revoked. It is legally binding and would be effective even given under mitigating circumstances.

To the ancient world, blessings (and curses as well) had even more power than we give our legal documents: it was believed that the words themselves, spoken under God's authority, actually accomplished what they pronounced.

III. THE RESULTS OF DECEPTION

Jacob, with Rebekah’s help, intentionally deceives his father Isaac to receive the blessing. Jacob deliberately lies to his father. This deceit sets in motion a pattern of dishonesty.

Jacob’s lie initiates a fate for himself that will involve being deceived himself and deceiving others repeatedly before he can be healed and restored to God’s full blessing.

Jacob and Rebekah’s actions would force Jacob to flee Esau’s anger and be separated from his family for 20 years, and Jacob would never see his mother again.

What goes around comes around!

IV. ISAAC’S RESPONSE TO ESAU

Isaac answered Esau's cries with a blessing that served only to highlight the greater blessing given to Jacob:

- Where Jacob will be blessed by God of heaven's dew and of the earth's richness, Esau will dwell away from these things.
- Where Jacob will rule nations and be lord over his brothers, Esau will live by the sword and serve his brother.
- There is but one hope given him, that at some point he will throw off Jacob's yoke from his neck.

6. Hebrews 11:20 tells us that "by faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau."

This blessing is inspired by faith because he who cannot see (literally or figuratively) into the future is sure of what he hopes for - that is, the fulfillment of God's covenant promises of blessing on his children.

As heir and steward of God's covenant, he passed the promises on to the one whom God revealed to Rebekah would rule.

V. JACOB ESCAPES ESAU'S FURY

How does Esau deal with his frustration and anguish over losing HIS birthright and blessing?

Read: Genesis 27:41-46

[41] Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob."

[42] But the words of Esau her older son were told to Rebekah; so she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said to him, "Behold, your brother Esau comforts himself by planning to kill you."

[43] Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; arise, flee to Laban my brother in Haran,

[44] and stay with him a while, until your brother's fury turns away;

[45] until your brother's anger turns away, and he forgets what you have

done to him; then I will send, and fetch you from there. Why should I be bereft of you both in one day?"

[46] Then Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am weary of my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women such as these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?"

Far from forgiving Jacob, Esau "hated Jacob" after losing their father's blessing. He holds onto his grudge, letting it fester into anger and bitterness, then plots to bide his time until Isaac dies, at which time he plans to kill his brother.

A. Rebekah Saves her Sons

In verse 45, Rebekah asks, "why should I be bereft of you both in one day?" What does she mean? How does Rebekah save both her sons from Esau's vengeful plot?

If Esau were to kill Jacob, he would deserve death in return. By sending Jacob away to Laban [Rebekah's brother] until Esau calms down, Rebekah saves not only Jacob's life but Esau's too, from becoming a fugitive from vengeance and punishment.

Rebekah shows that she is a woman of patience and understanding, believing that time and patience will eventually heal the wound between her sons.

Sadly she will never "send, and fetch" her beloved son home again as she intends; she will die before he returns.

B. A Wife for Jacob

Rebekah frames her suggestion to send Jacob to Laban by saying he should find a wife from among her people and not from among the Hittites. This is a veiled criticism of Esau, who had married two Hittite women who have made her life miserable (Gen. 26:34 and 27:46), and further reason for blessing Jacob over his older brother.

VI. REFLECTION

Notice the progression of Esau's reaction to Jacob tricking him out of his birthright: anger and bitterness led to hatred and then to a plot to murder. Are we harbouring anger at someone who has wronged us?

Recognize the danger unresolved anger and bitterness can cause, and resolve not to "give the devil a foothold" (see Eph. 4:26-32) by nurturing them. Pray that God will give us the grace we need to forgive.

Jacob's dilemma - knowing the birthright and blessing would be his and yet having to wait years for a father who preferred his brother - is not unique to him. Are we growing impatient waiting on God? Are we tempted to take things into our own hands? It is always better to wait for God's timing and to allow Him to act.

Let us learn from Jacob, as from Abraham and Sarah, that forcing things might bring about the same result but it will not be without a cost - and ask them to pray for us that we might learn patience.

VII. THE SINFULNESS OF THE PATRIARCHS

“Why does the Bible show us the sinfulness of the patriarchs? Wouldn’t it be better to see perfect examples of virtue and character? Despite the sin of man, God continues to work His plan.

Sons marry pagan women and lie to their father. Women deceive their husbands. One thing is constant. God is faithful. God never changes, never fails,, never deceives, never disappoints.

God can work with sinful human beings and still bring about his perfect plan. God can take our crooked lives and make a straight line of them.

The biblical characters were not perfect and neither are we. God can work with what we have if we but offer it to Him. Simply call upon the Lord and give Him what you have – your life!”

[Come and See Catholic Bible study – Genesis; pg. 129].

Summary

1. God chose Jacob, Isaac's younger son, to carry on His plan and promise of blessing. The fact that Rebekah and Jacob schemed and lied to get that blessing does not mean that God approved their methods. They will pay the consequences in their family life, but God in His sovereignty is able to use their actions for good and to further His purpose.
2. Having once rejected his birthright when he sold it to Jacob for a hot meal, Esau was unable to inherit the blessing when he wanted it.
3. Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future by faith - faith that God would fulfill His covenant promises of blessing on his children.
4. The birthright, inheritance and blessing all are gifts of God, given by His grace and not according to any merit on Jacob's part.