

The Battle for a Father's Blessing | Reading: Genesis 26:34-28:9

Introduction

When at Bible College we did a module called anthropology (study of human cultures). One of the things we used to do in class discussions was compare how our culture did something with how another culture did it. We used to weigh the pros & cons of each. We often started with the assumption our culture was right yet seldom finished with our assumptions completely intact. It was a really good way of broadening our thinking around different topics as well as growing in understanding of other cultures. One of the topics we discussed was marriage. In our culture two people meet, fall in love & get married... but in other cultures parents arrange the marriages of their children... Of course to begin with we thought arranged marriages were ridiculous. However the discipline of discussing it helped us see another side to things. We live in a very individualistic culture ("it's my life I'll marry who I want..."); other cultures are much more family focused ("it's our family so this decision affects us all..."). None of us went home & entrusted our parents with the task of finding a husband or wife for us, but it did help us see we had things to learn from cultures that do things very differently.

The reason this came to mind is because this story opens with Esau taking two Hittite wives, which added difficulty to the lives of Isaac & Rebekah. In fact this seems to be the only thing they agree on in this story. Esau's wives are also referred to in the closing section of the story as well, which led Esau to find a third wife he thought might be more pleasing to parents. These references to Esau's marriages provide the frame around the story we're going to look at today.

Philip Eveson writes; *"The account of how Jacob, not Esau, received the coveted blessing is a marvellous example of Hebrew storytelling. It is full of interest & suspense."* It *"includes intrigue, deception, hatred & separation. There are four characters involved and six scenes."*

Reading the Story – Four Characters, Six Scenes

1. Isaac & Esau Plot (27:1-4)

It was normal custom for a father to gather his sons around him to bless them publically before he died (Gen 49:1-2). Isaac, however, took Esau privately aside & told him his intentions to bless him. In reality Isaac didn't die for another 40 years, so why act so prematurely & secretly? There seems to be something underhanded going on. It often gets overlooked that Isaac made the first move in the deceitful game that unfolds in this story. Isaac would have known the prophecy that the older would serve the younger. He would have known Esau sold his birthright, which the blessing was tied to. Isaac should not have considered giving the blessing to Esau when he knew Jacob was God's choice.

2. Rebekah & Jacob Counterplot (27:5-17)

Rebekah overheard the secret plan & she wasn't going to let her blue eyed boy lose out on the blessing promised to him before birth. She was likely strengthened by her belief in God's prophetic word to her but this does not condone her actions here. She may have felt justified but she should have confronted her husband instead of joining in on the deceitful & underhanded game he had begun. Rebekah knew how to exploit her husband's weak points & hatched her plan with these in view. As an African saying goes, *"the worst enemy is the one who knows you best."*

3. Jacob Deceives Isaac (27:18-29)

Here we reach the nail biting scene of the story where the suspense reaches its climax. Will Isaac fall for it, will Esau return before the crucial moment. Note how all five of Isaac's senses are mentioned in the story. In verse 1 we learned that his eyes were dim, but look how this scene unfolds around his other senses. We see also that Isaac's mind is also sharp for he comments on the speed of his son's return. It sounds like he suspects something & with that the scheme hangs in the balance. Jacob replies & Isaac calls him over to feel him. The suspense rises. Isaac says; **"The voice is Jacob's voice** (O dear, caught out?), **but the hands are the hands of Esau** (Phew, it's not over yet). Isaac's sense of hearing & sense of touch has everything still hanging in the balance. Maybe in old age he didn't fully trust his hearing, but either way the scheme is still alive. Then it was his sense of taste (25) & his sense of smell (27) that fully convinced him it was Esau (maybe the wine helped too). Isaac then blessed Jacob & the prophecy is fulfilled just in the nick of time.

4. Esau Returns to Isaac (27:30-40)

For me this scene contains the key phrase in the story as Isaac comes to terms with what has just happened. The picture we're given is that as soon Jacob goes out, Esau arrives back. When Isaac realised what had happened it says he **"trembled very violently and said, "Who was it then that hunted game & brought it to me, & I ate it all before you came, & I have blessed him? Yes, and he shall be blessed."** That little phrase **"Yes, and he shall be blessed"** is a key phrase for it communicates Isaac's realisation of God's prophetic word being fulfilled; he could not fight the will of God anymore. He was not able to out-plot God's will. Verse 35 confirms Isaac knew he had given the blessing to Jacob & the following verses highlight that he knew the prophecy of the older serving the younger & he knew it had now been fulfilled despite his efforts. In the rest of the scene we also see Esau's anger towards Jacob as well as desperation for a blessing from his dad. Isaac does the best he can.

5. Rebekah Plans Jacob's Escape (27:41-45)

In this fifth scene the focus moves from the will of God being fulfilled to the consequences of Rebekah & Jacob's scheming. Yes Rebekah knew it was God's will for Jacob to receive the blessing & this certainly

influenced her actions (as well as him being her favourite son). However was it her place to try to manipulate the fulfilment of prophecy? Or we could ask; would it still have been fulfilled if she hadn't have done what she done? Should she simply have confronted her husband's underhanded plan when she overheard him? There are unanswered 'what ifs' deliberately left hanging in this story. What we are shown clearly is the consequences to Rebekah & Jacob's deception. The will of God cannot be stopped as Isaac learned, but at the same time it cannot be manipulated into fulfilment by human schemes without consequences. Rebekah & Jacob learned this lesson. God is sovereign & **"works all things according to the counsel of his will"** (Eph 1:11) but people are still responsible for their sinful & twisted actions. Both these truths are held up in the unfolding of this family drama.

6. Rebekah & Isaac Finally Talk (27:46-28:5)

For the first time in the story we see Rebekah & Isaac interacting. In the scene Rebekah smartly uses the one thing they were both agreed on – their dislike of Esau's wives – to secure Jacob's safety. For her plan to succeed she needed Isaac on board & she knew how to work it. With Rebekah's encouragement, Isaac went to Jacob & urged him to go to Rebekah's home place Padan Aram. Isaac blessed him with an even richer blessing as he went. In the remainder of the story we see that Esau noticed all this & sought out a new wife in hope of earning his parents approval.

3 points from in the story

- 1. You cannot fight God's will & win.**
- 2. God is sovereign but humans are responsible for their actions.**

Culture or custom could not change God's choice; God is free from such things & he is the only one who has complete free will in all his purposes, plans & actions. Neither could Isaac's favouritism of Esau change God's choice. In Romans 9 the apostle Paul uses this account to underline God's sovereign freedom & choice. Paul writes in verses 10-13 of that chapter; **"when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not born & had done nothing good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger". As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."** Paul uses this story to underline God's sovereign grace. God's choice of Jacob was not because Jacob was nicer or morally superior to Esau, in many ways he wasn't, no it was the result of God's freedom to show mercy to who he wills, period. This is what it means for grace to be grace... Likewise we are not saved because of good or bad we've done in comparison to others but because of God's sovereign grace.

It was God's will to bless Jacob. Yet the wider story shows it was also Esau's fault that he lost his birthright & blessing... & shows Jacob & Rebekah reaped consequences for their deceit. God's sovereign will

prevailed yet people were still responsible for their actions, both sides are true in this story & in the world today!

3. The Importance & Power of Blessing

The word blessing, bless or blessed is mentioned 19 times in our reading. It is the big idea. On a human level we can see a battle for parental approval, especially a father's approval. We can clearly see how Isaac & Rebekah playing favourites had negative effects on their sons. There is a lesson to note for all parents here. This seeking of a father's approval runs right through the story. At the very end we see Esau taking a third wife when he sees his first two did not please his father. On a human level this story is a battle for a father's approval.

On a divine level however we see it was a battle for Divine blessing & we can also see the irrevocable power of this blessing from God. This was no weak blessing, it had deep spiritual significance. It included satisfaction, provision, promotion & protection & it was connected to the unfolding purpose of God towards the coming of the Christ. The blessing of God was everything in this story, the battle in the story highlights this, the lengths they were prepared to go & the desperation shown by Esau when he realised Jacob got there first. The blessing of their father was everything.

Conclusion: Blessed With Every Spiritual Blessing in Christ

Esau & Jacob battled for the blessing of their father because only one of them could have it. But do you know something powerful? As brothers & sisters in Christ we do not have to battle for our heavenly fathers blessing because we all already have it. Jacob's elder brother Esau obeyed his father's plot to steal the blessing from Jacob & it failed. Jesus our elder brother obeyed the Father's plan to secure God's blessing for us & it succeeded! That is good news for all of us! As brothers & sisters in Christ we do not have to battle or compete for our Father's blessing!!! We can each know his approval & blessing in Christ & it is irrevocable! It is grace, grace, grace... Since God's will was done in this story Jacob went on to have twelve sons who became the 12 tribes of Israel & out of line of one of the those tribes, Judah, the ultimate blessed one came & in him we can all know the Father's blessing! **Listen to how Paul puts this in Ephesians 1:3-14.** Let the power of this sink in... In Christ you have the Father's blessing & nothing can undo it!

Study sources used for this sermon

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