

Genesis 27:1 – 28:9

^{27:1} Now it came about, when Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see, that he called his older son Esau and said to him, ‘My son.’ And he said to him, ‘Here I am.’ ² Isaac said, ‘Behold now, I am old and I do not know the day of my death. ³ Now then, please take your gear, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me; ⁴ and prepare a savory dish for me such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, so that my soul may bless you before I die.’ ⁵ Rebekah was listening while Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game to bring home, ⁶ Rebekah said to her son Jacob, ‘Behold, I heard your father speak to your brother Esau, saying, ⁷ ‘Bring me some game and prepare a savory dish for me, that I may eat, and bless you in the presence of the LORD before my death.’ ⁸ Now therefore, my son, listen to me as I command you. ⁹ Go now to the flock and bring me two choice young goats from there, that I may prepare them as a savory dish for your father, such as he loves. ¹⁰ Then you shall bring it to your father, that he may eat, so that he may bless you before his death.’ ¹¹ Jacob answered his mother Rebekah, ‘Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man and I am a smooth man. ¹² Perhaps my father will feel me, then I will be as a deceiver in his sight, and I will bring upon myself a curse and not a blessing.’ ¹³ But his mother said to him, ‘Your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, get them for me.’ ¹⁴ So he went and got them, and brought them to his mother; and his mother made savory food such as his father loved. ¹⁵ Then Rebekah took the best garments of Esau her elder son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. ¹⁶ And she put the skins of the young goats on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. ¹⁷ She also gave the savory food and the bread, which she had made, to her son Jacob.

^{27:18} Then he came 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 firstborn; I have done as you told me. Get up, please, sit and eat of my game, that you may bless me.’ ²⁰ Isaac said to his son, ‘How is it that you have it so quickly, my son?’ And he said, ‘Because the LORD your God caused it to happen to me.’ ²¹ Then Isaac said to Jacob, ‘Please come close, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not.’ ²² So Jacob came close to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, ‘The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.’ ²³ He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau’s hands; so he blessed him. ²⁴ And he said, ‘Are you really my son Esau?’ And he said, ‘I am.’ ²⁵ So he said, ‘Bring it to me, and I will eat of my son’s game, that I may bless you.’ And he brought it to him, and he ate; he also brought him wine and he drank. ²⁶ Then his father Isaac said to him, ‘Please come close and kiss me, my son.’ ²⁷ So he came close and kissed him; and when he smelled the smell of his garments, he blessed him and said, ‘See, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the LORD has blessed; ²⁸ now may God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and an abundance of grain and new wine; ²⁹ may peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you; be master of your brothers, and may your mother’s sons bow down to you. Cursed be those who curse you; and blessed be those who bless you.’

^{27:30} Now it came about, as soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had hardly gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting. ³¹ Then he also made 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 Isaac his father said to him, 'Who are you?' And he said, 'I am your son, your firstborn, Esau.' ³³ Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, 'Who was he then that hunted game and brought it to me, so that I ate of all of it before you came, and 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 And he said, 'Your brother came deceitfully and has taken away your blessing.' ³⁶ Then he 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.' And he said, 'Have you not reserved a blessing for me?' ³⁷ But Isaac replied to Esau, 'Behold, I have made him your master, and all his relatives I have given to him as servants; and with grain and new wine I have sustained him. Now as for you then, what can I do, my son?' ³⁸ Esau said to his father, 'Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father.' So Esau lifted his voice and wept. ³⁹ Then Isaac his father answered and said to him, 'Behold, away from the fertility of the earth shall be your dwelling, and away from the dew of heaven from above. ⁴⁰ By your sword you shall live, and your brother you shall serve; but it shall come about when you become restless, that you will break his yoke from your neck.' ⁴¹ So Esau bore a grudge against 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 near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.'

^{27:42} Now when the words of her elder son Esau were reported to Rebekah, she sent and called her younger son Jacob, and said to him, 'Behold your brother Esau is consoling himself concerning you by planning to kill you. ⁴³ Now therefore, my son, obey my voice, and arise, flee to Haran, to my brother Laban! ⁴⁴ Stay with him a few days, until your brother's fury subsides, ⁴⁵ until your brother's anger against you subsides and he forgets what you did to him. Then I will send and get you from there. Why should I be bereaved of you both in one day?' ⁴⁶ Rebekah said to Isaac, 'I am tired of living because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife from the daughters of Heth, like these, from the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?' ^{28:1} So Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and charged him, and said to him, 'You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. ² Arise, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father; and from there take to yourself a wife from the daughters of Laban your mother's brother. ³ May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. ⁴ May He also give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your descendants with you, that you may possess the land of your sojournings, which God gave to Abraham.' ⁵ Then Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Paddan-aram to Laban, son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau. ⁶ Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-aram to take to himself a wife from there, and that when he blessed him he charged him, saying, 'You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan,' ⁷ and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Paddan-aram. ⁸ So Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan displeased his father Isaac; ⁹ and Esau went to Ishmael, and married, besides the wives that he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth.

Historical and Cultural Background

- *God Was Developing Partners to Restore His Garden:* He taught Abraham and Sarah to live by His promises, which He spoke verbally to them. While God blessed many people with fruitfulness and promises of abundance, God made a special promise to defeat evil through a 'son of Eve,' a 'seed of the woman,' that is, a human hero (Gen.3:14 – 15) who would come through Abraham and Sarah's biological descendants and bless the whole world (Gen.12:1 – 3). So living by hope and faith in God was vital.
- *Isaac and Esau:* Father and son, who were living by their stomachs. Isaac favored Esau because he liked meat, and Esau was a good hunter (Gen.25:28). Esau traded his birthright to Jacob for stew (Gen.25:29 – 34). There is a wordplay: Esau was Isaac's 'firstborn' (*haberah*) who longed for his father to 'bless' (*barak*) him, but 'wept' instead (*yebek*).
- *Jacob:* Not as hedonistic as his brother Esau, but arguably driven by his appetites in a different way. His name means 'supplanter' and/or 'heel' because he came out of Rebekah's womb holding Esau's heel.
- *Rebekah:* Rebekah exercised great faith and hope when she left her family (Gen.24). God spoke to her, not Isaac, about their children (Gen.25:22 – 26). Rebekah clothed Jacob in animal skins like God clothed Adam and Eve in animal skins after the fall (Gen.3:21).

Questions

1. We know from the last passage that God told Isaac and Rebekah the prophecy that the older will serve the younger. Why does Isaac try to bless Esau, the older, instead of Jacob, the younger?
 - a. Isaac has become a very sensual person, liking meaty, savory food. So he favors Esau in defiance of God's word
 - b. Isaac has affection for Esau without righteousness; notice that Esau is even more of a sensualist; he marries not one but two women and they are both Canaanites
 - c. Jacob, meanwhile, seems to have become a trickster. Does that run on his mother's side of the family? Rebekah is often criticized for being deceptive. I disagree with that criticism. But we will look at that carefully.
2. Do you think that Rebekah told Isaac what God told her? I think so, but we kind of entertain both possibilities as readers. It's kind of like the questions of whether Adam added the 'do not touch it' when he passed along the word to Eve, or whether Adam was with Eve the whole time while Eve was talking with the serpent.
 - a. Possibly Rebekah tried to persuade Isaac and then gave up.
 - b. Possibly Rebekah saw that it was a lost cause from the start.
3. How could the family have partnered with God despite their father's favoritism and stomach-driven life?
 - a. Esau could have experienced a dying-rising by letting go of the blessing, living just outside the promised land, and being a neighbor to Jacob's descendants.
 - b. Isaac could have experienced a dying-rising by letting go of his appetite and his favoritism, caring about the future and what God intended for the future.
 - c. Jacob could have experienced a dying-rising by not having to grasp and scheme for his father's blessing
4. Instead, how do Rebekah and Jacob go into action?
 - a. Isaac is trying to manipulate the blessing to give it to his favorite son. Rebekah is not the one who is manipulative, although sometimes we mistakenly see it that way. For a good rebuttal to that view, see <http://www.cbeinternational.org/blogs/rebekah-guardian-and-protector-israel>. I think Rebekah simply knows that Isaac has become a stomach. Isaac recognized Jacob's voice. So he could have investigated more. He chose not to because he didn't want to bite the hand that fed him! Rebekah was merely directing Isaac's self-obsessed appetite. That's what you get when you make yourself into a stomach.
 - b. Rebekah has faith and obedience. She had heard the word of God about the two nations in her womb, and the older serving the younger. She is seeing this situation as the time that God is acting through her. It's very important that God spoke to Rebekah FIRST. As with Abraham and Sarah, clearly the married couple as parents were supposed to act together and bless their child together.
 - c. Rebekah acts like God! She clothes his son with animal skins, like God clothed Adam and Eve with animal skins after the fall. In both cases, it is protective and so that the heir can inherit the intended blessing. She may also be willing to take the curse of Isaac upon herself, if it came to that. But does this mean that deception is acceptable? No, because...
 - d. Rebekah is acting in the oneness of her marriage with Isaac. Isaac hesitated and could have asked for help. He had suspicions. But in the end, he just wanted to bless the hand that fed him.
 - e. Also, can Isaac give the blessing by himself? No. I believe this is God telling Isaac through Rebekah that he can't pass down the blessing/inheritance by himself. So this is not God approving of deception, or using any means necessary. It is not a case of the ends justifies the means. It is a very specific case of a married couple and the agreement with God and with each other that must unfold.
 - f. This story seems to be making an ethical point. Recall how God has been trying to restore marriage back to His creation vision. With Abraham and Sarah, it was necessary to cut off certain attitudes from them, mostly Abraham, but also Sarah in her view that using Hagar as a surrogate mother was fine. Abraham had to give up the cultural power given to him as a man to name his own heir, to use a surrogate mother, to find another wife. It had to be Sarah, the true wife. Rebekah knows this story and knows what God has been doing.
 - i. Marriage is meant to be lived out in partnership, with each other and with God. In the New Testament, even in cases when one spouse is sinning and resisting God, the other spouse still has to follow Jesus, and raise their children in the faith (1 Cor.7:12 – 16).

- ii. Community with other people in general is meant to be lived out in partnership, with each other and with God.
 - iii. Application:
- 5. But who was actually disobeying God? Isaac!
 - a. Application: When we make decisions according to our appetites, how do we treat people? Especially those close to us?
 - b. We treat people not according to how God sees them, but how we experience them
 - c. Even our appetite for appreciation and love can become a sinful basis on which to treat people
- 6. Why does Isaac have only one blessing to give?
 - a. This might have been done with others standing outside the tent; it was public; it was like a will
 - b. Isaac recognized that he had sinned and yet he had been outsmarted
 - c. Isaac recognized that somehow God's blessing had genuinely passed to Jacob. It seems like the whole family already knew that Esau had sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew, in the last section.
- 7. Why does Isaac say that Esau will live 'away from the fertility of the earth...and...the dew of heaven from above'? And then foretell that, 'By your sword you shall live, and your brother you shall serve; but it shall come about when you become restless, that you will break his yoke from your neck' (Gen.27:39 – 40)?
 - a. He knows from the original prophecy given to Rebekah, 'Two nations are in your womb; and two peoples will be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; and the older shall serve the younger' (26:23).
 - b. Perhaps Isaac didn't believe the word given to him through Rebekah because *he didn't want to believe it*. His appetite for meat as Esau grew up overrode his spiritual discernment.
 - c. He finally acknowledges with true insight what will happen in the future regarding the descendants of his two sons.
 - d. Notice, though, that by this time, Isaac's words are more developed than the original prophecy to Rebekah in Genesis 26:23. The original prophecy left open the possibility that there could have been a willing and grateful relationship between Esau and Jacob, even if Esau's descendants are not the bearers of God's covenant. But now, Isaac's favoritism and carnal appetites have trained his sons in a certain direction.
 - e. Application: When we make decisions according to our appetites, other people who listen to the Word of God will need to make decisions about us.
 - i. E.g. A pastor being removed from his/her position because of sexual harassment, which is driven by an appetite for emotional appreciation and sexual attention
 - f. Application: Within ourselves, we have to make God's word master our appetites. When we make decisions according to our appetites, how do we treat God's word? Especially when it's given to us through another person?
 - i. Illus: a person resisting concerns from friends about dating a non-Christian, or not keeping appropriate boundaries in a dating relationship generally (1 Cor.7)
 - ii. Illus: a person resisting concerns about their alcohol consumption (Eph.5:18)
 - iii. Illus: a person resisting concerns about mission and reaching out to non-Christians