



Sunday School Lesson
Genesis 27:1-40
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In this continuation of the study of Jacob's life story from last week, we find Jacob receiving his father's blessing at the end of Isaac's life. The earlier selling of the birthright by Esau ([25:29-34](#)) now culminates in the father's blessing of Jacob, again by the use of devious means on Jacob's part. This pattern of misbehavior typified most of Jacob's life.

I Context

The basic contextual issues for chapter 27 remain much the same as they were for chapter 25. You can check this out in the discussion posted at Cranfordville.com under [Bible Studies](#).

a. Historical

External History. The history of the composition of the book of Genesis has already been discussed in the study on chapter 25, and thus will not be repeated here. Go to [that study](#) for the details.

Internal History. The internal history has somewhat changed from the previous study in chapter 25 on the beginning of Jacob's life. Jacob is a young man now facing the future with an aging father who is facing death. They are still living in the area around Beersheba in southern Palestine.

b. Literary

Without repeating these issues discussed in the [chapter 25 study](#), just a summation will suffice. Our passage falls in the so-called Jacob Story section (chaps 25-36) of the patriarchal history section (chaps 12-50) of Genesis. Perhaps some attention to the flow of the Jacob Story will add more insight into our understanding of chapter 27.

In the Genesis volume of *Interpretation Commentary* (iPreach, online), a proposal is made which helps to identify how the Jacob story is set up in its primary elements:

- [Conflict with Esau](#) (25:19-34; 27:1-45)
- [Conflict with Laban](#) (29:1-30; 30:25-31:42)
- Birth Narratives** (29:31-30:24)
- [Covenant with Laban](#) (31:43-55)
- [Reconciliation with Esau](#) (32:1-21; 33:1-17)

"The materials in 33:18 — 36:43 occur outside the main dramatic structure of the narrative. They

serve to form a transition and to give closure to the narrative. In these materials three things are evident: (a) The family now settled in the land (cf. 33:17) faces new problems of security and fidelity in a different context. (b) Jacob's family is in some disarray. The details are given now which the earlier taut narrative did not include. (c) The reconciled brother Esau is still very much in view and is valued positively." (*Interpretation, Genesis*)

Another summary is also helpful from the *New Interpreter's Bible, Genesis* (iPreach online): "One may outline the Jacob story broadly as a journey: flight from Canaan to Haran and back to Canaan. To this we should add the journey through the land of promise in 33:18–35:27, after the return. This itinerary gives to the story a strong sense of movement, presenting a person and a family on the go, never staying in one spot for too long. The journeys both within and without the promised land mirror the life of later Israel, especially the experiences of exodus and exile. The most basic movement in the Jacob story is linear, climaxing in the settlement of Jacob and his family in the land of promise."

To understand the context of our passage 27:1-40, then, is to see this as the second segment of conflict with Esau (25:19-34 followed by 27:1-45). Chapter 26 interrupts this flow with a brief summary of the Isaac Story. This conflict with Esau will be followed by conflict with his father-in-law to be and uncle, Laban. The heart of the Jacob Story is the birth of the several sons from his wives and their slave girls: from wife Leah came Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulum; from Leah's slave girl Zilpah came Gad and Asher; from wife Rachel came Joseph; from Rachel's slave girl Bilhah came Dan and Naphtali. From these sons came ten of the twelve tribes of the nation Israel. From the high point of the birth narratives the story moves generally along more positive lines with reconciliation first with Laban and later with Esau. Problems and dysfunctionality still exist but healing of family relationships comes to center stage in these later narratives.

II. Message

The internal structure of the passage is relatively simple and falls into four basic scenes: (1) Isaac prepares to bless his older son (vv. 1-4), (2) Rebekah schemes for her younger son Jacob (vv. 5-17), (3) the younger son Jacob deceives his father Isaac (vv. 18-29) and (4) the father Isaac grieves with his older son Esau (vv. 30-40).

a. Isaac prepares to bless his older son (vv. 1-4)

NASB

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."

NRSV

1 When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called his elder son Esau and said to him, "My son"; and he answered, "Here I am." 2 He said, "See, 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 Then prepare for me savory food, such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may bless you before I die."

NLT

1 When Isaac was old and almost blind, he called for Esau, his older son, and said, "My son?" "Yes, Father?" Esau replied. 2 "I am an old man now," Isaac said, "and I expect every day to be my last. 3 Take your bow and a quiver full of arrows out into the open country, and hunt some wild game for me. 4 Prepare it just the way I like it so it's savory and good, and bring it here for me to eat. Then I will pronounce the blessing that belongs to you, my first-born son, before I die."

Comments:

Scene 1 here has some symmetry to the final scene in vv. 30-40 with the common elements of Isaac and Esau, first in great expectation and then in bitter disappointment. The two intervening scenes portray

the deception first by the mother (vv. 5-17) and then by the younger son (vv. 18-29) which turn happiness into bitterness, both for father and older son.

The beginning scene depicts a very natural and traditional rite in the ancient Semitic world: the giving of the final blessing by the dying father to the oldest son. This involved the transfer to leadership of the clan from the father to the oldest son. He in effect took his father's place as leader of the family; this meant the assuming of all of the power and privileges of the father. All of the brothers and sisters were expected to respect the oldest son's role as new leader at the same level they had shown to their father.

Although difficult to determine with exactness, some connection between the 'blessing' (brk, בֵּרַךְ) here and the birthright (bkrh, בְּכֹרָה) in chap. 25 most likely exists. Both have to do with passing on inheritance to the firstborn son. Perhaps the point of the two narratives is simply to highlight the abuse of Esau by Jacob first between the two brothers and then with their father.

What are some of the ramifications to this? The Genesis volume of *Interpretation Commentary* contains a helpful summary of some of these:

a. The pursuit of blessing characterizes existence as intergenerational. Parents and children have a deep stake in each others' destinies. The narrative refutes every notion of individualism which assumes that every individual life and, indeed, every generation is discreet and on its own. The generations are inalienably and terrifyingly bound together (cf. Heb. 11:39-40).

b. The narrative presumes that symbolic actions have genuine and abiding power. Symbolic actions (like laying on hands) are not empty gestures signifying nothing. This ritual act is a decisive event in which something has been done irrevocably (cf. 48:18-19). More happens than meets the eye.

c. This narrative assumes and affirms that spoken words shape human life. Language is not simply an exercise in propaganda and manipulation (as it tends to be in our modern world). Words here are not a matter of indifference which may be attended to or not, as is convenient. Here, when words are spoken by authoritative persons in proper contexts, they have a substance. They mean what they say. They must be handled with respect, for they are means toward life or death (cf. James 3:10).

d. This narrative offers a fresh discernment of the nature of power. It eschews mechanistic views which equate power with force. It understands that power, the capacity to shape the future, lies not in weapons and arms, but in the use of language, gesture, and symbol.

What can we learn from this? For one thing, the society of Isaac and Esau is drastically different than our contemporary US society. Along life's journey, especially at crucial turning points in our lives such as leaving home for college, getting married etc., we may seek our father's blessing for what we have decided to do. This means we desire his approval for our decision. If he grants it fine. But if he withholds it, the son can continue on with his decision. But the 'blessing' in our text is a horse of an entirely different color! Blessing mean assuming a position of absolute power over your father's family. Along with it came ownership of everything your father had possessed, including his slave girls. Your brothers and sisters were expected to obey you just as they had their father. Thus, a question to ponder: how much do the cultural patterns we live in shape our religious beliefs? Additionally, when such huge cultural gaps exist between 'then' and 'now' in a scripture passage, how much application from these texts can we legitimately make?

Obviously, the concept of 'blessing' is not a possible bridge from the 'then' to the 'now' meaning of this scripture passage. Other connecting links need to be explored. The above insights from the *Interpretation Commentary* provide some help. In the world of Isaac, words meant something. When they expressed promise, the promise was absolutely binding. Thus words contained both possible risk and potential benefit. Caution needed to be exercised in expressing them. How much could we learn from this! With the bombardment of our ears with millions of words daily, they tend to lose meaning. Promises made in words, especially orally spoken words, often mean nothing.

Another possible connecting link relates to the significance of ritual and symbolic actions. In Isaac's world they conveyed significant meaning and were important vehicles for passing down important values and for giving order and stability to family. What kind of family rituals and symbols exist in your family? Do you value them? How do you use them as teaching instruments to children and grandchildren?

b. Rebekah schemes for her younger son Jacob (vv. 5-17)

NASB

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.

Comments:

Scene 2 introduces the first of a two stage plot of deception. In the Genesis volume of the *Believer's Church Bible Commentary* is a helpful summary (iPreach online):

Scene 2 introduces a direct complication to the normal process of Isaac's blessing his older son. Rebekah conspires to have that blessing go to Jacob. In the dialogue between Rebekah and Jacob (v. 6-13). the mother lays out her plan to deceive Isaac. Jacob objects,

NRSV

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 say to your brother Esau, 7 "Bring me game, and prepare for me savory food to eat, that I may 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 get me two choice kids, so that I may prepare from them savory food for your father, such as he likes; 10 and you shall take it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies." 11 But Jacob said to his mother Rebekah, "Look, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a man of smooth skin. 12 Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him, and bring a curse on myself and not a blessing." 13 His mother said to him, "Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my word, and go, get them for me." 14 So he went and got 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 her elder son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them on her younger son Jacob; 16 and she put the skins of the kids on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. 17 Then she handed the savory food, and the bread that she had prepared, to her son Jacob.

NLT

5 But Rebekah overheard the conversation. So when Esau left to hunt for the wild game, 6 she said to her son Jacob, "I overheard your father asking Esau 7 to prepare him a delicious meal of wild game. He wants to bless Esau in the LORD's presence before he dies. 8 Now, my son, do exactly as I tell you. 9 Go out to the flocks and bring me two fine young goats. I'll prepare your father's favorite dish from them. 10 Take the food to your father; then he can eat it and bless you instead of Esau before he dies." 11 "But Mother!" Jacob replied. "He won't be fooled that easily. Think how hairy Esau is and how smooth my skin is! 12 What if my father touches me? He'll see that I'm trying to trick him, and then he'll curse me instead of blessing me." 13 "Let the curse fall on me, dear son," said Rebekah. "Just do what I tell you. Go out and get the goats." 14 So Jacob followed his mother's instructions, bringing her the two goats. She took them and cooked a delicious meat dish, just the way Isaac liked it. 15 Then she took Esau's best clothes, which were there in the house, and dressed Jacob with them. 16 She made him a pair of gloves from the hairy skin of the young goats, and she fastened a strip of the goat's skin around his neck. 17 Then she gave him the meat dish, with its rich aroma, and some freshly baked bread.

not, as the reader might expect, to the fact of deception, but to the plan — he fears that the deception might not work: he might end up cursed instead of blessed (vv. 11-12). Rebekah dismisses his worry, agreeing to accept on herself any negative consequence. Now we have a different alignment in the family than we found in the prologue to this unit (26:34-35). There Isaac and Rebekah were together against Esau. Here we find the acting out of coalitions which the narrator gave us in the saga's introduction: Isaac and Esau; Rebekah and Jacob (25:28).

Rebekah takes the initiative to direct events away from their natural course. This redirection will take the family toward the end anticipated by the divine oracle which attended Rebekah's pregnancy (25:23). This leaves the readers caught between the divine oracle, which expected the younger to be the dominant son, and the devious maneuvering of the mother and younger son to accomplish that fact. Nowhere does the faith tradition excuse deception of the blind and deaf (Lev. 19:14; Deut. 27:18 von Rad, 1973: 277). Nevertheless, the narrative proceeds without evaluating the actions of the family. The story tells itself, creating its own drama and ambiguity.

Quite interesting is the leadership role of the mother in this deception. Had there been multiple wives, one perhaps could more easily understand how one of the wives could plot to advance the cause of her favorite son ahead of the sons of other wives. Such happened with frequency in the ancient polygamous society, e.g., David's and Solomon's situations much later. Yet, amazingly, Isaac and Rebekah were in a monogamous marriage -- something almost unheard of in that society. Thus when Rebekah plotted to advance Jacob over Esau, she was pitting her own two sons against one another. What we're seeing here is the continuation of the favoritism of Jacob by his mother that was indicated earlier in 25:28, "Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob."

What insights for us can be gleaned from this text? For one thing, when devotion to a child leads a parent to override tradition and what is proper in order to engage in deception to advance the child's situation, that parent is not actually helping the child. As the subsequent narratives will illustrate, this came close to costing this mother the life of this beloved son. At best, she would spend the next several decades with this son in another part of the world and cut off from contact with her. The missed pleasures of being with grandchildren when they were born and growing up were but a part of the price she paid. How many families in our society are wrecked by this sort of thing? If we knew the exact number, it would unnerve us tremendously. Stable society depends on good parenting practices.

c. The younger son Jacob deceives his father Isaac (vv. 18-29)

NASB

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,

NRSV

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 firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, so 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 up to his father Isaac, who felt him and said, "The voice

NLT

18 Jacob carried the platter of food to his father and said, "My father?" "Yes, my son," he answered. "Who is it — Esau or Jacob?" 19 Jacob replied, "It's Esau, your older son. I've done as you told me. Here is the wild game, cooked the way you like it. Sit up and eat it so you can give me your blessing." 20 Isaac asked, "How were you able to find it so quickly, my son?" "Because the LORD your God put it in my path!" Jacob replied. 21 Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Come over here. I want to touch you to make sure you really are Esau." 22 So Jacob went over

"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."

is Jacob's voice, 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 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, "Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that 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!"

to his father, and Isaac touched him. "The voice is Jacob's, but the hands are Esau's," Isaac said to himself. 23 But he did not recognize Jacob because Jacob's hands felt hairy just like Esau's. So Isaac pronounced his blessing on Jacob. 24 "Are you really my son Esau?" he asked. "Yes, of course," Jacob replied. 25 Then Isaac said, "Now, my son, bring me the meat. I will eat it, and then I will give you my blessing." So Jacob took the food over to his father, and Isaac ate it. He also drank the wine that Jacob served him. Then Isaac said, 26 "Come here and kiss me, my son." 27 So Jacob went over and kissed him. And when Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he was finally convinced, and he blessed his son. He said, "The smell of my son is the good smell of the open fields that the LORD has blessed. 28 May God always give you plenty of dew for healthy crops and good harvests of grain and wine. 29 May many nations become your servants. May you be the master of your brothers. May all your mother's sons bow low before you. All who curse you are cursed, and all who bless you are blessed."

Comments:

Again the comments from the Genesis volume of the Believer's Church Bible Commentary (iPreach online) are helpful:

This scene focuses on the dialogue between Isaac and his son; but which son? It is a complicated dialogue in which Isaac twice blesses the son standing before him (vv. 23, 27). Perhaps some of its complicated character can be traced to changes that came about as this story was passed on in different locales and through many generations. But, however it happened, the final dialogue creates an intense encounter in which Isaac cannot figure out and also cannot quite trust what he is told. Jacob, in turn, faces the danger that his father will discover the truth. The peril of that danger ebbs and flows throughout the encounter. It looks as if the danger has passed with the statement in verse 23 that Isaac had blessed the son before him, only to erupt again with the father's next speech: Are you really my son Esau? (v. 24).

In his speeches in the dialogue, Isaac constantly seeks to unravel the mystery standing before him. Precluded by age from using sight, he tries to take in the data provided by sound and touch, smell and taste. The results are confusing. The food tastes like the foods he enjoys with Esau. Touch pictures for him the hair-covered body of his older son. The odor of the garments reflects the life of his hunting and herding son. Only sound gave cause to wonder. The words declared the son to be Esau, but the sound was that of Jacob. How can he be sure?

Isaac's inquiry prompts Jacob to reiterate in all ways the deception he and Rebekah have arranged. Occasionally the dialogue requires Jacob to invent explanations quickly. The most intriguing of these comes in response to Isaac's wondering how the food could have been prepared so quickly after his request. Jacob replies, "Yahweh, your God, brought about my success" (v. 20). With that, Jacob has pulled God into the deception, dramatically using the divine name. Yet the divine oracle at Rebekah's pregnancy (25:23) expects the primacy of Jacob which this scheme intends to produce. Perhaps hidden amidst the deception and exploitation. God has worked in ways beyond the provision of a quick and tasty meal for a dying father.

It is a kiss that finally convinces the blind man and completes the betrayal (v. 27). The blessing pronounced by Isaac announces, first, fertility for the fields, and second, political prominence (vv. 28-29). The third element in the blessing makes the success of others dependent on their relationship to Jacob. With that blessing, the scene abruptly closes. [*Blessing in Genesis*, p. 312.]

In scene three the plan of deception is successfully carried out. Jacob has been well prepared by his mother and is able to overcome every test by his aged father. The blessing of Isaac (vv. 27b-29) emphasizes fertility and dominion. Many years later, Jacob would pronounce a somewhat similar blessing on two of his ten sons, Judah and Joseph (49:8-12, 22-26).

What can be gleaned from this passage? The narrative carries us into the flow of events with mixed feelings. The promises of God to Abraham seemingly are being jeopardized by the deceitfulness of this son. Why doesn't God do something to override Jacob's -- and his mother's -- casting aside of proper behavior? Yet, the ancient Hebrew narrator won't relieve our frustration. Rather dispassionately he carries us through the events without directly casting judgment on Jacob. From the larger story we know that Jacob is the heroic figure, but we don't like heroes who cheat, lie and deceive. We want them to be pure and pristine. But Jacob is anything but that! His actions are repugnant and repulsive.

Maybe we need to dig deeper in order to see what should be seen here. When surrounded by overwhelming evil in our world, do you ever wonder why God doesn't just zap all this into oblivion? How can good come in such a sorry situation? The Hebrew narrator has already alerted us to the belief that Jacob was destined to be the vehicle through which God would carry out his promise to Abraham. The marvel is that in spite of human evil God finds ways to do what He wants done. And do so, without sacrificing human freedom or accountability. God used the deception of Rebekah and Jacob for good eventually, but it would be a gross misinterpretation of the text to claim that God caused them to deceive Isaac. In this skill that God possesses we can take consolation that He can get things done through our lives -- in spite of us.

d. The father Isaac grieves with his older son Esau (vv. 30-40)

NASB

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

NRSV

30 As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of his father Isaac, his brother Esau 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 sit up and eat of his son's game, so that you may bless me." 32 His father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" He answered, "I am your firstborn son, Esau." 33 Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, "Who was it then that hunted game and

NLT

30 As soon as Isaac had blessed Jacob, and almost before Jacob had left his father, Esau returned from his hunting trip. 31 Esau prepared his father's favorite meat dish and brought it to him. Then he said, "I'm back, Father, and I have the wild game. Sit up and eat it so you can give me your blessing." 32 But Isaac asked him, "Who are you?" "Why, it's me, of course!" he replied. "It's Esau, your older son." 33 Isaac began to tremble uncontrollably and said, "Then who was it that just served

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."

Comments:

Note the helpful summary from the Genesis volume of the *Believer's Church Bible Commentary* (iPreach online):

Immediately, according to the narrative, Esau arrives at Isaac's side. The narrator makes the reader anticipate that a slightly earlier arrival would have changed the end of the tale (v. 30). The dialogue between father and older son reaches deep into the rage, despair, and grief that comes when a future has been irretrievably lost to the scheming deception of others. Esau begins offering his father the requested food (note that with Jacob much the same dialogue occurs but in different order, 27:18-19). Isaac asks the question debated in Scene 3: Who are you? (v.32). Hearing his son's response, Isaac shakes uncontrollably and asks a question which needs no answer: Whom did I bless before you? (v. 33).

brought it to me, and I ate it all before you came, and I have blessed him?— yes, and blessed he shall be!" 34 When Esau heard his father's words, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me, me also, father!" 35 But he said, "Your brother came deceitfully, 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 look, now he has taken away my blessing." Then he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" 37 Isaac answered Esau, "I have already made him your lord, and I have given him all his brothers as 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 only one blessing, father? Bless me, me also, father!" And Esau lifted up his voice and wept. 39 Then his father Isaac answered him: "See, away from the fatness of the earth shall your home 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."

me wild game? I have already eaten it, and I blessed him with an irrevocable blessing before you came." 34 When Esau understood, he let out a loud and bitter cry. "O my father, bless me, too!" he begged. 35 But Isaac said, "Your brother was here, and he tricked me. He has carried away your blessing." 36 Esau said bitterly, "No wonder his name is Jacob, for he has deceived me twice, first taking my birthright and now stealing my blessing. Oh, haven't you saved even one blessing for me?" 37 Isaac said to Esau, "I have made Jacob your master and have declared that all his brothers will be his servants. I have guaranteed him an abundance of grain and wine – what is there left to give?" 38 Esau pleaded, "Not one blessing left for me? O my father, bless me, too!" Then Esau broke down and wept. 39 His father, Isaac, said to him, "You will live off the land and what it yields, 40 and you will live by your sword. You will serve your brother for a time, but then you will shake loose from him and be free."

Esau needs no further explanation either, but dissolves into a plea for blessing (v. 34). Denied that blessing, Esau in subsequent speeches, expresses the whole range of emotion: anger at Jacob, despair for his own future, a tearful but tenacious appeal for some kind of blessing (vv. 34, 36, 38). The range and intensity of the emotions gripping the two men can best be appreciated by rereading the dialogue closely.

Finally Esau is blessed or is sent away with a “nonblessing.” The Hebrew words are ambiguous. The poetry can be read to grant Esau fertility of the fields, much the same blessing that Jacob received (see the footnote to v. 39 in RSV and NASB). But more often Esau’s blessing is interpreted as a nonblessing: he shall live away from the fertile fields. The ambiguity of Esau’s future continues as the blessing defines his political destiny: his future shall be one of conflict. He shall be subordinate to his brother—but not always (v. 40). This blessing can appropriately be heard in connection with the historical relationship between Israel and its Transjordanian neighbor, Edom, a relationship of conflict and shifting dominance. But in the context of this narrative, Esau’s blessing serves notice to readers that some elements of this family’s future remain unclear in spite of the success of the Rebekah-Jacob coalition. [*Blessing in Genesis*. p. 312.]

Bitter disappointment by both father and son take over once both realize they have been duped by Jacob. But once the blessing was formally pronounced it could not be rescinded. Both realize this and thus the plea is made for another blessing by Esau. What came wasn’t the best of news. Esau would live a difficult life in the midst of conflict. But although initially he would be subservient to Jacob, eventually he and his descendants would break free of Jacob’s control.

But as the next narratives go on to indicate Esau would be able to make life miserable for Jacob at least initially. [Gen. 27:41-28:9](#) describes Jacob having to flee for his life as he goes back to the eastern Fertile Crescent region of Paddan-aram to get a wife. It would be decades before he would return home and rebuild family relations. In defiance of his father, Esau took the Canaanite woman Mahalath -- Ishmael’s daughter -- as an additional wife to the two Hittite wives he already had taken ([26:34-35](#)). His anger pushed him further into destructive behavior.

What we see happening is a severe rift in this family. Father and son are pitted against mother and son. The situation has deteriorated to the degree that one son is anxious to kill his brother. With the pressures toward dysfunctionality shredding many American families today, we can learn much from the negative example of this ancient family. Once more the reality of parental favoritism took its toll on Isaac’s family. One son is forced to leave home and won’t return for decades. Another son defiantly chooses wives that will cause his parents grief and push him further into the violent life-style predicted by his father. To be sure, our generation isn’t the first to wrestle with severe tensions inside family. Nor will it be the last.

If the story ended here we would be left with a sense of gloom regarding the family of Isaac. But we know that ten of the twelve tribes of Israel would come from Jacob. Something significant will have to take place to turn this situation around. Sure enough, it did as Jacob was making his way eastward. We will study that next week. To me the marvelous aspect of all this is how God managed to work good from this messed-up family. They were *really* messed-up, but amazingly God worked some unbelievable good through this family. In that I find consolation and encouragement. We’re not hopeless, even though we can mess up really bad.