

Genesis 26:34-28:9
Psalm 108
Philippians 2

“The Blessing of Jacob”

September 20, 2009

Jacob was told that Esau would serve him.

Of course, throughout history Esau’s descendents (the Edomites)
rarely served Israel!

But Psalm 108 reminds us that God did not forget.
God will go before his people to Edom –
and God will give them the victory.

Psalm 108 is a Psalm of thanksgiving –

although at the end we discover that the victory has not yet been won.

David sings with confidence that God will grant the victory –
because God is the Divine Warrior who goes before his people
and “it is he who will tread down our foes.”

Did you know that a descendent of Esau plays a prominent role in the NT?
Herod – the Idumean (or Edomite).

As Jesus stands before Herod,
he does battle in a most interesting way!

He is silent.

And through his silence – through his suffering –
Jesus wins the victory.

The long-promised triumph over Edom comes in the cross.

So let us sing the song of the triumph over Edom, Psalm 108.
(And Read Philippians 2)

Our text opens and closes with Esau’s marriages.

At the beginning, Esau marries two Hittite women.

1. Esau’s Hittite Wives (26:34-35)

*34 When Esau was forty years old, he took Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite to be his wife,
and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite,
35 and they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah.*

Remember what we have seen about the Hittites?

Abraham would not let Sarah be buried among the Hittites –
he did not want her bones to be mingled with the bones
of those who were under God’s wrath and curse.

Likewise, Abraham insisted that Isaac must not marry a Hittite woman.

Now Esau marries two Hittite women.

It is possible that they were “nice” people.

They may have been sweet and friendly.

But they made life bitter (literally, “they were bitterness of spirit”)
to Isaac and Rebekah.

The reason for this is not anything personal.

We are not told that they *did* anything.

Rather, it is the fact that they are Hittites that makes life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah.

This is not a case of racism –
it is a case of covenantalism!

Esau has joined himself to a people who are under God’s wrath and curse.

This is a case analogous to what happened before the Flood,
when the sons of God (the seed of the woman)
married the daughters of man (the seed of the serpent).

When the covenant people of God marry those who are outside the covenant
the result is never good.

This seemingly minor point at the end of chapter 26 sets up the whole of chapter 27
by showing us that Esau does not really care about the covenant.

We saw a couple weeks ago how quickly Esau sold his birthright.

He has no vision for God’s covenant –
he does not care about God’s promises to Abraham.

But in spite of all this,
Isaac intends to bless Esau anyway.

2. Isaac’s Dim Vision and Rebekah’s Attentive Ears (27:1-13)

27:1 When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see,

This statement of Isaac’s physical condition
is intended to alert us to his spiritual condition as well.

Why do I say this?

In chapter 24 we heard about Abraham at the end of his life.

Abraham was old, well advanced in years.

And the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things.

That introduction creates the expectation that something good is about to happen.

If you start by saying

“Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see”

you should expect that the following story will be adversely affected
by Isaac’s dimness.

But Isaac *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 delicious food, such as I love,
and bring it to me so that I may eat,
that my soul may bless you before I die."*

Esau has already sold his birthright,
so he is not supposed to receive the blessing.
Birthright and blessing are not two separate things.
The birthright entitles you to the blessing.
The blessing confirms the birthright.

But the whole way this passage is constructed
helps us see that Isaac is driven by his appetite.

Repeatedly we are told that Isaac *loves* food.
The word used here is a word usually reserved for love of people.
Isaac loves food—and especially game—the way he should love people.

Does he know of God's promise to Rebekah?
That the older shall serve the younger?
Does he know that Esau has sold his birthright?
We are not told.
What we are told is that Isaac is driven by his appetite,
and his eyes are dim.

In contrast, notice what it says about Rebekah:

5 *Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau.*

Isaac's eyes are closed – but Rebekah's ears are open.

*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 delicious food,
that I may eat it and bless you before the Lord before I die.'
8 Now therefore, my son, obey my voice as I command you.
9 Go to the flock and bring me two good young goats,
so that I may prepare from them delicious 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."*

What do you make of this?
Rebekah plainly is acting to deceive her husband.

And yet, she is also acting in faith.

After all, what will happen if she does nothing?

Esau will return, and Isaac will bless Esau.

Isaac will say to Esau,

“May God give you of the dew of heaven and of the fatness of the earth
and plenty of grain and wine.

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!”

In other words,

if Rebekah does nothing,

then Isaac will give the blessing of Abraham to Esau –

and we would today be talking about “Abraham, Isaac, and Esau”

-- not Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

After all, the blessing that Isaac will give on this day

is a once-for-all blessing.

It is an irrevocable blessing.

Isaac is going to give *the* blessing of Abraham to one of his sons *today*.

Unlike her dim-sighted husband,

Rebekah sees clearly that her husband is about to make a catastrophic mistake.

He is about to bless the wrong son.

So why doesn’t she just go to her husband and say,

“Isaac, you don’t understand! God promised this to Jacob!”

Maybe she had done this years before.

Maybe not.

After all, why shouldn’t Isaac respond, “Yeah right, Jacob’s always been your favorite!

Esau is the firstborn and since God hasn’t told *me* otherwise,

I’m going to bless him!”?

If your husband is about to commit the worst sin of his life

you may need to resort to drastic measures to make sure that he doesn’t!

God has said that Jacob is the one who is supposed to receive the blessing.

If Rebekah does nothing, then she will be complicit in her husband’s failure to obey God.

But of course, there is a potential for trouble:

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, “Let your curse be on me, my son;
only obey my voice, and go, bring them to me.”*

You have to understand that blessings and curses were taken far more seriously in the ancient world than today.

But I want you to see something here:

Jacob is more afraid of his Isaac’s curse than he is of the word of God.
Rebekah is more afraid of violating the word of God
than she is of running afoul of Isaac’s curse.

For a long time, I had been taught to think very poorly of Rebekah’s actions.
How could she deceive her husband?!

But if you try to set aside all of our modern preconceptions and focus on what the *text* says,
you start seeing Rebekah as a woman of great faith.
She would prefer being cursed by her husband to watching him break the word of God.

3. Jacob in the Presence of His Father (27:14-25)

*14 So he went and took them and brought them to his mother,
and his mother prepared delicious 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 young goats she put on his hands
and on the smooth part of his neck.*
*17 And she put the delicious food and the bread, which she had prepared,
into the hand of her son Jacob.*

This is a fascinating scene.

Jacob, clothed in the garments of his elder brother,
comes to his father for a blessing.

You might be tempted to see a picture of our justification here –
(for truly we are clothed with Christ’s righteousness!)
but that does not at all fit with the picture here –
because Esau is hardly the righteous one!

Clothing is going to become an increasingly important part of the story in Genesis
At the fall God clothed Adam and Eve in animal skins,
showing us the need to be clothed through a sacrifice.
Now you see Jacob clothed in his brother’s clothes,
and with the goat skins that will make him resemble his brother.

If anything, you see here a picture of the incarnation –

how the one who knew no sin would come in the likeness of sinful flesh.
And he comes now, bringing the covenant meal to his father.

*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.*

There is a sense in which this is true:
Esau had sold to Jacob the birthright.
Legally speaking, Jacob is Esau – he is the firstborn.

*I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, that your soul 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, "Please 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 near to me, that I may eat of my son's game and bless you."
So he brought it near to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank.*

Isaac is blind – he cannot see – but he does not trust his ears.
He trusts his other senses – of touch, taste, and smell.

Faith comes by hearing,
but Isaac does not trust his hearing.

4. The Blessing of Jacob (27:26-29)

*26 Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come near and kiss me, my son."
27 So he came near and kissed him.
And Isaac smelled the smell of his garments and blessed him and said,*

*"See, the smell of my son
is as 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!”

This is *the* Abrahamic blessing.

Isaac proclaims that the blessing of Abraham now rests upon Jacob.

What is interesting about this is that virtually *none* of this happens to Jacob.

Certainly God is with him and prospers him in Paddan-Aram,
and he returns with flocks, herds, two wives and 11 sons.

But peoples do not serve him,
nations do not bow down to him.

Esau and his descendents do not bow down to Jacob and serve him.

But over time all of these things happen to Israel – in varying degrees –
and of course, all of these things come to pass most gloriously
in our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is why we must see Jacob as a picture of Christ,
as he stands before his father and receives the blessing of Abraham.

And because that blessing has come to our Lord Jesus Christ –
because our Lord sits at the right hand of the Father –
therefore it also comes to all who trust in him!

The blessing of Abraham now comes to you in Jesus Christ.

The reason why I don't use the Abrahamic blessing in the benediction
is because the Abrahamic benediction is focused on the singular Son of God.

You are not *the* Son of God –
you are his family!

But all other blessings throughout the Word of God
are rooted in this one.

Because Jesus has received the blessing of Abraham,
therefore we share in the fruits of that blessing
because we have been united to Christ!

3'. Esau in the Presence of His Father (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 delicious 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 firstborn, Esau.”

33 Then Isaac trembled very 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.”*

Isaac understands that the blessing is irrevocable.
Once pronounced it cannot be undone.
Jacob is now *the* Seed of Abraham.

*34 As soon as 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 deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing.”

*36 Esau said, “Is he not rightly named Jacob? [“he cheats”]
For he has cheated me these two times.
He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing.”*

You need to see something here:

While it is true that in *this* case, Jacob did “cheat” Esau out of the blessing,
Jacob did not “take away” his birthright.
Esau refuses to accept responsibility for his own actions.

How often do you hear this?

“It’s not my fault!”
“He took it from me!”

What is more,

Esau refuses to acknowledge that according to the contract he made with Jacob,
Jacob was *supposed* to receive the blessing!
Esau has a classic case of “victim mentality.”

Then he said, “Have you not reserved a blessing for me?”

*37 Isaac answered and said to Esau,
“Behold, I have made him lord over you,
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.

Twice now we have heard of “all his brothers.”

Does this mean that Isaac and Rebekah had other sons?
Possibly – though unlikely (since all other Abrahamic peoples are named).
More likely this refers to “descendants.”

All of Esau’s children have been given to Jacob as servants.

Having given Jacob everything, Isaac has no further blessing to give.
So instead he gives an “antiblessing”

39 Then Isaac his father answered and said to him:

*“Behold, away from [just means “of”] the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be,
and away from [“and of”] the dew of heaven on high.*

Again, interpretation affects translation.

This simply reads, “of the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be,
and of the dew of heaven on high.”

It is exactly the same language used in verse 28,
when Isaac told Jacob,

May God give you “of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth.”

Now Isaac tells Esau,

“Of the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be, and of the dew of heaven.”

The only thing different is that this is less “blessing” and more “prophecy.”

There is no invocation of the name of God –
because Esau will not be blessed by God!

40 *By your sword you shall live,
and you shall serve your brother;
but when you grow restless
you shall break his yoke from your neck.”*

The Edomites would be brought under Israelite control in the days of the kings –
but in 2 Kings 8 they rebelled and broke Israel’s dominion.

And for that matter, it would be an Edomite – an Idumean – King Herod
who will participate in the crucifixion of the Christ.

2’. Rebekah’s Attentive Ears and Isaac’s Clear Vision (27:41-28:5)

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.”*

(in fact, it will be nearly 80 years before Isaac dies!
Esau is not very perceptive.)

42 *But the words of Esau her older son were told to Rebekah.*

Once again Rebekah gets advance warning of impending events!

So she sent and called Jacob her younger son and said to him,

*“Behold, your brother Esau comforts himself about you 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 from you,
and he forgets what you have done to him.
Then I will send and bring you from there.
Why should I be bereft of you both in one day?"*

After all, if Esau kills Jacob, he will be guilty of murder and therefore executed.

*46 Then Rebekah said to Isaac, "I loathe my life because of the Hittite women.
If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women like these, one of the women of the land,
what good will my life be to me?"*

I think too often scholars try to read too much into the psychological relationships
in the scriptures.

Does anyone in their right mind think that the entire conversation
between Rebekah and Isaac consisted of two sentences from Rebekah to Isaac,
that Isaac said nothing in response,
and then Rebekah walked out?

Are these two sentences even intended to summarize the whole conversation?

Of course not!

We are not told what Isaac and Rebekah's relationship was like.
We are not even told what this conversation was all about.
What we are told is what *we* need to hear!

And what we need to hear is that Rebekah gently rebukes Isaac for doing nothing about Esau.
Rebekah here reminds Isaac that Esau has married Hittite women –
thereby rendering her life loathsome
because it means that her grandchildren are being reared by unbelievers.
And if Jacob marries Hittite women
then it will only get worse.

What was the point of Rebekah coming all the way from Paddan-Aram to marry Isaac,
if their children are just going to intermarry with the very people
whom Isaac was forbidden to marry?

*28:1 Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and directed him,
"You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women.
2 Arise, go to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel your mother's father,
and take as your wife from there one of the daughters of Laban
your mother's brother.
3 God Almighty [El Shaddai] bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you,
that you may become a company of peoples.
4 May he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you,
that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings
that God gave to Abraham!"*

Notice that Isaac does not rebuke Jacob for his deceitfulness.
Isaac finally sees clearly.

In spite of his own blindness to God's will and purpose,
God has accomplished his purpose
in bringing the blessing of Abraham to Jacob.

And so Isaac sends Jacob away in peace.

*5 Thus Isaac sent Jacob away. And he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban,
the son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother.*

1'. Esau's Ishmaelite Wife (28:6-9)

*6 Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-aram
to take a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he directed him,*

"You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women,"

7 and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and gone to Paddan-aram.

8 So when Esau saw that the Canaanite women did not please Isaac his father,

*9 Esau went to Ishmael and took as his wife, besides the wives he had,
Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth.*

While I differ with most modern interpreters in my approach to this story,

I do like what Bruce Waltke has said about Esau (p383):

"Esau is a figure of tragic irony...

'a marginalized family member who deeply wanted to belong.'

Despite his desires to belong and to please his father,

he lacks that spiritual perspicacity that will connect him with his family."

Too late, he realizes that his father does not approve of his Canaanite wives
(he already has two of them!).

There is a fundamental lack of faith that characterizes *everything* that Esau does.

This is why we read Philippians 2.

We are called to have the mind of Christ –

willing, like Rebekah, to endure the curse of her husband,

in order to see the Word of the LORD come to pass;

but even more, like Christ himself, who endured the curse of God

so that we might have eternal life.

And because he endured that curse – because he endured the cross,

he has now been exalted with the fulfillment of the blessing of Abraham,

that every knee might bow, and every tongue confess

that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father!