

Genesis 25:19-28:9 Jacob and Esau

Introduction

Last week we discussed the deaths of Sarah and Abraham, and the selection of a bride for Isaac. Abraham sent his trusted servant, Eliezer (Helper of God) to travel to the old country, Haran, to secure a wife for Isaac from among Abraham's own people. Isaac was not to marry a local Canaanite woman, but a woman of the lineage of Shem, to develop the proper lineage for the Messiah. We were introduced to Rebekah's conniving brother Laban who will factor into the redemption story in the life of Jacob.

We discussed how Eliezer might represent the Holy Spirit bringing the Bride of Christ (Rebekah) to the Promised Land for a wedding - a beautiful foreshadowing of the fulfillment of the Plan of Redemption.

Tonight we will observe how the scripture is not necessarily written in a linear process but at times takes a step back to fill in the gaps of time with significant events. We read of Abraham's death in the early part of chapter 25, but the events recorded later in chapter 25 back up to as much as 15 years before his death and immediately following his death.

Chapter 25:19-34 Birth of Esau and Jacob; Esau sells his birthright

Vs. 19-21 The passage begins with a bold statement that what is to follow are the records of the generations from Isaac, son of Abraham, second great patriarch of God's people. Isaac is often lost because he does not have the same volume of writing as his father, Abraham nor his son Jacob. We should not devalue the role of Isaac as a great patriarch because there is so much less written about him. However, Isaac plays a critical role as we shall see, not only as father of Jacob, but as a man of faith who made great statements about the Living God, YHVH, to all the people around him.

Isaac is 40 years old when he marries Rebekah, and like his mother, Sarah, Rebekah is plagued with barrenness. Isaac intercedes with God on Rebekah's behalf and she finally conceives and gives birth after 20 years of marriage. Tradition tells us Isaac made a special journey to Mount Moriah to pray that God would open Rebekah's womb.

Vs. 22-23 But Rebekah's pregnancy is not easy! She is vexed by the twin sons she is carrying struggling within her. The pregnancy provides us with an illusory picture of the conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of Satan. The ultimate syncretism is taking place in her woman and she feels as if she will be destroyed. Warring spirits bring chaos and strife, and a womb provides little to no room for finding space between the opposing values. This troubled pregnancy sets the stage

for the conflicts between Esau and Jacob for the remainder of their lives - and well beyond.

When Rebekah inquires of God why she is so vexed in her pregnancy, He responds with,

*“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.”*

Vs. 24-26 Rebekah gave birth to the twins. The first born, Esau, was red in color and covered with hair like a “garment”. Esau’s brother, Jacob was born hanging on to Esau’s foot, indicating the conflict that began in the womb and was destined to continue throughout life.

Isaac was 60 years old when Esau and Jacob were born. Abraham was 160 years old at the time of the twins’ birth. (Abraham was 100 years old at Isaac’s birth and died at 175 years; 25:7)

Vs. 27-28 As the boys grew they very obviously took different paths in life. Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field - indicating no interest in spiritual matters, but pursuing the world. Jacob was a peaceful man, dwelling in tents, a euphemism for spiritual and Torah pursuits.

The scripture makes a point that Isaac loved Esau because he had a taste for game, but Rebekah loved Jacob. Not only are the boys conflicted in life, their parents foster some of the conflict in their preferences for one boy over the other. Disaster is certain to follow.

Vs. 29-34 **What is the significance of Jacob cooking lentil stew at this time?** Lentil stew is a mourner’s meal. The boys are now 15 years of age and their grandfather, Abraham has died. Esau has avoided the tearful family gatherings and mourning by going to the field to hunt. He had no interest in his grandfather’s faith or walk with Hashem. His hunting has proven fruitless and he comes home tired and starving. Jacob takes advantage of his brother’s exhaustion and his lack of spiritual interests and barter with him to sell Esau some food in return for his birthright. Esau feels as though he is about to die and he has no interest in the spiritual leadership of the clan many years in the future, so he gladly sells his birthright for the lentil stew.

Remember the words of God to Rebekah before the boys were born, *“The older shall serve the younger”*. God has a plan for Jacob that will have eternal impact.

Chapter 26 Famine, Abimelech, and Water Wells

Vs. 1-5 A famine strikes the land. Remember, Isaac is dwelling in the Negev, a hostile and dry desert land in the south of Canaan. God warns Isaac to not leave Canaan and go to Egypt as his father, Abraham, had. Instead, Isaac goes to Gerar, a place with more water and most likely less impacted by the famine. The king of Gerar, capital of the Philistines, is Abimelech; most likely the son of the King Abimelech Abraham dealt with in chapter 20 and 21.

God appears and speaks to Isaac to extend the covenants of Abraham on to Isaac.

- Do not go down to Egypt
- Stay in the land of which I shall tell you
- Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you
- For to you and to your descendent I will give all this land
- I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham
- I will multiply your descendents as the stars of the heaven
- And will give your descendents all these lands
- By your descendents all the nations of earth shall be blessed
- Because Abraham obeyed Me and kept **My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws (Torah)**

Vs. 6-11 Isaac dwelt in Gerar and because his wife was so beautiful he told everyone she was his sister in fear he might be killed for the sake of Rebekah. The king, Abimelech, looked out his window one day and witnessed Isaac “caressing” Rebekah and knew she was not his sister but his wife. Surely he remembered a similar incident with Abraham and Sarah posing as brother and sister and the near death plagues God put on his father and all the people.

Abimelech immediately called Isaac to meet with him and confronted Isaac on this lie. Abimelech was surely angry and scared - if someone took Rebekah, death could surely be brought on the king and his people. Abimelech charged all his people that if anyone even touched Isaac or Rebekah the king will have that person put to death. One tradition states that Abimelech had a parade with Isaac and Rebekah as the grand marshals. As they paraded through the town it was shouted out, “This is Isaac and Rebekah, special guests of the king. If anyone lays a hand on either of them, the king will surely kill you”.

Vs 12-17 God makes good on His promises to Isaac in verses 2-5. Isaac sows crops in the land and reaps a hundredfold. He became rich and continued to grow richer, and became very wealthy. Isaac had possessions of flocks and herds, and had a great household, so that he was envied by all the Philistines.

The wells that Isaac’s father Abraham had dug, the Philistines had filled with earth. Abimelech became concerned by the wealth and power Isaac had been given and

requested Isaac move away from Gerar. Isaac settled in the Valley Gerar, towards Beer Sheba.

Vs. 18-23 Isaac began to re-dig the wells his father, Abraham, had dug and which had been filled in by the Philistines. Isaac gave the same names to the wells Abraham had given them. Tradition tells us the names were related to statements about the sovereignty of God, and this was not well accepted by the Philistines who were polytheistic and did not know YHVH.

When Isaac dug new wells and found flowing water, the Philistine herders would argue the water was theirs. Isaac's men would locate another place to dig and when water was located, again the Philistine herders would claim the water belonged to them. Isaac moved to another location and on the third attempt again located flowing water. This time the Philistine herders did not quarrel with Isaac's herders so Isaac named this well Rehoboth, for he said, "At last the LORD has made room for us, and we will be fruitful in the land".

Why are these wells significant to the Isaac story? Certainly they represent God's blessings on Isaac and His care for this chosen man. We can say this is a way God showed Isaac the place to dwell as peace was finally reached with the Philistine herders. More importantly perhaps, the water represents life. The wells dug by Abraham were given names reflecting the goodness of God and the Philistines would rather face death (lack of water) than acknowledge the God of Heaven. Just as with Esau and Jacob, light and darkness cannot dwell together. When Isaac dug wells then abandoned them to the Philistine herders, he brought life but it was too close to the Philistines who preferred darkness to light. Isaac was a patriarch who brought light and life to the world around him. In Chapter 22 we studied the sacrifice of Isaac and considered all the ways Isaac represented Christ in His crucifixion. Yeshua the Messiah represents life and light in the darkness of the world and is rejected by the world that prefers darkness and death.

Vs. 23-25 Isaac went up from there to Beer Sheba and God appeared to him that same night and spoke to Isaac;

"I am the God of your father Abraham; Do not fear for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendents, for the sake of My servant Abraham."

Isaac built an altar there and called upon the name of the LORD. Isaac pitched his tents there and had his servant dig another well.

Vs. 26-33 Isaac became recognized as a very great, wealthy and powerful man. The people of Canaan had known Abraham and they knew there was a connection between the True God and Abraham. They now recognized that favor had been passed on to his son, Isaac. Tradition holds that Isaac was the exact representation of Abraham in all his physical characteristics, and the neighboring Philistines also saw the great faith

and trust Isaac had in YHVH and how Isaac was blessed because of that faith and trust.

Abimelech, his advisor Abuzzath, and the commander of his army, Phicol paid a visit to Isaac. Kings do not go out to visit just anybody. Isaac was a significant force in the eyes of the king and he wished to make a treaty with Isaac for the protection of his people. Abimelech recognized the source of Isaac's wealth and power was God, and most likely that made Isaac more fearsome because Abimelech understood he was not just a physical force, but a spiritual force as well.

"We plainly see that the LORD has been with you; so we said, 'Let there now be an oath between us, even between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the LORD'".

Isaac responded by making a feast for his guests, put them up over night and the next day they exchanged oaths and his visitors returned to Gerar.

The very same day Isaac's servants dug another well and found a wonderful source of water which Isaac named Shebah: and the city was therefore named Beer-Sheba, meaning "Place of the Oath". This is the same place Abraham and Abimelech formed an oath of peace (21:31); God will meet Jacob at this well (46.2); and God will meet Elijah at this well as recorded in I Kings 19:7.

Vs. 34-35 Like his father, Isaac, Esau marries at age 40 as well, only Esau selects two local daughters of the Hittites, Judith and Basemath. These woman brought grief to Isaac and Rebekah. Again we see the difference in Esau and Jacob. Esau has no inclination toward the spiritual. He has no respect for his family name and honor. Tradition tells us that these two wives were fully into their pagan religion of the area and did many things to appease the local gods and deities. This was the source of great grief brought on Isaac and Rebekah.

Chapter 27 The Deception of Isaac

Vs. 1-4 Isaac is an old man, had lost his sight, and felt death was perhaps not far away. He calls his first born son, Esau, to go hunt game for him, prepare it in a savory dish, and bring it to him. He wished to enjoy one more wonderful meal of wild game, and then extend his blessings on his oldest son before death over took him.

Birthrights and Blessings

The Birthright was a material, financial blessing generally bestowed on the oldest son. It was a double portion of the wealth of the father, generally understood to be used to lead and bless the entire family. In Esau and Jacob's case, the birthright would involve taking all the wealth of Isaac, dividing it by three, and Esau would receive two

portions and Jacob would receive one portion. This is the birthright Esau sold for a bowl of lentil stew.

The Blessing was not so much financial or wealth based as it was prestige, honor, power and spiritual. The son who received the blessing had the right to carry on the father's business in his name, rule over the clan, and control the fortunes of the father after the father's death. It is the blessing of kingship if the family were of royalty. The son with the Blessing would assume the throne. In God's covenant with Abraham, He promised him and his descendents land, uncountable descendents and kings; thereby giving Abraham both the birthright and the blessing.

Generally both the birthright and the blessing were administered to the oldest son, but not all the time. We will find in Genesis 49 that Jacob will extend the birthright to Joseph (Ephraim) and the blessing went to Judah, the fourth born son.

It must be remembered that God has already told Rebekah the older would serve the younger (25:23).

Vs. 5-17 Rebekah overheard Isaac telling Esau to go hunt and prepare game and he would bestow the blessing on Esau. Remember 25:28 states Isaac loved Esau more than Jacob. Is his mind feeble from age and has he forgotten the prophecy regarding the older shall serve the younger? Was he **spiritually blind** as well as physically blind? Is Isaac usurping God's plan on purpose? Rebekah has not forgotten!

Rebekah instructed Jacob to go to the flock and bring two young lambs for her to prepare as a savory dish for Isaac. Jacob was to take the dish to Isaac, his father, and thereby receive the blessing. Jacob protested as he is smooth skinned and Esau was very hairy. If Isaac discovers this trickery it will bring a curse of Jacob rather than a blessing.

Rebekah instructs Jacob to cover his arms and neck with the wool of the lambs and don Esau's clothes so he has the feel and smell of Esau. If Isaac recognizes it is Jacob and not Esau, Rebekah states the curse will be on her and not Jacob (v. 13).

Jacob does all his mother instructs him to do and takes the food to Isaac.

Vs. 18-29 Was Isaac truly fooled?

- The meal was prepared much sooner than Isaac anticipated, even if Esau found game quickly.
- Isaac recognized the voice of Jacob and checked for further identification
- Isaac seemed to accept the feel of Jacob's skin covered with wool and the smell of Esau's clothes.

- The savory meat was served with wine and bread - perhaps the wine helped abate detection of the imposter?

Did Isaac really think this was Esau? Maybe yes and maybe no. We do not know for sure! What we do know is Isaac gave the blessing to Jacob:

*“May God give you of the dew of heaven,
And of the fatness of the earth,
And an abundance of grain and new wine;
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.”*

Vs. 30-38 About as soon as the blessing was completed and Jacob departed his father’s tent, his brother Esau came in from hunting and had wild game. Esau prepared the game just the way Isaac liked it best and came to his tent to present it to his father, and receive his blessing.

When the trickery was discovered Isaac trembled violently and cried out, *“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!”*

The scene is very sad. Isaac is extremely upset and Esau is hurt and angry. *“Is there not a blessing for me too?”* Esau cries. No, the words have been spoken - there is only the blessing for the one who received it, who the blessing was spoken over - there are no redo’s! Jacob is the blessed master over his brother after the death of Isaac. He will receive the greater portion of Isaac’s wealth and is the named patriarch for the clan of Isaac.

Vs. 39-40 Instead of a blessing for Esau, it sounds much more like a curse from the lips of Esau’s father;

*“Behold, away from the fertility of the earth shall be your dwelling,
And away from the dew of heaven from above.
By your sword you shall live, And your brother you shall serve;
But it shall come about when you become restless,
That you shall break his yoke from your neck”.*

We need to remember these blessings and prophetic curses as we read through the narrative on the lives of Esau and Jacob and even onto the future dealings of Israel and Edom.

Vs. 41-45 Esau very openly made clear his plans to murder his brother Jacob after the death of their father, Isaac. Rebekah heard these words and called Jacob to her and informed him of Esau's plan and the need for Jacob to leave Beer Sheba and go to Haran to Laban's house, the brother of Rebekah, some 500 miles away. She promises to send word to him when it is safe for Jacob to return to Canaan.

Vs. 46 Rebekah sets the stage for Isaac to agree to send Jacob away to Laban's house in Haran:

"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?"

Chapter 28:1-9 Jacob sent to Haran and Esau marries the daughter of Ishmael

Vs. 1-5 Jacob obviously agrees with Rebekah on sending Jacob to Haran. After all, Isaac was blessed through his life with a beautiful wife from his father's family in Haran. This son of his who is to be the next patriarch would do as well in selecting a wife from the same source. She must certainly be better than what they had endured from the wives of Esau of the Hittite women.

Isaac calls his son Jacob in to warn him to not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan, but go to Paddan-Aram to the house of Bethuel, his mother's family to find a wife from the daughters of Laban. Isaac blesses his son Jacob,

"May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you and you may become a company of peoples. May He also give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your descendents with you, that you may possess the land of your sojourning, which God gave to Abraham".

Then Isaac sent Jacob away to Paddan-Aram to the house of Bethuel and Laban, the family of Rebekah.

Vs. 6-9 Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to find a wife from the house of Bethuel (House of God) and admonished Jacob to not take a wife from among the Canaanite women. He watched as Jacob obeyed his father and made ready for the long journey.

Knowing the Canaanite women displeased Isaac as wives for his sons, Esau went to Ishmael and married his daughter, Mahalath, sister of Ishmael's oldest son, Nebaioth. Did Esau marry Mahalath to appease his father since she was not a Canaanite or did he marry the daughter of Ishmael out of spite for his father?

Note:

It is common in church lessons to have an attitude of condemnation toward Jacob for "stealing" the birthright and the blessing from his brother. Trickery and deceit were certainly involved. Esau's view on the whole affair was that his birthright and blessing

were stolen from him - but who is Esau? Esau is a man who had no interest in the spiritual call of his father and his own potential role in God's plan of redemption for mankind. Esau represents the 'seed of the serpent'. It is the very words of God who spoke to Esau's mother that the younger shall rule over the older (25:23). We must not undermine the will of God and the course He chooses in performing His holy will.

Timeline:

We have already established that Jacob and Esau are 15 years old when Abraham dies and Esau sells his birthright for a bowl stew. How old are Esau and Jacob when Jacob receives the blessing?

It is believed that in 28:8-9 that Nebaioth, son of Ishmael, is cited because Esau arranges the marriage with Ishmael, but Ishmael dies before the wedding and his oldest son (25:13), Nebaioth is now patriarch of Ishmael's clan and presides over the wedding. We know Ishmael dies at age 137 (25:17). At that time Isaac is 124 years of age (14 years younger than Ishmael (17:24-25)). Esau and Jacob are born when Isaac is 60 years old and Isaac is now 123 years old. That makes Jacob and Esau 63 years of age.

Following this process we will learn that it takes Jacob 14 years to arrive in Paddan-Aram at the age of 77 years of age.