

Jacob Gets the Blessing, Part 1  
Genesis 25, 27

Turn to Genesis 25 please. We're going through the Genesis stories of Abraham and Sarah, and their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. Four generations, and in Genesis these stories are organized around God's blessing on Abraham. In the beginning of Genesis 12, God came to Abraham, and called him to move away, and promised to bless him.

God promised to bless Abraham, and his descendants after him, and eventually to bless all the nations through him. That's what ties these families stories together: that blessing. These are family stories, because God's blessing was passed on in real families, as is still true.

These families did some things right, and other things wrong, like all families. And right in the middle of it is God keeping his promise to bless this family line. These are Genesis stories, that means that the Scripture is organized to make these stories the foundation of how God works with people. These stories teach the basics of God and people and how his blessing works.

We'll do two sermons on how Jacob gets the blessing, how the blessing gets passed on from Abraham's son Isaac to his grandson Jacob. It is a long and interesting story. Today is part one, next sermon is part two. Today we'll cover the end of Genesis 25, and all of Gen 27. There are eight scenes here, and every one of them shows some kind of family trouble.

Rebekah's twins (Gen 25:21f) Rebekah could not have children, for 20 years. Isaac prayed for her, and the Lord answered his prayer, and she became pregnant. And then it says, "the babies jostled each other, they struggled together." So there were two of them, and from the womb they do not get along.

Rebekah said, "If it's like this, why do I live? I waited 20 years to be pregnant, and now it's like there's war inside me." So she asked the Lord what was going on, and he said, "there are two nations in you. They won't get along. One will be stronger, the older will serve the younger."

Esau was born first, and Jacob came out second, but Jacob's little hand was grabbing Esau's ankle as he came out. He was not letting Esau get away on him. "To grasp the heel" was the Hebrew image for deceiving someone. Jacob means "to grasp the heel." What Rebekah and Isaac knew, before those boys were even born, was that they were not going to get along, ever.

Esau sells his birthright (Gen 25:27f) Esau was a hunter, Jacob was not. And it says that Isaac, who was fond of wild meat, loved Esau, and Rebekah loved Jacob. This is a problem. No parent should have a clear preference for one child over another. In this family, both parents do. The boys don't get along, and they seem to have divided the parents.

Furthermore, preferring one over the other seems to start with Isaac, and it sounds like Isaac loves Esau because Isaac really enjoys the kind of food that Esau the hunter can bring him. That's a dismal reason to love one son over another, and Genesis wants us to think that.

Esau came in from hunting one day and saw Jacob cooking something. "Quick, give me some of that stew, I'm starving," he said. Jacob said, "first sell me your birthright." Esau said, "I won't live without food, who cares about the birthright," and Jacob said, "I want to hear a solemn promise from you that the birthright is mine."

So Esau made a solemn promise, and sat down to bread and lentil stew. That is not a special meal, just ordinary food. We're supposed to think, "he sold his birthright for that?" He says he's dying, but that is clearly not true. He ate and drank, and then he walked away. And the last line of the story is, "So Esau despised his birthright."

It's one thing to make a dumb choice when you're really hungry. I am certainly capable of that. But even after he'd eaten, he had no regrets, he just got up and walked away.

We're not sure what "birthright" means exactly, but it will be close to "inheritance of the oldest son." Esau walked away from his heritage. Birthright is different than blessing. Birthright is the property and rights of the oldest son, and the blessing was powerful words about the future.

Jacob does not look good in this story either. He's making himself a simple meal, his brother comes in very hungry and asks for food. Instead of just sharing his food, Jacob goes for the throat. He profits as much as he can from his brother's sharp hunger. Nasty business all around. Neither Jacob nor Esau come out of this looking very good. But the story deliberately ends with Esau. He despised his inheritance, what God had given his grandfather and father. Not good.

Esau's Troublesome Wives (Gen 26:34-35) We are skipping over Genesis 26, which is about Isaac getting the blessing, and which we've already covered.

When Esau was forty, he married two different Hittite women. Isaac also got married when he was forty. But when Isaac was forty, his father Abraham insisted that Isaac not marry a Canaanite woman. Not a chance. Isaac must not marry one of these Canaanites.

Why did Isaac not do the same for Esau? Isaac seems to have dropped the ball here, and paid the price. Whatever was wrong with Canaanite women, it was real. How they lived and acted brought regular grief to Isaac and Rebekah. Details are left to our imagination.

Isaac Plans to Bless Esau (Gen 27:1-4) When Isaac was old, and could barely see, he called in Esau. "Esau, I'm old and don't know when I will die. Take your bow and hunt some wild game for me, and bring me one of those meals I love, so I can give you my blessing before I die."

This is a little peculiar. Normally, when a person would be dying, the family would gather around, and that would be the time for last words to the children.

At the end of Genesis, when Jacob was dying, he had all twelve of his sons there, and he spoke to each one of them individually, and blessed them. That would be normal. What's peculiar here is that Isaac is not dying. He says he does not know when he'll die, which is true. But Jacob fled after this, and was gone 20 years, and Isaac was alive when Jacob returned.

And if Isaac really wants to get ready to die, why did he not call Jacob also, and Rebekah, and give his final words to everyone? Does he want to cut Jacob out of a father's blessing? Does he just want a good meal? Don't know, but something irregular is going on. Anyway, Esau gets his bow and arrows and heads out.

#### Rebekah Commands Jacob (Gen 27:5-17)

Rebekah heard what Isaac told Esau, and says to herself, "That's not going to happen, I will not let Isaac ignore Jacob like that." Rebekah calls in her son Jacob, and repeats to him what she'd just heard his father Isaac say to his brother Esau.

Then she gets serious: "Obey my voice as I command you," she begins. The NIV does not use the English word "command" there, which is too bad. "Obey my voice as I command you." "Go to the flock, bring two choice young goats, and I will prepare just the kind of food your father likes to eat. Then you take it to him, so he blesses you before he dies."

Isaac has unjustly preferred the son he loves, so Rebekah will unjustly prefer the son she loves. She's arranging to deceive her husband and take what he's giving to her other son. If Isaac had called in both sons to bless them, fine, but she will not let it happen like this.

Jacob now faces a difficult choice. He should obey his mother's command, no doubt about that. But lie to his father, and steal from his brother? He has good moral reasons to hesitate. Jacob does hesitate, but not for moral reasons. He hesitates because he does afraid to get caught. "What if I get caught? Then me father will curse me, I'll be worse off than if I does nothing."

Rebekah says, "Let the curse fall on me." And she means it. And if Isaac had cursed Jacob, it would have fallen on her. That's how we're to take the story. So Jacob gets the young goats. She prepares the meal, and she puts goat skin on Jacob's hands and neck so he will seem as hairy as Esau, if Isaac touches him. Esau must have been a pretty bushy character.

And she dressed Jacob in the best clothes of Esau, which she has in her possession. Why does she have these clothes of Esau? They still smell like him, she'd not had them long. What has Rebekah been planning? Scripture does not tell us that, but it tells us enough to know that Rebekah's certainly up to something, if she has Esau's good clothes with her.

Isaac Blesses Jacob (Gen 27:18-29)

Jacob takes the food to his father, and says he's come for his blessing. But he spoke too much. Jacob is now hairy like his brother, and smells like his brother. But although Isaac can't see, he can still hear, and the voice sure sounds like Jacob. Jacob feels like Esau, hairy, but sounds like Jacob, and Isaac takes some convincing. Jacob has to lie repeatedly, "I am Esau."

His father Isaac ate the food, and then asked his son to come close to kiss him. Jacob kissed him, and then Isaac could smell Esau on the clothes, and he loves the smell, and blesses Jacob.

*Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed.*

*May God give you heaven's dew and earth's richness—an abundance of grain and new wine.*

*May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you.*

*Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you.*

*May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed."*

At first this seems like a normal blessing, but there are two peculiar things about it. One is, this falls short of the blessing to Abraham, which Isaac is supposed to be passing on. Isaac never says, "may Yahweh bless you." Esau does not love and fear the God of Abraham and Isaac, and so Isaac cannot give him that blessing.

You smell like a field that YHWH has blessed, is as close as he gets. May God give you the dew and earth's richness and good crops. That's good, but God gives those things to every human. In the next chapter of Genesis, Isaac blesses Jacob, when he knows it's Jacob, and he says "May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful, may he give you this land, may God give you and your offspring the blessing of Abraham."

Isaac cannot say those things to Esau, because Esau does not love and fear the God of Abraham. Esau will get good things from God, but Esau has taken himself out Abraham's blessing. Esau can only receive the best of the things God gives to all people.

That's the first thing to note about this blessing. The other is this line, "be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you." Isaac has twin boys, just two sons. Why would he say that to one of them. "Be lord over your brothers." He blessing separates his sons. It is far as possible from a healthy brotherly relationship.

Perhaps Isaac remembers that 40 some years ago, God told Rebekah, "the older will serve the younger," and Isaac wants his blessing to pull the other way. We don't know. But we do know that in Genesis, brothers have had trouble getting along with each other since Cain killed Abel. Now in this family, both Isaac and Rebekah, the parents, are part of the problem.

Esau Returns to Isaac for his Blessing (Gen 27:30-40)

Jacob left, and had just gone when Esau returned from his hunting. He prepared the special food, and took it to his father Isaac, and said, “My father, sit up and eat some of my game, so that you can give me your blessing.” And Isaac said, “Who are you?”

Esau: “I’m Esau, your first born.” Isaac trembled violently. “Who brought food to me? I ate it just before you came, and I blessed him, and indeed he will be blessed!” Esau burst out with a loud and bitter cry. “Bless me – me too, my father!” Isaac: “Your brother came deceitfully, and took your blessing.”

Esau: “He is rightly named Jacob, a deceiver. He’s taken advantage of me twice. First he took my birthright, and now he’s taken my blessing.” Esau sold his birthright with full knowledge, and at the time at least did not care. But he’s right that Jacob took advantage of him twice.

Esau: “Haven’t you reserved any blessing for me?” Isaac: “I made him lord over you, and made his relatives his servants, and I gave him the goodness of the land. What is left?” Esau: “Do you only have one blessing, my father. Bless me too, my father!” Then Esau wept aloud.

Isaac: “You will not have the richness of the earth. You will live by your sword, and serve your brother. But when you’ve had enough, you will throw his yoke from your neck.”

Esau held a grudge against Jacob, and said to himself, “When my father dies, I will kill Jacob.”

The thing is, Isaac does have more blessing to give. In the next chapter of Genesis, which I plan to cover next week, when Isaac knows he’s talking to Jacob not Esau, he says, “May God Almighty bless you Jacob, and make you fruitful. May he give you the blessing he gave to Abraham, so that all this land is yours.”

Isaac has all that still to give, but Esau does not want God Almighty, so Isaac cannot give it to him. There must be real sorrow in Isaac here, that Esau, the son he loves and wants to bless, does not want God, so he cannot give the son he loves what he would love to give.

For all of that, the Scripture has real sympathy for Esau. He is the only innocent person in this chapter. Isaac, Rebekah, and Jacob all behave poorly. They are the ones who fear God, and between them they rob Esau of something he treasured, his father Isaac’s blessing. The Scripture grieves for Esau, and his loss, and how he was treated by his own family. It broke his heart to lose his father’s blessing, especially this way, and the Scripture does not hide that.

### Esau's Plans and Rebekah's Plans (Gen 27:41-46)

When Rebekah heard that Esau was planning to kill Jacob, she called him in. “Esau is planning to kill you. Now my son, do what I say. Flee at once to my brother Laban in Harran, and stay there until Esau cools off. Why should I lose both of you in one day.”

“Why should I lose both of you in one day.” Rebekah knows that by telling Jacob to steal Esau's blessing, and helping him do this, she has lost Esau forever. That relationship was probably rough already, but now for sure it is over. For her, Esau might as well be dead. And that grieves Rebekah. “Today I lost my son Esau for good. I want to keep at least one of my sons.”

Rebekah knows that Isaac's words to Jacob are important. That's why she helped Jacob get Isaac's blessing. Now she tells Jacob to leave, but she wants Isaac also to tell Jacob to leave. So she goes to Isaac, and says, “Isaac, I'm disgusted with living, because of these Hittite women. If Jacob takes a Canaanite wife like that, my life will not be worth living.”

This Rebekah is impressive. What she wants is to save Jacob's life from Esau, and she wants Isaac to tell Jacob to leave. If she goes to Isaac and says, “Esau is ready to kill Jacob, so tell Jacob to go to Laban in Harran to be safe,” Isaac will probably say, “It serves Jacob right. I don't blame Esau. I'm not sending him to Harran.”

If Rebekah says, “Esau's wives are making my life miserable,” Isaac will probably say, “Esau can marry who he wants.” So she leaves Esau out of it entirely. We read earlier that Esau's wives were a source of grief to both Isaac and Rebekah. So she goes to Isaac and says, “These Hittite women are an awful burden. I sure hope Jacob doesn't marry a woman like that.”

And Isaac says, “You've got a point there. I'll send Jacob to Laban right away.” And he did.

That's as far as we'll take the story in Part 1. We'll finish the blessing story next week.

### Rebekah (then God)

Rebekah sounds disappointed with life. She waits 20 years to get pregnant, then a few months of joy, and then as the little guys develop, there is war in her womb. Endless struggle in there. It's not fun. She says, “If it is like this, why do I live? I waited 20 years for this?” Later she says, “I'm disgusted with living because of these Hittite women. If Jacob marries a woman like that, my life will not be worth living.” Why do I live? Disgusted with living. My life not worth living.

But Rebekah is also the mastermind behind two crucial events. One, make sure Jacob gets his father's blessing, and two, save Jacob's life to he lives to see it. She wants Isaac to send Jacob to Laban, and makes it happen. Back when Rebekah was young, when Abraham's servant was at the well, Rebekah showed initiative and energy and courage. She was God's choice for Isaac.

Not just any woman could have gotten Isaac to bless Jacob that day, and then arrange for Isaac to send Jacob far away. For all her disappointment and pain, she plays a crucial part.

### The Blessing of God

By far, the most remarkable thing here is the kind of family God uses, in fact that God *chooses*, to receive his blessing and to carry it on to the next generation, so that eventually God can offer this blessing to all the nations. The twin boys are struggling against each other from the womb. No counselling or parenting books are going to solve this one, folks. And this is a chosen family.

I was going to summarize the other faults here, but that would take too long.

God had blessed this family. Genesis 26 made clear that the blessing of Abraham has been passed on to Isaac. And by the end of Genesis 28, we will see that the blessing of Abraham and Isaac has been passed in all its fullness to Jacob.

God used this questionable family, and in fact used their various misbehaviors, to accomplish his purpose, which was to pass the blessing on to Jacob, and keep him alive. Nobody deserves anything here. No one earns anything. God has decided to bless his people. God is resolved to bless his people. God is utterly determined to bless his people.

No one in this story has an easy life. They have troubles, some they brought on themselves, and some they did not. Either way, God is with them, and taking care of them, helping them and making them fruitful. And this is the blessing that has come to all the nations, right down to us.

This family does not sound like a good Christian family, does it. God does not like this poor behaviour, but it happens. And he finds a way to bless us. Does this family make you feel at home in the blessing of God? It should. Amen.

PRAYER: O God, we did not actually know it was like this. We did not know how ordinary these people were. They were more like us than we thought, more than we even tell each other! And you blessed them, and took care of them. You told them not to be afraid, and you made them fruitful. And this is the blessing that has come to all the nations, right to us here.

O God, you have decided to bless people, you are determined to bless, you are resolved to bless, to be so good to those who bow to you. And we bow to you now, and thank you, and praise you, that through Jesus the Lord, this very blessing has come to us, who are no more deserving than they were. We give you glory and praise. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the Lord make our love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else. May he strengthen our hearts so that we will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord. You are dismissed.