

Jacob and Esau Blessed

Genesis 27, 28:1-9

Jacob Deceives but is Still Blessed

When Esau took his Hittite wives, he was 40, and therefore Isaac was 100. He lived in Beersheba. The history of salvation is taken up again 37 years later, for Isaac was 137, as can be proved by calculating the ages of his sons.

His eyes had become so weak that he could no longer see, and because he expected his life to end soon, he decided to bless Esau, after first having enjoyed another savoury dish of venison.

It is remarkable that Isaac still wanted to give the blessing of the first-born to Esau, despite the fact that he could have known better. Undoubtedly, Rebekah will have told her husband about the revelation she had received: that the greater would serve the lesser; and if he had not been able to draw the right conclusions from that, the fact remains that he cannot have been unaware of Esau's godless way of life. Was such a person to be the bearer of the covenant blessing with its Messianic purport, one who couldn't care less about God and His commandments? Was that blessing to be passed on to a heathen posterity? Did he not remember that a wife had had to be taken for him from Haran?

Still, Isaac was a believer, although it seems strange that he promised Esau the blessing, and even went so far as to connect it to a pleasant repast. Calvin justly wrote—and his judgment is the most favourable—that Isaac's faith was wondrously confused. Rebekah had eavesdropped on the conversation, and wanted, at all costs, to prevent Esau from being blessed. She took refuge in deceit. She told Jacob to get two kids, which

she prepared as Isaac liked them, gave Jacob Esau's best clothes, covered his hands and neck with the rough hides, and, despite his protestations, sent her son to his father with the meal.

Isaac was not completely unsuspecting. He didn't think that Esau could be back yet; not even when Jacob, being asked about it, declared that the LORD had granted him success so soon; nor when he felt his son, because the voice was Jacob's voice, although the hands were Esau's hairy hands; and after the royal meal of game, bread, and wine, he still wanted to smell his son's clothing, to dispel his last doubts.

Following this, Isaac blessed his son, using, as starting point, the smell of the garments, which was "as the smell of a field which the LORD has blessed," and he went on, "May God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine." Peoples would serve him, and nations bow down to him. He would be lord over his brothers, who would bow down to him. "Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you!" This was the Abrahamitic blessing. *Cutting through all the confusion, lies, and deceit, the Spirit of God made its way, to place the blessing on Isaac's lips*, the blessing that Isaac believed, as far as its contents were concerned, but for which he had planned another recipient.

Esau Also Blessed

What a disillusionment when, shortly after this, the real Esau came home, excited, carrying the food to his father Isaac! Isaac was terribly shocked and Esau cried out when he heard that Jacob had received the irrevocable blessing, and he begged, "Bless me, even me also, O my father!" When he heard how rich the blessing was that Jacob had received, and noticed that his father did not know exactly what might be left for him, he cried out in despair: "Have you but one blessing, my father?" and he begged again, with more force, "Bless me, even me also, O my father!" finally breaking down in tears, weeping with a loud voice. Once he had indifferently thrown away the birthright, and now, when he wanted to inherit the *blessing*, he was rejected, and even hot tears could not bring his father to repent (Hebrews 12:16, 17). The Messianic blessing had been given away. His father could not, and did not want to, have it undone.

Esau had come too late, forever, as is shown within the framework of the events.

Again the Spirit of prophecy became active in Isaac, and also Esau received his blessing: “Behold, away from the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be, and away from the dew of heaven on high. By your sword shall you live, and you shall serve your brother; but when you break loose, you shall break his yoke from your neck.” This last sentence portrays a beast of burden that breaks loose and runs away, managing, while wandering around, to throw off its burden. This is what later happened to Esau’s posterity, for example, during the time of David (2 Samuel 8:13ff.; 1 Kings 11:14-22), and during the time of Amaziah (2 Chronicles 25:11ff.) and several times after that.

Was this a blessing? Yes (Hebrews 11:20); but not the Messianic one. We could call it Noachian: many descendants, and animals, as well as green herbs, for food (Genesis 9:1-3). God would give this lover of nature what he had always desired: game, and dominion through might. Living in the fatness of Canaan, Jacob’s seed would be able to support a powerful army as the means to supremacy, which is based on a healthy economy. Esau would build his might, in the rocky and arid regions, by his sword.

We see clearly how the LORD Himself, despite human sinfulness, has taken control of Isaac and his family, blessing and punishing according to His own good pleasure. *Jacob*, in spite of his deceit, was blessed, as was foretold at his birth, and even before that time, and this was God’s *grace*. *Esau*, the covenant-breaker, was *justly* rejected; he received what he had always desired: sinful enjoyment of this earthly life.

Now, if we note that the LORD, before their birth already, had revealed that the greater would serve the lesser, had it then not been established already that he could not receive the Messianic blessing? Indeed; but let us not fail to see *how* that happened: by throwing away the birthright. That sin was definitely not from God (James 1:13-15). The same applies here as did with Ishmael. Both would not bring forth the Messiah in their line, but that gave them no licence to scorn the

blessing that God would grant in Isaac's and Jacob's holy seed, namely, salvation in Christ. Esau was immoral and irreligious (Hebrews 12:16, compare Obadiah: 2,15).

Jacob and Esau both were sinful, and both were justly weighed according to God's covenant demands.

Esau was found wanting—*justly*. And Jacob? God weighed Jacob according to His divine justice . . . when, from his seed according to the flesh, the Messiah Who had come had to appear before God's judgment seat, was mocked and reviled by Herod, the Edomite, and had His death demanded by the people before Pilate. God weighed him in Christ, and *granted him mercy*, the mercy which passed Esau by.

This was all according to His good pleasure—that must be the last word - His good pleasure in Christ.

Esau's Desire For Revenge. Jacob Sent Away.

When Rebekah heard of Esau's plan to murder Jacob after Isaac was dead (not before, to spare him the sorrow!), she became so afraid that she convinced her favourite to go to Haran until Esau would have forgotten what had been done to him, at which time she would send to recall him from Laban's house. For if she would see Esau kill Jacob and then the avenger of blood coming to attack Esau, she would be bereft of both her children in one day, she reasoned.

She didn't dare inform Isaac; he would not believe it: Would Esau, his favourite, do something like this? No, she complained to her husband about Esau's wives. What would happen if Jacob married such a wife? This Isaac could understand.

And so it happens that he himself sends Jacob away. Not Esau is sent away, as Abraham had done with the sons of Keturah for the sake of *him*, the child of the promise, but Jacob is sent away, to find a wife in Haran; this Abraham had not allowed him, Isaac, to do!

What a state of affairs in that family!

Rebekah camouflaged her fear of Esau before Isaac. Isaac gave way to speculation and sinful scheming: he sent Jacob away and kept his beloved Esau close at hand. This does not give us the impression that there was much strength of faith. Life in Isaac's house was characterized by choosing parties, pacifism with regard to Esau, and laxness in the service of the LORD. That the joy of faith was lost in the house of Isaac does not seem strange to us. Their sins brought their own punishment. Isaac sent away the blessed one, thereby robbing himself of the light of continuing revelation, for that would from now on not come to him, but to Jacob. Rebekah, who loved this son particularly, probably never saw him again. Jacob was further away from the fulfilment of the promise than ever, now he had to leave the land as an exile. Esau continued to foster vengefulness.

But God's faithfulness remained.

Against the dark background of so much sin, and of Isaac's now dreary life, the LORD's comforting word, which once again broke through, shone all the more brightly: "God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you . . . and your descendants . . . that you may [inherit] the land of your sojournings which God gave to Abraham." When Jacob had obediently departed, and Esau realized how much displeasure his wives gave Isaac (Rebekah's displeasure did not mean too much to him), he also went to take a wife from the family, along with his other wives. Not from Haran, but from Arabia, a daughter of Ishmael, who was a son of Abraham! But Ishmael was the persecutor of Isaac, just as he was of Jacob! What irony in this history!

Questions

1. How old were Jacob and Esau when they received their blessings?
2. What is meant by the "fatness of the earth" in 27:28?
3. Who are the "brothers" of 27:29?
4. Was Esau right in using the name Jacob in the sense of deceiver (27:36)?

5. Did Esau's tears indicate true repentance?
6. Was Isaac's desire to bless Esau with the Messianic blessing, passing Jacob by, just?
7. If not, what does Hebrews 11:20 mean?
8. What is meant by "away from the fatness of the earth" in 27:39? (Compare Question 2.)
9. What does 27:35, and for that matter, this whole episode, indicate about Isaac's opinion regarding the legality of the blessing? Was the blessing legal, though given to the wrong person?
10. If Esau had come home earlier, would he have received the Messianic blessing? Why, or why not?
11. Did salvation depend on that blessing? Why, or why not? In other words: Could Esau have been saved without being the father (according to the flesh) of the Messiah?
12. What is the ground for eternal condemnation of a person? May we say: Because God wills it? (Compare Ezekiel 33:11.)