

The Family of Abraham - Part 17—The Deception of Isaac

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[0 : 00] Welcome back to this, the 17th in my series on the story of the family of Abraham. We're looking at chapter 27 today, the blessing of Jacob by Isaac and Esau's loss of his blessing.

This story, we should remember, is a hugely important one for biblical history. It's at this point, in many respects, that Israel is established as the line of Abraham's seed that God will achieve his covenant purposes through.

Israel rather than Esau. And that split, that parting of the ways, is one that is of great consequence. Everything else that follows flows in some way or other from this particular event.

And this event then is one that requires deep study and analysis in the light of everything else that goes on. As Yoram Hazoni has pointed out, the meaning of any biblical text taken in itself can be very limited.

But yet, the meaning of the text, when read in the light of the broader sweep of biblical narrative, can be quite profound and extensive. It's the same with this.

[1 : 06] The story here, it can be difficult to discern who are the good people, who are the bad people, is there any good character here? Who is in the right and who is in the wrong?

And what should they have done? All these sorts of questions vex the reader of this chapter, who may feel that their sympathies are being pulled this way and that constantly.

Do we empathise with Esau, who feels robbed a second time? Do we lift up our voices and weep with him? Or do we feel that our sympathies are very much with Rebecca, who recognises that she has a prophecy concerning the son that should be blessed, and she does what she can to make that take effect?

Or do we sympathise with Isaac, the blind man who is fooled? Or with Jacob and his use of shrewdness to get what he should get?

All of these questions really vex us and make it difficult for us to discern what is the right way to read this chapter. Now if we look in the broader sweep of the story of Genesis, you'll already notice that there are ways in which this story is played out in different ways.

[2 : 23] So if you look in the chapters that follow, you'll see the switching of a first and a second born and the deception of someone in the dark. And in that story, it's the story of Jacob being deceived concerning Leah and Rachel by his father-in-law, Laban.

And that particular switch casts a dark shadow over the rest of not just Jacob's life, but over the life of his descendants to a great extent.

Because the two sides of the family find themselves caught in a rivalry, the events with Joseph in many respects flow out from that. We see other ways in which this casts a shadow over the story, with Jacob being deceived concerning his beloved son.

Another event involving cloaks and goats, where the blood of Joseph is presented on his garment and brought to Jacob.

And he's asked, do you recognize this? It's a very similar story. We see other stories that have echoes of this. For instance, the Judah and Tamar story has a number of echoes of this story.

[3 : 39] And in each of these stories, I think what we're seeing is something of the negative force of what Jacob did playing itself out. The consequences of his deception are great, which suggests that it was not the right thing to do.

Now that is a position that I've come to over time. It's not one that I originally held. My original position, well, my original position was that this was sinful Jacob, just being deceitful and there was no right on his side at all.

And he was someone who hadn't yet come to faith or something like that. Things need to be dealt with. Later on, he'll have a conversion experience and things will change.

And that is not a position that I find particularly nuanced or well enough equipped to deal with the complexities of this text. Later on, I came to James Jordan's position.

I found that quite persuasive, which is that Isaac was in the wrong in failing to give the blessing to the right son. And Rebecca and Jacob were trying to rectify that situation through righteous deception.

[4 : 50] But yet reading the story of Jacob after this and the shadow that this act casts upon things and the way that other events seem to play out the consequences of this, it seems that that's not quite so easy a position to hold.

For some reason or other, Jacob seems to suffer very negative consequences for what he does here, which suggests that what he's doing is not vindicated by the text.

In some sense, he bears the consequences and it is not the right thing to do. Then that was really through the influence of Yoram Hazoni that I came to that position.

But more recently, I've come to another position that's been influenced, but is not quite the same as the position of David Foreman. David Foreman's position is that we need to read the story as if we did not know what the ending was.

That's a very good principle to take when we're reading scripture. There are many times when we're reading scripture and we presume that what we already know to be the ending is always in view at every single stage.

[5 : 58] It's something that we should find when we're reading the Gospels. When we're reading the Gospels, you'll often read the Gospels and you're reading everything in the light of where you know it ends up.

And that's often something that will lead you to miss a number of features of the text that may not be resolved where you think they are. And features of the text that explain why many people were confused by what happened in the death and resurrection of Christ.

Reading stories in scripture as if we did not know what the ending was takes a lot of imaginative work. The experience of reading a story is something that is very different the second time around.

It's why we talk about spoiler alerts. We have spoiler alerts because if you know what's going to happen, it's very difficult to enter fully into the drama and the suspense of a narrative.

It's very difficult to notice certain things. Once you know how it's going to end up, you tend to categorise things into blind alleys and diversions and other things like that and false leads and then into those true things that drive inexorably towards the conclusion that the author intends.

[7 : 10] And in the process, what you miss is the ability to assess that ending in a more nuanced way. To recognise, for instance, that the ending may not actually resolve all of the themes.

Or the ending may not be as satisfying as you might think. That there may be other ways that the story could have ended. And the contingency of the ending becomes more apparent.

Because you're reading from the vantage point of these accumulating themes that need to be resolved rather than in terms of the resolution and reading everything in terms of the denouement.

How everything is tied together at the end. Reading this story then, in that sort of way, what do we notice? Well, the first question is, when we're reading the story of Rebecca and what she's doing here, is there any mention of deception?

And that's an important thing to consider. When she first gives her instructions, or literally her commands, to Jacob, what does she say?

[8 : 21] She says, Indeed, I heard your father speak to Esau your brother, saying, Bring me game and make savoury food for me, that I might eat it and bless you in the presence of the Lord before my death.

Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to what I command you. Go now to the flock and bring me from there two choice kids of the goats, and I will make savoury food from them for your father such as he loves.

Then you shall take it to your father that he may eat it, and that he may bless you before his death. Now where is there any mention there of deception?

What is clearly presented is Rebecca is pushing forward, at this point, she's pushing forward her son to take action, to go before his father, bringing food, doing exactly the thing that's asked of Esau, his brother, and to present himself before his father with food.

Now what could be in view here if it's not deception? Just bear that in mind. Think about it a bit more. And he asked then, Look, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I'm a smooth-skinned man. [9 : 36] Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be a deceiver to him, and I shall bring a curse on myself and not a blessing. Now what is in view here?

Again, read as if we didn't know the ending at this point. Is there necessarily deception taking place here? What he's been told to do is to bring forward food to his father, and as he brings forward food to his father, then he's hoping to receive a blessing from his father, in doing what Esau was commanded to do.

And then he wonders, Is he going to seem like a deceiver? That he's not the person that should be there, and that he's, in some sense, not really fit for a blessing.

And then what his mother does, she says, Let your curse be on me, my son. Only obey my voice, and go get them for me. He went and got them, and brought them to his mother, and his mother made savoury foods, such as his father loved.

Then Rebekah took the choice clothes of her elder son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob, her younger son. And she put the skins of the kids of the goats on his hands, and on the smooth part of his neck.

[10 : 56] Then she gave the savoury food, and the bread, which she had prepared into the hand of her son, Jacob. Now, at this point, it's obvious it's deception, isn't it?

It's very clear that she means to deceive Isaac concerning the identity of her son. I'm not so sure anymore. The more that I read this, the less certain I am that there is deception in view.

Maybe more subtle what's going on here. Let's think back to the story that we've had so far.

Rebekah, in the very outset of the story of Esau and Jacob, had struggling in her womb, and she was wondering, why is it this way with me?

Why is this happening to me? And then she's told by the Lord that two nations are struggling in her womb, and that there will be two people separated from her body.

One people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger. Now, at that point, she has a clear intimation of which of the brothers is going to serve the other.

[12 : 03] Now, some have argued that this is a sort of Delphic ambiguity, that it's the older, the younger shall serve. And it could mean the older brother will be served by the younger, or the older brother will serve the younger, and it's got that ambiguity.

I'm not sure it's intended to be read that way. Rather, she knows that Jacob is the one that should be blessed. And there's a difference in Jacob and Esau that's very much about, well, when they come out of the womb, one seems red and fully formed, hairy, and just seems a far healthier kid, perhaps, a kid with a lot more strength and vigour, and the other son just seems, he doesn't seem very strong at all, he seems weak, and he's named Jacob.

He's named Hel. And it's not entirely a flattering name. Now, it's not even clear that Rebecca names him. It may just be that Jacob names him.

They name Esau Esau, but it's not clear that Jacob is named by both of them. And she has a deep attachment to Jacob. And you have this juxtaposition where Isaac loves Esau because he ate of his game.

And then you have, but Rebecca loved Jacob. And so there's this father's son and mother's son and the competition between them.

[13 : 34] And the competition between them is also such that one is loved in a more conditional way. And that's often like a, it's a more fatherly sort of love that the father sees certain features in his son and loves him very much for what he achieves and that sense of, now, of course, there is a certain unconditional aspect to that.

But the father's love is very much related to the doing of the son. Whereas the mother's love is more unconditional. And it seems to be particularly given to the younger, weaker son in this case.

Maybe the son that needed more care and protection and maternal nurture. Whereas the father's son is the son who's the doer. And as we read through the story, we'll see that the older son is defined as a doer.

He's the man of the hand. He's the man that can do things. He's the man that carries weapons. He's the man that hunts. He's the skillful man. The man who can do these sorts of things.

Whereas Jacob is the domestic man. He's the man who cooks the lentil stew. He's the man who is a man of tense. He's smooth. He's mild.

[14 : 44] And in all these sorts of ways, he's associated more with the realm of his mother. Whereas the man of the field is Esau. He's the man that goes out and he's the man that can struggle.

He's a manly man in a way that Jacob is not. And the love of Isaac for Esau is a love that's very much based upon what Esau is as a hunter, a skillful man, a man of his hands, a man who's known for initiative, a man that's known for these more manly traits.

And if you're thinking about who is going to be a fitting person to bring forward the destiny of the covenant people, if you weren't thinking morally, if you're just thinking in terms of their natural attributes, you would think Esau.

Esau is a man who, we'll see in a couple of chapters time, kings descend from, kings and chiefs descend from Esau. He's a man who has that natural capacity for rule and agency within the world. Whereas Jacob does not to the same extent. Jacob is a man more characterized by his voice and a man of thought, a man who's not so much a man of action.

[16 : 02] Now, Jacob will have to become a man of action if he's going to become a full man. And later on, we'll see that. But at this point, he's a man that does not have much, he's not much of a man of action at all.

He's a man who's very passive, as we'll see. Whereas Esau is a man that's defined by skill. And as a result, his father thinks that he is the one.

He is the one we're going to put the faith, the confidence in for bringing things forward. If you're going to go forward, you want to give it to the man that has agency, the man that has some sort of strength to him.

Not this weaker brother, this more domestic brother. The other thing we should notice is that this is some years before Isaac will finally die.

And that plays a role later on in the narrative. But at this point, he thinks, presumes that he's going to die. He's blind. He's presumably bedridden at the moment.

[17 : 02] He's told to rise up and eat. And at this point, it seems like death is near. His mother died not far off from this age. And at this point, maybe he thinks, my time has come.

I'm ill. I'm not going to have much longer. Let me bless my sons. And so that story is one that is very much overshadowed by this event of approaching death, which doesn't actually come.

And later on, we'll see that Esau is expecting his father's imminent death. And at that point, he's going to avenge himself on his brother. He's going to wait for his father's death.

But of course, his father's death does not happen for quite some time yet. At this point, it's worth thinking about the views that every person would have within the story.

So we have Esau, who is the older son, who feels tricked by his younger brother concerning the birthright. He wants to be the brother who comes out on top.

[18 : 09] He very much relates to his father, primarily. His father is impressed by his activity and his ability to do things skillfully.

His ability as a man of the field. He's a hunter like Nimrod, or he's a man of the field like Cain. He's someone who has that skill and that natural aptitude for rule.

And he's also someone who has done things that displease both of his parents, particularly his mother. He has taken wives of the Canaanites. And these wives, the story of these wives, frame the narrative here.

It causes great grief to his parents. At the beginning of this narrative, at the very end of the previous chapter, you see the description of his taking these two wives from the Canaanites.

And later on, you'll see him taking a wife that is designed more to pacify his parents and to improve his relationship with them. And that contrast between Esau then as a man of the field, a man of action, a man who does not honor the covenant, a man who despises his birthright, a man who takes wives that are not good wives.

[19 : 19] And then Jacob, who's a man associated with his mother, a man who does not really have much standing in the eyes of his father, a man who is weaker, less able than his brother, a man who's just not as much of a doer as his brother, a man that's associated with his mother's realm, and a man who's very much needs to be instructed by his mother.

There's a very strong difference there. Rebecca, think about Rebecca. Rebecca is someone who has a promise or a prophecy that is told concerning her two sons, and she knows what is to be the case.

And she sees that Jacob is about to be left out of the blessing, that Isaac is about to bless Esau rather than Jacob. And this is a crisis time.

I mean, how is this prophecy going to come about if she does not intervene? For Isaac, Isaac puts little trust in his son, Jacob. I mean, we see the son Jacob here.

He's not really got much agency. He doesn't really do much. And he doesn't seem to be a fitting person to put the weight of the covenant upon. Now Esau, he has his problems.

[20 : 33] Esau is not really someone who honours the covenant. And he has these bad wives, but to smooth out those things, you can make, you can redirect his masculine, manly traits in the direction of something better.

But what hope is there for Jacob? Jacob's just a bit weak. He's just not got much to him. And that challenge is, I mean, how could I bless that son?

How could I put the weight of the covenant upon the son that just does not seem to have the shoulders sufficient to bear it? Then you read the story, which is Rebecca taking action.

Now pay attention throughout the narrative of how little Jacob actually does. Rebecca initiates the plan. She overhears what Isaac says to Esau, his son.

And then she commands Jacob. This isn't just a suggestion. This is, she gives a series of commands. She's telling him exactly what to do. She's exercising a maternal authority.

[21 : 38] And he just meekly has to go along. He doesn't really have much agency of his own. She says that when he says that he might be thought a deceiver, she says, well, let the curse be on me.

She takes the responsibility and the accountability. When he brings the kids of the goat, she makes the stew. She's the one that prepares the food. She's the one who dresses her son.

Now, when you read all of this, you think Isaac or Jacob at this point, he's not a young kid. Jacob is at this point, he's in his 60s or 70s.

And when we read the later narrative and think about the age at which Jacob went down to Egypt and then the age that Joseph was when he stood before Pharaoh, the years of famine, subtract all of that.

Think about when Jacob, when Joseph was born to Jacob and put all those details together, you'll find out that he's in his 60s or 70s at this point.

[22 : 45] Jacob is not a young man here, but yet his mother is telling him everything that he must do. He has virtually no agency of himself, of his own. And this, I think, helps us to understand part of what is going on.

The action here that is envisaged, what is Rebecca hoping to do? The action envisaged is not really the action of Jacob primarily at all.

What is happening when we see the son being presented to the father? When you see the reference to smelling the son and the things like, surely the smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed, came near and kissed him and smelled the smell of his clothing, etc.

And then feeling the, all the essential imagery, this feeling the hands, kissing and smelling the son, eating the food, all of this imagery is interesting, as is the fact that there are two kids and the mother has two kids and these kids are used in different ways.

What is happening? When we read the story here, I think what we're seeing is that Rebecca is playing out the story of her two sons. And she is offering up one of the sons, the least, the son that is not loved by the father, but the son that she loves.

[24 : 10] She is offering that son up to the father in a way that makes it possible that that son might just be accepted. Now, is she intending to deceive Isaac? I'm not sure that she is.

Rather, she's intending to trigger his recognition. And what will happen at this point, she hopes, that Jacob will go forward, he'll bring the food, the food will be pleasing to his father, his father will smell the clothes of Esau and all these other things that he's wearing, feel his hands, and yet recognize that it's Jacob.

And what will that do? Well, it will help him to recognize that the younger son could become what he wants him to be. That the younger son has some capacity yet.

That the younger son is the proper son to receive the blessing. The younger son is the one who brings domesticated kids, not wild game.

And the covenant should be given to the one who bears this proper food, not the wild game. The wild game is associated with things outside the covenant. Whereas the son that's brought forward is

not a wild animal, he's a domesticated animal.

[25 : 32] And we talked a bit in previous discussions and podcasts about the way that Israel is supposed to be a tamed people, a pruned people in circumcision and other ways like that.

And those children that are not part of the covenant to the same degree are depicted as wild animals. They're not evil animals but they're animals that are associated with the wild, untamed. Whether that's Ishmael or here, Esau. These are children that are wild. They're outside of the domesticated realm of the covenant.

Now as he presents this food. Now is Isaac supposed to mistake the wild food or the domesticated kids, the food prepared in that way, for the wild food?

Maybe not. I'm not sure he is. I'm supposed, I suspect that he's supposed to recognise the difference and perceive a moral lesson. That this is the this is the son that I've overlooked.

[26 : 39] And this is a son that is making a case for himself or more particularly his mother is making a case for him. The mother has taken two kids. Now why two kids?

Does Isaac just have this ravenous appetite that he could down two goats? Probably not. The two kids represent Esau and Jacob and one of them is used to dress up Jacob and the other is used to present the food to be the one that goes forward.

And Esau, again we need to remember the plays on words here. Esau is a play on word with goat and with hairy and with seer or that word seer rather than Esau.

It's a play on a set of different meanings. So seer, the land of Edom. Then we have goats and then we have hairy and they're all slight variations of the same word or the same sounds.

And so what we're seeing, I think, is a play upon Esau, Esau's identity, that Jacob is being dressed up like Esau and brought forward by his mother so that he would receive the blessing, that he would receive approval.

[27 : 57] And the movement here is a sacrificial type movement. It's maybe not accidental that there are two kids involved in the sacrifice of the day of coverings or the day of atonement.

On the day of coverings you have the offering of one goat that's sent out into the wilderness away from the fat of the land, etc., away from the Jew of Heaven, which is what we later see in the events of the statement made by Isaac concerning Esau.

And then the other is brought up into God's presence and offered at the altar, etc. Now, what we have there, I think, is maybe something related to the way that Jacob immediately goes to Bethel and cedes the ladder up to Heaven.

Maybe Jacob is being offered up as the goat that's taken God's presence, and Esau the one that's sent away. Maybe it's playing out that dynamic.

But what is taking place here is primarily an act of Rebekah. Jacob is doing very little. He's just being commanded and directed to do these different things. And what Rebekah is probably doing, I believe, is presenting her son in a way that renders him attractive to the father, putting on the clothes of his older brother, to say that he could fit these clothes yet, he could become this man yet, he could become a man of the hand, he could become a doer.

[29 : 30] He's not just this weak kid that you've dismissed. He could become more than that. He's a man that is a man that is fitting for the covenant. He's not a wild man, he's not a man that's marrying outside of the covenant.

He's not a man that despises his birthright. This is a tame man, but as a tame man, he's a good man, and as a good man, he could become more of a man, he could become someone who can act with the strength and the masculinity of his brother.

Just give him a chance. Pay attention to this son. Don't just dismiss him as you have all your life. And those two sons being presented by Rebekah, it's a playing out of the birth narrative again in different ways.

Unfortunately, something goes wrong. When Jacob goes to his father, now he could be seen as a deceiver. He's wary about that. His father may think you're just trying to fool a blind man.

Now, what was the likelihood that if Rebekah was aiming to deceive Isaac that it would have worked out? Pretty slim. I mean, if you're trying to deceive the father of your sons, who had known those sons for over 70 years, well, it's unlikely you're going to do that.

[30 : 49] He knows them pretty well. He knows their voices, he knows all these different aspects about them. Even when he's blind, he can tell the difference between them. He should be able to.

And if he can't immediately, he should be able to find ways, wouldn't you expect? That's what you presume. But no. What happens is that what she was not intending to do, she was intending to present this son to make a case for herself and for the son that had been overlooked and to say that he can fill that role, he can be that one, he can be the one that you bless.

But yet, when he's inquired of, Jacob says that he is Esau. Jacob said to his father, he went to his father and said, my father, and he said, here I am, who are you, my son?

Now, he knows it's one of his sons, he just doesn't know which. And Jacob said to his father, I am Esau, your firstborn. I have done just as you told me, please arise, sit and eat of my game that your soul may bless me.

And then Isaac is not certain what's going on here. And again, maybe here some of the echoes of the story of the Akeda narrative where he says, my father, here I am, the same sort of language playing out here.

[32 : 12] How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son? And he said, because the Lord your God brought it to me. These are themes again that might remind you of the animal being brought very quickly, the animal caught in the bushes, the question of where is, why has something happened in a particular way?

The, where is the sacrifice, that question. Isaac comes to, said to Jacob, please come near that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not.

What Jacob is doing here is he's hiding. He's not really showing his identity, rather he's pretending to be Esau. But was that the original plan? It's not certain to me that that was the original plan.

The original plan was, as I see it, more likely one of putting forward Jacob in a way that showed that he could become like the son that the father loved.

They were making a case for Jacob as Jacob, not Jacob masquerading as his brother, but this is a Jacob that can rise to the stature of his brother and yet be the right son to bless.

[33 : 23] This is not an unfaithful person. This is a person who will honour the covenant, but yet he's not fully grown. He's not fully matured. He's not become the man that he could be yet.

Give him a chance. Here's a man that could have hands like Esau yet. Feel those hands for now. Just bear with me. Just recognise the possibility.

Allow your imagination to go there, that this son could become the one. But no, what Jacob does as he deceives his father and pretends to be Esau, rather than making the case that he could be like Esau, that he could earn the, could be the one that is meriting the blessing, deserving of the blessing, a fitting recipient of the blessing in his own right.

No, he pretends to be his brother. And that event haunts him for the rest of his life in different ways. Let's play out the consequences of this. And then he brings the game and he eats it, the food and he eats it, and then he comes near, kisses him, and he smells him, and he blesses him at that point. Surely the smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed. Therefore may God give you of the dew of heaven, of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine.

[34 : 41] Let people serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, and let your mother's sons bow down to you. Curse be everyone who curses you, and blessed be those who bless you.

This is the covenant blessing, and he's giving it to the son, the older son. It's quite a serious thing that he's giving it to the son, Jacob, here, rather than the older son.

It's quite significant what he's doing here. Think of what this is saying about Jacob. He's saying, be master over your brethren, and let your mother's sons bow down to you.

This is a significant statement to make in contravention of what God had prophesied concerning the boys. When they had been in the womb, God has said that the older will serve the younger, and here is Isaac blessing what he presumes to be his older son in such a way that would go directly against that.

And that is worth bearing in mind here. Jacob is in the wrong to deceive his father, but his father is deceived, and his father, there is a poetic justice to this.

[35 : 56] His father fails to recognise the difference between his two sons. And the features that he focuses on, the features, the smell of his son's clothes, the taste of his game, and the feel of his hands, this is a very limited set of cues to work off.

Those are the things that cause him to bless his son. Is that really the basis for blessing the person who will bear the covenant destiny? Merely their strength, their handiness, their ability to be a

person of skill?

Is it merely the fact that they smell of the field? That they are someone who's associated with that realm of hunting and other things like that? Is it merely the fact that they have rough hands? Or are you supposed to discern in a different way? Jacob's deception, or the deception of Isaac at this point is fitting. He deserves to be deceived in this way.

The fact that he's focused so much on these aspects of Esau's character and he knows that there's something off. The voice sounds like Jacob, but when he feels the hands, when he smells the clothes, that's enough.

[37 : 11] What should he be paying attention to? The fact that he's deceived is fitting, it's appropriate. He gets his comeuppance in many respects. He has favoured the wrong son.

And as a result, he is struck by trembling when he realises what has happened. When Esau comes in and says, what about me? Again, think about what's taking place here.

There's the dark realm and the struggling of two brothers. The struggling between Isaac, or Jacob, who rises, goes out first of the realm, out of the realm, and Esau who comes next, and that rivalry between them.

What is the opposition here? It's the opposition very similar to the one of the womb, that Jacob came out clutching his brother's heel, and they were struggling for their mother's resources in the womb, struggling for her life and her blood, and yet, now they're out of the womb, they're struggling for the blessing of their father.

And it presents them as at great odds with each other. Only one can get this in its proper way. And when we see that Jacob talks, or Isaac talks to his son Esau, what is left for Esau?

[38 : 29] This is striking. This is what would have been left for Jacob. Isaac, his father answered him and said, or Esau said to his father, have you only one blessing, my father?

That's a haunting question. That's the question Jacob would have been asking, had action not been taken. Bless me, even me also, my father.

And Esau lifted up his voice and wept. He's absolutely distraught. He's lost everything. And his father said, behold, your dwelling shall be of the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above.

More likely, away from the fatness of the earth and the dew of heaven from above. By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother, and it shall come to pass, when you become restless, that you shall break his yoke from your neck.

This reminds you maybe of the blessings given to all the statements made concerning Ishmael, and later on the statement, earlier on the statement made concerning Ham and Canaan. this is a pretty chilling thing to read.

[39 : 34] This is what would have befallen Jacob. And Esau, you can understand that he feels devastated by this. Understandably so. His brother has wronged him, defrauded him of his birthright, and now defrauded him of his blessing.

And here we see the father's action. I mean, he trembles, he realises what he has done. And there is a sense of recognition at this point.

I mean, is there no way that he can take this blessing back? Is there no way that he can judge his son? I think there's similar dynamics here to the story of Judah and Tamar.

Judah dresses up, removes her widow's clothing, dresses up as a harlot, and Judah, who's just so blind, would drink perhaps, takes Tamar in and has relations with her, and just hands everything over to her.

His cord, his signet, and his garment, and all these sorts of things are handed over to her, and then later on offers to give her a kid.

[40 : 45] Again, kids are associated with children, and Tamar has been looking for a child, and in the same case here, we have the woman with the two kids offering and doing an action concerning those kids that presents them to the father.

And Isaac's action at this point just shows how far he had gone, and there's a moment, I think, of recognition. He trembles at what he has done.

It's a terrible thing. He's left nothing for the son that he favours, but yet he knows that what he did was the right thing to do.

it was right to bless his younger son rather than the older son. There was, I believe, a moment of recognition. He does not actually judge Jacob at this point.

There's no berating Jacob. There's no, although what Jacob did was clearly wrong, he seems to take the approach of Judah, that you are more righteous than I, that Rebecca and Jacob were in the right in this case, or had more right on their side than he did in this case.

[41 : 58] Jacob was right. Jacob had a lot of consequences that came from this as a result of his sin, but he was not the one primarily in the wrong.

And the results of this are far-reaching. There are two events of, or a number of events of weeping within this narrative. We have the weeping of Esau at this point.

He lifts up his voice and weeps. Later on we'll see Jacob doing that at a point, and then we'll see them doing it together. This is playing out a larger narrative underneath it.

You have two sons competing for the resources of their parents. One son favoured by the mother, one son favoured by the father. One son that lost out of the mother's resources in the womb and came out clutching his brother's heel.

Another son that lost doubt on his father's blessing and the birthright. At this point you have, as it were, a reaffirmation of Jacob's name. And Esau says, Is he not rightly named Jacob?

[43 : 02] For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright and now look, he has taken away my blessing. He said, Have you not reserved a blessing for me?

Two sons and brothers in this bitter rivalry and this coming out, as it were, of the womb of the tent of the father and the judgment at that point and the naming of Jacob, the reaffirmation of his name, not a positive name, a name that's associated with supplanting, with the heel, with all these themes that are negative themes.

And if Rebecca was hoping that there would be a very positive end to this story, it does not work out in a way that is as positive as she hoped. There's a very mixed blessing here.

He gets a blessing, but yet the consequences of his actions here are severe and will dog him for the rest of his life. And so it's a very mixed blessing.

Whereas Esau, his state is one just devastation. He's lost everything. Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him.

[44 : 15] And Esau said in his heart, the days of mourning for my father at hand, then I will kill my brother Jacob. And he says this in his heart, but Rebekah hears of it.

She gets wind of Esau's intentions. So she instructs Jacob to flee and tells him to go to her brother Laban in Haram.

Stay with him a few days until your brother's fury turns away, until your brother's anger turns away from you and he forgets what you have done to him. Remember, this is what Jacob primarily has done to his brother, not Rebekah.

Rebekah was putting her son up to make a case for him, to make a case to Isaac on his behalf and also to maybe push her son to make a case for himself as well.

And she's not primarily the one that defrauded the brother by pretending to be the brother. She didn't really instigate that. It wasn't that sort of deception that she was looking for.

[45 : 20] Rather, what she was doing was putting forward the son to make a case for him. And so she presents this as very much Jacob's action, that what he has done to his brother, not what we have done.

So what we see is the whole narrative of the deception of Isaac is flanked by these statements concerning the wives of Esau.

And the wives of Esau are a significant part of this story, as we'll see as we get into the next chapter. It helps us to understand why Esau was an unfitting recipient of the blessing, why Jacob would be a better recipient.

But also we see the consequences of what takes place here playing out over history. Rebecca also mentions at this point, she says, why should I be bereaved also of you both in one day?

Why should I miscarry you both in one day? There is this fear that this was supposed to be a new sort of birth event, that this was supposed to bring into effect what had taken place.

[46 : 40] The original birth event, Esau had come out first, Jacob clutching his heel, and yet she knew that the younger was supposed to be the one that received the blessing. Now there was supposed to be a new sort of rebirth as the younger son was put in first, and got out with the blessing first, but getting it honestly and forthrightly by truly representing himself as Jacob and making a case for himself, saying all these things that you like in Esau, I can become that, give me time, but yet I am the fitting recipient of the blessing.

And yet it all goes wrong and it seems as if she is miscarried. Jacob has come out and now he is the object of his brother's hatred.

His brother has been left with nothing. He has been devastated by what has happened. Instead of a blessing, he is cut off from the fatness of the land and the dew of heaven. And so she has lost Esau in many respects.

If it wasn't bad enough that he had the daughters of Heth, now she has lost him to this judgment upon him, which is supposed to be a blessing but is no blessing at all.

And now if Esau takes Jacob's life as well, she is left with nothing. Both her children have gone. And so she tries to offer up her son to her husband to make a case for him and then in the end it seems like she has lost both.

[48 : 08] It suggests that maybe her action wasn't the wisest either. Then in this chapter there are four different parts playing out. The part of Isaac who sins by not giving the blessing to the right son.

the part of Jacob who does not follow through the plan as originally intended hides behind his brother's identity rather than stepping out into, growing out into his brother's characteristics while maintaining his faithful character.

father's and then Esau who's this wild son who's not really honouring his parents and yet is distraught and who is robbed of his blessing.

And then Rebecca who has a prophecy that she wants to bring to effect but yet fails to do it in a careful way and ends up with things almost blowing up in her face. In each of these stories there are tragedies that are going to play out in future generations and throughout the stories of the characters involved.

This is something to pay attention to. This story is one we'll return to on a number of occasions in the ensuing discussions of future episodes. Thank you very much for listening.

[49 : 20] If you have any questions on this or other chapters like it and other issues like it please leave a question for me your Mercurius cat account. If you'd like to support the transcription of videos like this and if you want to see the transcriptions just go to the link in the show notes and you can do that using my Patreon or PayPal accounts.

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