



Genesis - Chapter Twenty Seven

II. Genesis 11:27-50:26 - Patriarchal History (continues)

II.b Genesis 25:19-36:43 - Isaac's Descendants (continues)

Summary of Chapter Twenty Seven

Genesis records in detail two important occasions when patriarchs, nearing death, pronounced special blessings on their sons: Isaac in vv.1-40, and Jacob in 49:1-27. In this present account, Isaac's intention to bless Esau is subverted by Rebekah, who helps Jacob receive the blessing of the firstborn. This event not only builds on the earlier incident when Esau sells his birthright to Jacob (25:29-34), but also develops the divine statement in 25:23 that the elder will serve the younger. Although Rebekah's actions involved deception, the text simply reports what Rebekah did without condoning or commenting on her actions. Nevertheless, the first audience again would see the ways in which God in his sovereignty uses all kinds of actions: good, bad, and mixed, to bring his people to the place in which they find themselves.

II.b.v Genesis 27:1-29 - Isaac Blesses Jacob

When he knew that the end of his own life was approaching, Isaac wanted to pass on the blessings of succession to his firstborn and favourite son, Esau. Before he was prepared to do so he wanted Esau to hunt for game to prepare him his meal and then he would bless him.

However, his wife Rebekah overheard all this and she wanted her favourite, Jacob, to receive the blessing, so she devised a plan to fool Isaac into thinking he was Esau and she prepared Isaac his favourite meal to promote the deception. This ruse worked and Jacob received his father's blessing in place of Esau.

¹ When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called his elder son Esau and said to him, 'My son'; and he answered, 'Here I am.' ² He said, 'See, I am old; I do not know the day of my death.

Genesis 27:1-2

Isaac is introduced as both old and blind. Both factors are important in light of subsequent events. Although Isaac states: I do not know the day of my death, he clearly believed he was near to death, and he decides that the time has come to bless his firstborn son, Esau. Such blessings were very important, for as prayers addressed to God they were viewed as shaping the future of those blessed. Other key figures called their sons at such a time: <<*When the time of Israel's death drew near, he called his son Joseph and said to him, 'If I have found favour with you, put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal loyally and truly with me. Do not bury me in Egypt'*>> (Genesis 47:29), and: <<*When David's time to die drew near, he charged his son Solomon, saying: 'I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, be courageous, and keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his ordinances, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn'*>> (1 Kings 2:1-3).

From biblical accounts, Martin Luther calculated that Isaac was one hundred and thirty seven when he blessed Jacob. If this is correct then he had another forty-three years to live as he died at the age of one hundred and eighty (35:28).

Isaac's blindness enables Jacob to avoid detection when he pretends to be Esau. It may also be implied that Isaac's physical loss of sight reflects an inner blindness that makes him oblivious to Esau's shortcoming and God's purpose for Jacob (25:23). Isaac's motivation for blessing Esau is possibly driven by a desire for 'savory food' (v.4) and the love of his son's manliness through his outdoor pursuits rather than a true assessment of his character.

Isaac is not the only man described as having failing eyesight in his old age, possibly caused by very thick cataracts or macular degeneration. One such case was the priest: <<*At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room*>> (1 Samuel 3:2). It was not so with another famous leader: <<*Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired and his vigour had not abated*>> (Deuteronomy 34:7).

³ Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and hunt game for me. ⁴ Then prepare for me savory food, such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may bless you before I die.'

Genesis 27:3-4

That I may bless you before I die. The paternal blessing that Isaac wishes to give to Esau is important because it will establish the identity of the heir to the divine

promises given to Abraham and Isaac, as well as to Isaac's material wealth and family responsibilities. In light of this, the firstborn line will eventually lead to a royal descendant through whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed.

This link between firstborn and blessing is emphasised in a wordplay involving both terms. In Hebrew, firstborn is *bekorah*, whereas blessing is *berakah*. Much of the story involving Esau and Jacob centres on these concepts and how the younger twin, Jacob, acquires both the firstborn birthright and the related paternal blessing.

Passing on blessings appears several times in Scripture, including: <<All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, blessing each one of them with a suitable blessing>> (Genesis 49:28), <<This is the blessing with which Moses, the man of God, blessed the Israelites before his death>> (Deuteronomy 33:1), and, in context, the blessing here is commented on in the NT: <<By faith Isaac invoked blessings for the future on Jacob and Esau>> (Hebrews 11:20).

⁵ Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it, ⁶ Rebekah said to her son Jacob, 'I heard your father say to your brother Esau, ⁷ "Bring me game, and prepare for me savoury food to eat, that I may bless you before the LORD before I die." ⁸ Now therefore, my son, obey my word as I command you. ⁹ Go to the flock, and get me two choice kids, so that I may prepare from them savoury food for your father, such as he likes; ¹⁰ and you shall take it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies.'

Genesis 27:5-10

Rebekah was listening. The narrator unambiguously states that Rebekah instigates and coordinates the deception undertaken by Jacob. This mitigates, but does not remove, Jacob's guilt in deceiving his father.

Now therefore, my son, obey my word as I command you. Instead of trusting God to fulfil what he had promised in 25:23, Rebekah decided to do what she thought was right in human-centred wisdom and strength. Her good intentions did not justify this self-centred approach. It is not surprising that Jacob was expected to obey his mother's commands and this is a principle that God would later set in law: <<Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you>> (Exodus 20:12).

So that I may prepare from them savoury food for your father, such as he likes. Rebekah, of course, knew her husband's tastes better than Esau would and was able to prepare a meal that would be to his liking. In the matter of this proposed blessing, Isaac was no less scheming than Rebekah. In the wilfulness of his old age, he was determined to pass on the blessing to Esau, despite what the Lord had said

and what the boys had shown in their lives. The fact Isaac tried to dispense the blessing secretly showed he knew what he wanted to do was wrong. Sadly, in this house, no one trusted anyone else.

¹¹ But Jacob said to his mother Rebekah, ‘Look, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a man of smooth skin. ¹² Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him, and bring a curse on myself and not a blessing.’ ¹³ His mother said to him, ‘Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my word, and go, get them for me.’

Genesis 27:11-13

Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him. The physical differences between the two brothers were clear: Esau is a hairy man, and Jacob of smooth skin. Isaac’s sight was dim but there was no problem with his sense of touch. From birth, Esau was clearly distinguished from Jacob by his hairy appearance (25:25), i.e. the thick covering of body hair that would have been even more pronounced in adulthood. Jacob, true to his name, trickster, was happy to go along with this plan. His only concern was if it would succeed.

When Jacob expresses concern about being discovered, Rebekah states that she will bear any curse placed on him. Rebekah’s desire for Jacob to receive the blessing of the firstborn is no doubt motivated by her special love for him, as indicated in 25:28.

¹⁴ So he went and got them and brought them to his mother; and his mother prepared savoury food, such as his father loved. ¹⁵ Then Rebekah took the best garments of her elder son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them on her younger son Jacob; ¹⁶ and she put the skins of the kids on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. ¹⁷ Then she handed the savoury food, and the bread that she had prepared, to her son Jacob.

Genesis 27:14-17

Rebekah was thorough in her execution of the plan to deceive her husband. She prepared savoury food, such as his father loved, dressed Jacob in the best garments of her elder son Esau so that he would smell like Esau, and she put the skins of the kids on his hands and on the smooth part of Jacob’s neck, to that his skin would feel like Esau’s. She knew her husband well and was able to manipulate the situation to ensure it was her favourite son who would receive the blessing of his father.

¹⁸ So he went in to his father, and said, ‘My father’; and he said, ‘Here I am; who are you, my son?’ ¹⁹ Jacob said to his father, ‘I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game,

so that you may bless me.’²⁰ But Isaac said to his son, ‘How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?’ He answered, ‘Because the LORD your God granted me success.’²¹ Then Isaac said to Jacob, ‘Come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not.’²² So Jacob went up to his father Isaac, who felt him and said, ‘The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.’²³ He did not recognise him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau’s hands; so he blessed him.²⁴ He said, ‘Are you really my son Esau?’ He answered, ‘I am.’²⁵ Then he said, ‘Bring it to me, that I may eat of my son’s game and bless you.’ So he brought it to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank.²⁶ Then his father Isaac said to him, ‘Come near and kiss me, my son.’²⁷ So he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his garments, and blessed him, and said,

‘Ah, the smell of my son

is like the smell of a field that the LORD has blessed.

²⁸ May God give you of the dew of heaven,
and of the fatness of the earth,
and plenty of grain and wine.

Genesis 27:18-28

Who are you, my son? The one thing that Rebekah could do nothing about was to disguise Jacob’s voice to sound like Esau’s and it seems that Isaac’s suspicions were aroused as soon as Jacob spoke: The voice is Jacob’s voice.

I am Esau your firstborn. This is an outright lie and would be in violation of God’s later command in Exodus 20:16. Isaac’s reaction to Jacob’s assertion suggests that he is not immediately convinced that this is Esau. The subsequent conversation adds to the drama of the story. Isaac is eventually persuaded when he smells Esau’s clothing, which Jacob had earlier put on (v.15).

How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son? This was another stumbling block in the deception. Isaac did not expect Esau to return from his hunting trip and prepare the meal so quickly in the way that Rebekah was able to do from existing meat stocks. However, Jacob was either primed to answer or quick-witted enough to give the only answer that would probably have seemed plausible to Isaac: Because the LORD your God granted me success. The deception here deepens as Jacob is prepared to bring the name of God into his lies.

He did not recognise him. Jacob still doubted the identity of the man before him. He spoke like Jacob yet felt and smelt like Esau. Despite the doubt he did not

expect his own sons to try to deceive him, so he accepted Jacob's words that he was Esau and he blessed him.

Come near and kiss me, my son. Such an embrace was the cultural norm, as it is today. Interestingly, it would be the embrace that would show reconciliation between the two brothers more than twenty years later: <<*But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept*>> (Genesis 33:4). This was not what Jacob had been expecting!

May God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. The words of the blessing were filled with pictures of the Lord's rich bounty: <<*he will love you, bless you, and multiply you; he will bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the issue of your flock, in the land that he swore to your ancestors to give you*>> (Deuteronomy 7:13), and: <<*They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again*>> (Jeremiah 31:12), and they echoed some of the words of the covenant God made with Abraham.

29 Let peoples serve you,
and nations bow down to you.
Be lord over your brothers,
and may your mother's sons bow down to you.
Cursed be everyone who curses you,
and blessed be everyone who blesses you!

Genesis 27:29

Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Isaac's blessing for his 'firstborn' goes far beyond requesting an abundance of material necessities (v.28). Here Isaac asks for universal sovereignty, embracing not only immediate family but also peoples and nations: <<*May all kings fall down before him, all nations give him service*>> (Psalm 72:11), and: <<*Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers, 'Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you'*>> (Isaiah 49:7). This blessing clearly builds on the divine promise to Abraham that kings will be among his descendants (17:6).

Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you! These words, which echo God's promise to Abraham in 12:3, develop a motif in Genesis whereby God's blessing or favour is mediated to others through members

of the unique line. This blessing, however, is excluded from those who disdain God's chosen ones.

II.b.vi Genesis 27:30-40 - Esau's Lost Blessing

When Esau returns from his hunting trip and with the promise meal prepared, he presents himself to his father and the earlier deception of Jacob is uncovered. However, it is too late for Isaac cannot rescind the blessing he had given to Jacob nor could he offer Esau the same blessing. This causes Esau to weep. He asks his father for a blessing anyway but the words offer no comfort as Esau will live by the sword away from the bountiful land of Canaan but he will one day break the yoke of his brother that formed part of the blessing Jacob had received.

³⁰ As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of his father Isaac, his brother Esau came in from his hunting. ³¹ He also prepared savoury food, and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, 'Let my father sit up and eat of his son's game, so that you may bless me.' ³² His father Isaac said to him, 'Who are you?' He answered, 'I am your firstborn son, Esau.' ³³ Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, 'Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all before you came, and I have blessed him? – yes, and blessed he shall be!' ³⁴ When Esau heard his father's words, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, 'Bless me, me also, father!' ³⁵ But he said, 'Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing.' ³⁶ Esau said, 'Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright; and look, now he has taken away my blessing.' Then he said, 'Have you not reserved a blessing for me?' ³⁷ Isaac answered Esau, 'I have already made him your lord, and I have given him all his brothers as servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son?' ³⁸ Esau said to his father, 'Have you only one blessing, father? Bless me, me also, father!' And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.

Genesis 27:30-38

Then Isaac trembled violently. Isaac began to shake convulsively. This phrase is very strong. It could be translated: "Isaac trembled most excessively with a great trembling." There are two plausible reasons for Isaac's shocked response. He realised that he had been deceived by his own son, probably also knowing that he would have been helped by Rebekah. This would have grieved him: <<**For even your kinsfolk and your own family, even they have dealt treacherously with you**>> (Jeremiah 12:6a). He would also have realised that he had tried to overturn

the will of God in having Jacob receive the blessing and had been deceived by his family in order that God's will should prevail.

Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing. When Esau returned to discover what has happened, he is filled with anger toward his brother (v.41). In response to Isaac's comment that Jacob deceived him, Esau observes: **Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times.** Esau alludes here to the wordplay on the name Jacob, which means 'to deceive or cheat'; refer to the comment made on 25:26. From Esau's perspective, Jacob has cheated him out of both his birthright (25:29-34) and his blessing, although Esau willingly forfeited his birthright to Jacob (25:33). When he saw it as a spiritual birthright, Esau did not value the birthright, but now that he saw it in material and political terms, he wanted it.

Have you only one blessing, father? Bless me, me also, father! This was more spiritual concern than seen before in Esau, though even this was coloured with material and political concern.

And Esau lifted up his voice and wept. Esau's tears were the tears of frustrated selfishness, not of regret for his own sin and despising of his birthright. Hebrews 12 uses the occasion of Esau as a warning: *<<See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and through it many become defiled. See to it that no one becomes like Esau, an immoral and godless person, who sold his birthright for a single meal. You know that later, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, even though he sought the blessing with tears>>* (Hebrews 12:15-17).

³⁹ Then his father Isaac answered him:

‘See, away from the fatness of the earth shall your home be,
and away from the dew of heaven on high.

⁴⁰ By your sword you shall live,
and you shall serve your brother;
but when you break loose,
you shall break his yoke from your neck.’

Genesis 27:39-40

See, away from the fatness of the earth shall your home be, and away from the dew of heaven on high. This indicates that Esau would no longer live in the land that would later be described as flowing with milk and honey; his future lay in the desert. Later, Esau's descendants settled outside of the Promised Land, to the east of the Jordan River, as referred to in the comment made on 32:3-5, eventually

taking control of Seir, which is later renamed Edom, refer also to the comment made on 36:1-37:1.

You shall break his yoke from your neck. Although Jacob has been given authority over his elder twin brother, Isaac indicates that Esau will eventually free himself from his brother's control.

II.b.vii Genesis 27:41-28:5 - Jacob Escapes Esau's Fury

Because of the deception and the natural antipathy that had always existed between the brothers, Esau resolved to kill his brother as soon as their father was dead. Rebekah was told of this threat to Jacob and so she instructed him to travel to the east and reside in the home of her brother Laban until the threat had passed. In order to get Isaac to agree to her plan she reminded him of the grief it had caused the two of them to have Esau married to Hittite women, so Isaac again blessed Jacob and instructed him to return to the east to find a wife from among his own people.

⁴¹ Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, 'The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob.'⁴² But the words of her elder son Esau were told to Rebekah; so she sent and called her younger son Jacob and said to him, 'Your brother Esau is consoling himself by planning to kill you.'⁴³ Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; flee at once to my brother Laban in Haran,⁴⁴ and stay with him for a while, until your brother's fury turns away —⁴⁵ until your brother's anger against you turns away, and he forgets what you have done to him; then I will send, and bring you back from there. Why should I lose both of you in one day?'

Genesis 27:41-45

I will kill my brother Jacob. When Rebekah learns of Esau's desire to murder his brother, she encourages Jacob to take refuge in north-western Mesopotamia, i.e. Haran, with her brother Laban. Fratricide is a common theme in Genesis and is a theme used by God to punish their descendants in later years: <<*For the slaughter and violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off for ever*>> (Obadiah 10).

Stay with him for a while, until your brother's fury turns away. It seems that Rebekah only intended Jacob to be away from her for a short time. As the story will soon show, Jacob's time in Haran would be more than twenty years.

Why should I lose both of you in one day? Had Esau killed Jacob he would have been banished from the family at the very least and so Rebekah would lose both her sons. In fact, in some way she did lose them both for Esau rebelled against his parent's wishes and Jacob lived a long way from them for many years. Since

Rebekah is not mentioned alive again in Scripture then it may be that she never saw Jacob again. He did however return in time for his father's death (35:27).

⁴⁶ Then Rebekah said to Isaac, 'I am weary of my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women such as these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?'

Genesis 27:46

The Hittite women. Rebekah is probably alluding here to Esau's wives (26:34-35), although she could be referring to Hittite women in general. She deliberately raised this issue in order to provide a rationale for sending Jacob away, conscious of Esau's desire to kill him, and thus securing her husband's agreement and blessing for Jacob.

What good will my life be to me? Rebekah's plea to her husband alludes to the fact that her family is all that she has. Despite her recent deception to ensure that Jacob was blessed, she still wants the best for her family. Her heartfelt plea is similar to that of another in Scripture: <<***Remember that my life is a breath; my eye will never again see good***>> (Job 7:7).