

Tasty Food, Bitter Feud

³⁴ When Esau was forty years old, he took Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite to be his wife, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite,

³⁵ and they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah.

^{27:1} When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called Esau his older son and said to him, "My son"; and he answered, "Here I am."

² He said, "Behold, I am old; I do not know the day of my death.

³ Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me,

⁴ and prepare for me delicious food, such as I love, and bring it to me so that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die."

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 speak to your brother Esau,

⁷ 'Bring me game and prepare for me delicious food, that I may eat it and bless you before the LORD before I die.'

⁸ Now therefore, my son, obey my voice as I command you.

⁹ Go to the flock and bring me two good young goats, so that I may prepare from them delicious food for your father, such as he loves.

¹⁰ And you shall bring it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies."

¹¹ But Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, "Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man.

12 Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him
and bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing."
13 His mother said to him, "Let your curse be on me, my son; only
obey my voice, and go, bring them to me."
14 So he went and took them and brought them to his mother, and
his mother prepared delicious food, such as his father loved.
15 Then Rebekah took the best garments of Esau her older son, which
were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger
son.
16 And the skins of the young goats she put on his hands and on the
smooth part of his neck.
17 And she put the delicious food and the bread, which she had pre-
pared, into the hand of her son Jacob.
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, that your soul 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, "Please come near, that I may feel you,
my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not."
22 So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, who felt him and said, "The
voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau."
23 And he did not recognize 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 near to me, that I may eat of my son's
game and bless you." So he brought it near 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 Isaac smelled the smell of his garments and blessed him and said, "See, the smell of my son is as 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.

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!"

30 As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, Esau his brother came in from his hunting.

31 He also prepared delicious food and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, "Let my father arise and eat of his son's game, that you may bless me."

32 His father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" He answered, "I am your son, your firstborn, Esau."

33 Then Isaac trembled very 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 he shall be blessed."

34 As soon as Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry and said to his father, "Bless me, even me also, O my 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 cheated me these two times. He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing." Then he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?"

37 Isaac answered and said to Esau, "Behold, I have made him lord over you, and all his brothers I have given to him for 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 but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father." And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.

39 Then Isaac his father answered and said to him: "Behold, away from the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling 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 grow restless you shall break his yoke from your neck."

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 Esau her older son were told to Rebekah. So she sent and called Jacob her younger son and said to him, "Behold, your brother Esau comforts himself about you by planning to kill you.

43 Now therefore, my son, obey my voice. Arise, flee to Laban my brother in Haran

44 and stay with him a while, until your brother's fury turns away--

45 until your brother's anger turns away from you, and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I will send and bring you from there. Why should I be bereft of you both in one day?"

46 Then Rebekah said to Isaac, "I loathe my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women like these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?"

28:1 Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and directed him, "You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women.

2 Arise, go to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel your mother's father, and take as your wife from there one of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother.

3 God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples.

- ⁴ May he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings that God gave to Abraham!"
- ⁵ Thus Isaac sent Jacob away. And he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban, the son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother.
- ⁶ Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-aram to take a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he directed him, "You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women,"
- ⁷ and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and gone to Paddan-aram.
- ⁸ So when Esau saw that the Canaanite women did not please Isaac his father,
- ⁹ Esau went to Ishmael and took as his wife, besides the wives he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth.

Genesis 26:34-28:9

The Anatomy of Evil

What is evil? Is it a thing you can reach out and touch with your hands? Is it something you can put into a test tube to do empirical analysis? If you can't touch it and can't verify its existence physically, then does it exist? If you took a purely materialistic view of the universe, or perhaps a monistic view (where all is "one"), then you might conclude such a thing. But of course, that is to live in the abstractions of one's mind, and not in the real world.

Everyone has a sense of evil. If people have not become desensitized to its horrors because of cultural manipulation, deception, and/or personal engagement minus repentance, people know evil, especially when it is done *to them*. What most do not know is why a thing is evil. Hint, it isn't because people deem it so.

When I talk about evil, I think of it the way that Augustine did, not as a positive thing, but as a **negative** thing or the **absence** of a thing. He used the idea of **light and darkness**, taking his cue from the Scripture. Light is given to the earth because a huge ball of fire rises in the east and shines its heavenly rays upon it. If evil were a thing, we would have to suppose that as soon as the sun sets, a giant ball of darkness rises in the east to take its place, shining its black rays down upon the earth. But we know that this is not what happens. Rather, it gets dark because the sun sets. Darkness is the *absence* of light.

The passage today is one of the longest we will look at in Genesis, some 57 verses: **Gen 26:34-28:9**. When preaching stories, I like to look for the literary unit, so as not to chop up the story into little bits. These verses make up our literary unit this week. But something struck me as I read again this well known story of **Jacob stealing Esau's blessing**. Someone

is missing. That someone is **God**. God is nowhere to be found in this story.

Something else also struck me, **which I hope to show you later**. There is **a lot of sin** in this story: wicked marriages, disrespecting God's promises and commands, lying, deceiving, manipulating, scheming, and others. Lest you think Jacob is the sole perpetrator, think again. Of the four main characters in this story, not a single one of them is put in a positive light. Each of them in their own ways are committing various kinds of evils.

Suddenly, the reason for God's absence made sense. God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. When he leaves, spiritual darkness rules. That is what happens in the story today. And yet, at the end of it day, **darkness does not win out**, but the God who is all-sovereign, all-powerful, all-seeing, and all-knowing does.

Esau and His Wicked Wives

The passage today actually begins with the **last two verses of the Genesis 26**. At first, they seem out of place. They tell us that when **Esau got married** he was forty years old. **Forty** is one of the numbers that dominates the Flood story (**Gen 7:4, 12, 17; 8:6**), and also happens to be the same age that Isaac was when he married Rebekah (**25:20**). Like the

events which precipitated the flood, Esau engages in evil marriages (see **Gen 6:2**). He breaks the command of Abraham, not to marry among the Canaanites (**24:3**). Unlike his father Isaac, Esau marries not one woman, but two. Both are his wives, and there is not even a hint that one is a maid-servant like Hagar. Rather, Esau is acting like Lamech of old, who took two wives and as we will see later, who ends up with great hatred in his heart.

The two wives of Esau are Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite (**Gen 26:34**). Neither name is particularly significant to the story. It is their **ancestry** that is significant. Hittites are among those living in the land of Canaan, whom God told Abram he would judge (**15:20**) for their great sins.

So why is this information given here? As I said, it seems out of place. But then you realize two things. **First**, you see in the next verse that these women “**made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah**” (**26:35**). We do not know why or how, we just know that they did. But just as suddenly as this raises its ugly head above water, it dips back below the surface and does not reappear again until the very end of our story. After Jacob has stolen Esau’s blessing, Esau wants to kill him (**27:41**; think of Lamech again). But Rebekah gets wind of it,

and commands Jacob to flee to her brother Laban's house (27:43; 8:2).

She tells Isaac something very odd, considering they have nothing to do with the actual story in between. “I loathe my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women like these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?” (27:46). Thus, just as before, the Hittite women raise their ugly (though probably quite beautiful) heads like a hydra rising out of the sea. Why? It signals first, that this forms the unit of our study. It begins and ends with the same thing.¹ Second, it becomes a segue to the story of Jacob meeting Rachel. Third, it shows us something about Esau. But I do not want to spoil that, so we will return to him in his own good time.

¹ I outline the unit this way:

- A. Hittite Women (26:34-35)
- B. Isaac Calling Esau (27:1)
- C. Rebekah's Plot to Steal (27:5-13)
- D. Jacob Gives Food to Isaac (14-17)
- E. Isaac Tests and is Deceived (18-27)
- F. Blessing of Jacob (28-29)
- D¹. Esau Gives Food to Isaac (30-31)
- E¹. Isaac Tests and comes to Realization (32-38)
- F¹. Anti-Blessing of Esau (39-40)
- C¹. Esau's Plot to Kill (27:41)
- B¹. Rebekah Sending Jacob Away (27:42-45)
- A¹. Hittite Women (27:46)

Isaac

The way I want to proceed is to look at each of the four characters separately. We will begin with **Isaac**. People usually think of Isaac quite differently than they do his father Abraham or his son Jacob. Abraham is the great man of faith. We often overlook his faults. Jacob is the great schemer and deceiver. We often overlook his faith. Isaac, by comparison, is rather quiet in the Bible. It seems that his personality was too. Isaac seems to be a rather peaceful and passive individual. In the last chapter, he is portrayed as a man of faith, but a man who is also not trying to get into a war with the natives. Because of our preconceptions, we want to read the story of Isaac here a little more carefully.

A lot of time seems to have passed since the last story. Isaac is **old** and his eyes are **dim** so that he cannot see (**Gen 27:1**). So he calls Esau his older son and says, “**My son.**” Esau says, “**Here I am**” (**27:1**). “**Behold, I am old; I do not know the day of my death. Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me, and prepare for me delicious food, such as I love, and bring it to me so that I may eat that my soul may bless you before I die**” (**2-4**). Suddenly, you will remember that we have something very close to this story already (**25:28-34**).

That story told us that God chose the younger Jacob over the older Esau (**vs. 23**).

This causes an eyebrow or both to raise. We start asking ourselves **questions**. Why is Isaac calling Esau? Doesn't he know about giving up his birthright? Doesn't he know that God promised the older would serve the younger? Then there is an idea present everywhere in Genesis except here. When a patriarch is going to die and bless, he calls all of his sons together at once. Why is Esau called by himself? And doesn't Isaac care about his pagan wives? And how exactly does Isaac know that he is about ready to die. As one commentator notes, if we are to take the Genesis history seriously, **“Isaac lives for many more years—he dies just ten years before Jacob and his family move to Egypt, more than a decade after Joseph is sold as a slave.”**² Is this old man so blinded by love for his firstborn that he can't see spiritually straight anymore? Or perhaps, it is just about the tasty food. He wouldn't be the first glutton in history. As another says, **“Isaac's sensuality is more powerful than his theology.”**³ Or

² John H. Walton, *Genesis*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 554.

³ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 206.

The proverbs say,

¹ “When you sit down to eat with a ruler, observe carefully what is before you,

² and put a knife to your throat if you are given to appetite.

³ Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food.

⁴ Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist.

maybe Isaac is trying to pull a fast one because he loves Esau and not Jacob?

As you can see, this little introduction to the story causes all kinds of questions to float around in our minds. We are left to ponder deeply the character of our hero Isaac. And these will not be the last of the questions when it comes to him and this story. For now, let us move on to Isaac's lovely wife, Rebekah.

Rebekah

We meet Rebekah in this story as one who is apparently doing a little eavesdropping (**Gen 27:5**). Was she expecting this? As soon as Esau went into the field to hunt for the game, Rebekah said to her son Jacob. Notice that in **vs. 5** Esau is Isaac's son, and in **vs. 6**, Jacob is Rebekah's son. These parents have favorites.

“I heard your father speak to your brother Esau, ‘Bring me game and prepare for me delicious food, that I may eat it and bless you before the LORD before I die.’ Now therefore, my son, obey my voice as I command you. Go to the flock and bring me two good young goats, so that I may prepare from them delicious food for your father, such as he loves. And you shall bring it to your father to eat, so that he may

⁵ When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven.

⁶ Do not eat the bread of a man who is stingy; do not desire his delicacies” (Prov 23:1-6).

“bless you before he dies” (27:6-10). This is most interesting. On one hand, Rebekah surely remembers the promise of God about Jacob. On the other, Rebekah is telling her son to deceive his father to get the blessing. Do the ends justify the means? Maybe for David Hume they do, but in God’s ethic they don’t.

At this point, Jacob and his mother have a little discussion. “Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him and bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing” (11-12). We remember back to when the two were born, with Esau being born hairy.

Mom says, “Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, bring them to me” (13). This is a strange answer. Don’t worry about the details. Just go get the animal and bring it to me. I’ll take care of the rest. If anyone’s wrath is aroused against you, I’ll take the punishment for it.

Compliant Jacob “went” and “took” and “brought” them to his mother, and she does the rest. First, she prepares delicious food, such as his father loved (14). Then, she took the best garments of Esau the older which she had in the house, and put them on Jacob the younger (15). To this, she added skins of the young goats he had killed. She put the

skins on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck (16). And she put the delicious food and the bread that she had prepared into the hand of her son Jacob (17).

More questions emerge, the first being, is she serious? I don't know about you, but a mutton doesn't exactly taste like venison. Farm animals do not have the texture of wild game. And most certainly—because I have had four kids and have been one myself, kids with those little touch and feel books, where you rub a piece of felt, then a piece of sandpaper, then a bit of carpet to learn the difference between them—how does she think that putting the fleece of a lamb on Jacob's hands could ever compare to the human hair of Esau. I've heard of pulling the wool over someone's eyes, but not literally, unless Esau was a satyr or something.⁴

Whether Rebekah had the promise of God in mind or not, I can't help but think about all of this the way that Sarai schemed to bring about the promise in her own way through Hagar. That act brought repercussions that exist to this very day. What we will find throughout the Jacob cycle is that this act will do the same for the nation of Israel who will

⁴ Of course, I couldn't resist the imagery. Esau is called *Seir*. Hair is *sair*. The garment is called a *sear*. A satyr (the most famous of which was named Pan) is a *sairim*. See *Giants: Sons of the Gods*, p. 194-96. Perhaps Rebekah has hope that it will all "Pan" out.

have to deal with the descendants of Esau all the way into the NT, when Herod tries to kill Jesus.

Jacob

For now, let's move on to Jacob. At the end of the day, it is not Rebekah who is most responsible, but Jacob, for Jacob is the one who carries out her plan himself. We pick it up in **vs. 18**, "So he went into his father and said, 'My father.' And he said, 'Here I am.'" This exchange is just like the one between Isaac and Esau (**vs. 1**). Suddenly, Isaac's suspicion is aroused. "Who are you, my son?" Why is he suspicious? We will see in a moment five reasons. But Jacob said, "I am Esau your firstborn" (**19**). Jacob flat out **lies** to his father. "I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me." He **lies a second time**. It isn't game, it is domesticated food. And a **third** time. He didn't make it, his mother did. Jacob also seeks to **steal** Esau's blessing. Isaac believes his lie, but his suspicion is not quelled.

"How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?" (**20**). This is the first of the five tests (**18, 20, 21, 24, 27**). These tests will all be empirical. The first is a **test of logic**. How will Jacob get out of this one? "Because the LORD your God granted me success." Notice two things here. First, Jacob used religion to cover up his lie. He used God and he

played on Isaac's devotion to Yahweh. This is a shameful thing to do, but one that happens far too often. Have you ever used religion as a means of actually covering up your sin? Second, notice that it is not "my" God, but "your" God. We will see for many chapters how this is Jacob's normal response to God. Only much later in his life will Jacob finally call God "my" God. This tells a great deal about this man's spiritual estate at this time in his life. What it says is not good. Keep that in mind as you consider that God chose *this* man.

Isaac does not answer Jacob, but asks his second question. It is a **test of touch**. "Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not" (21). Incredibly, Jacob obeys and his father felt his hands. "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau" (22). How incredible! Rebekah's trick worked. How dull must Isaac be? But now we learn a main reason for his suspicion. Jacob didn't even try to talk in an accent. The third test is therefore the **test of sound**, but Isaac's wits are not able to sort out the lies from the truth. Isaac "did not recognize him" (23). Therefore, he blessed Jacob.

Before we hear the blessing, we learn that Isaac said, "Are you really my son Esau?" (24). The fourth test is one of the

word. Jacob says, “I am.” Not that he is claiming to be God, but rather he apparently now realizes that his voice was giving him away. Better to just say on short word—‘*ani*.

Now Isaac tells his son to bring the food near so he may eat “my son’s game and bless you” (25). Jacob complies and Isaac ate, and—probably importantly—he drank wine too. Jacob is a wise little thief. Better to dull his dullard father’s sense as much as possible.

Isaac says, “Come near and kiss me, my son” (26). This is certainly the first part of the blessing, but it is also his final test. He is still not certain this is Esau. It is a test of scent (thinking, feeling, hearing, speaking, and now smelling). All the senses are engaged. Isaac is trying to discover the evil among him through his physical senses. “So he came near and kissed him. And Isaac smelled the smell of his garments and blessed him and said, ‘See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field that the LORD has blessed’” (27)!

This is a remarkable commentary on just how difficult it is to understand and identify evil with our senses. When deception is in our midst, our senses betray us. We con ourselves into believing what we are uncomfortable with. Notice how Isaac not invokes the LORD—“Esau” was right, the LORD has blessed him. These are Esau’s clothes, Esau’s

hands, Esau's tasty food. Surely, none of that could be faked. It sounds like Jacob, but no, it couldn't be. He wouldn't do that to me or to his brother. He's my son. Oh, how easily we are duped by sins sweet aroma. Jacob, the son of this man Isaac is at the heart of it. Surely, Jacob is viewed very negatively in this story.

The Blessing

Let us pause for a moment and consider the blessing that now ensues. It is a striking piece of irony, given what we know about God's prophecy at the birth of Jacob. "May God give you the dew of heaven and the fatness of the earth and plenty of grain and wine" (28). Calvin begins his comments on this blessing by approvingly citing the church Father Ambrose. "Jacob, the younger brother, is blessed under the person of the elder: the garments which were borrowed from his brother breathe an odour grateful and pleasant to his father. In the same manner we are blessed, as Ambrose teaches, when, in the name of Christ, we enter the presence of our Heavenly Father: we receive from him the robe of righteousness, which, by its odour, procures his favour; in short, we are thus blessed when we are put in his place."⁵ How

⁵ John Calvin and John King, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 91.

wonderful that God would use this blessing of a man who stole that blessing from his brother in a way that demonstrates our own participation in the same sins as the patriarchs, yet takes away our sins in Christ!

This becomes clearer in the next verse where we see the repeat of the birth oracle language of “serving” and “nations.” “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 blessed you!” (29). Here we need to remember that Jacob was chosen by God before he was born. The older would serve the younger. A nation would come from him. That nation was Israel, and through Christ who is True Israel, all in Christ have life through this blessing, a blessing given by mistake from Isaac. Does this not show that God is present even when he is absent? When evil things occur and humans sin and make mistakes, God is sovereign through them, working according to his purposes in heaven.

Speaking of heaven, God is blessing Jacob’s “fatness of the earth” because the earth that he will inherit in Canaan is a type of the dew of heaven. As Calvin says, “Thus he appointed the land of Canaan as a mirror and pledge to them of the celestial inheritance. In all his acts of kindness he gave them

tokens of his paternal favour, not indeed for the purpose of making them content with present good, so that they should neglect heaven ... but that, being aided by such helps, according to the time in which they lived, they might by degrees rise towards heaven.”⁶ This is the purpose of OT types and prophecies and even stories like this, that we might lift our heads up, away from earth, and towards our heavenly home where Christ is even now preparing places for us to live.

Esau

Now it is time to return to Jacob’s brother, Esau. “As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, Esau his brother came in from his hunting. He also prepared delicious food and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, ‘Let my father arise and eat of his son’s game, that you may bless me’” (30-31). It is a triumphal entry. Esau is stoked. If he has the earlier episode in mind when his brother made him sell his birthright, there is no hint of it now. Why should there be. His father has called him in on a private meeting to receive the blessing of the firstborn.

⁶ John Calvin and John King, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 91–92.

“Who are you?” Isaac answer. “What do you mean,” Esau must have thought. “I am your son, your firstborn, Esau,” (32) he said. “Who else would I be? What kind of a silly question is that? You must really be getting close to death my father, for not even remembering that I would be coming. I haven’t been gone that long.” That’s what I suspect Esau is probably thinking.

Suddenly, “Isaac trembled very violently” (33). The imagery of this reaction is vivid and disconcerting. We know that he isn’t having a seizure, though Esau doesn’t. We know that Isaac has immediately recognized what has happened to him. This is a true panic attack. “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?” It is completely rhetorical. Isaac knows full well who it was. It was Jacob! “Yes, and he shall be blessed” (33). These last words of the verse are decisive in their finality, and hardening in their effect on Esau. He will never be the same.

You see, what Isaac understands is something long ago forgotten. It is the power of a man’s word, and especially the power of blessing or a curse. Words really do matter. To speak it is, in a very real sense, to create it. Is this not the very lesson of **Genesis 1:3ff**? I do not mean this in any kind of

pagan—“name it and claim it” kind of way. I’m not talking about magic incantations. I’m talking about the objectivity of words. Words do things. They hurt and they heal. They cut and they mend. They bless and they curse. Do you know the power of your words and that once out, they cannot be returned?

Of course, this particular word has ramifications that will last for thousands of years, just the way God predestined it, as he works through the sins of four people that he profoundly disapproves of to make his will happen anyway. Esau knows exactly what has happened. “He cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry” (34). If he were a wolf, there would never have been a howl like this. Were he King Kong, his chest would cave in at the power of beating his breast. Were he Captain Kirk, Khan would be killed by the scream.

“Bless me, even me also, O my father!” (34). The roaring lion turns into a most pitiful wretched baby. “Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing” (34), Isaac replies. Just here I get the sense that both Isaac and Esau realize that their own attempts to thwart God’s plans have failed. Esau knew he had sold his birthright. Isaac almost certainly knew that God has said the older will serve the younger. But they didn’t care. Isaac overlooked much in

Esau, perhaps because he saw even more in Jacob. And he loved that tasty food. Esau, for his part, didn't care about his own birthright. Now it is all coming back on them.

How do people respond when they know they have been caught? They respond in anger and in blame. “Is he not rightly named Jacob?” (36). Here is where we get that idea that Jacob (*Yaaqob*) is a deceiver. The word deceiver in vs. 35 is parallel in thought to “cheated” or “supplanted” (*aqab*) in vs. 36. “He has cheated me these two times. He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing.” Then it all turns back into this pitiful, sorrowful sight. “Have you not reserved a blessing for me?” (36). These last words are ones that Esau would regret forever.

Isaac answered, “Behold, I have made him lord over you, and all his brothers I have given to him for servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son” (37)? “Have you but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father?” And Esau lifted up his voice and wept, not from repentance, but, frankly, out of anger and a sense of personal loss. This is weeping turned completely in on itself.

Hebrews comments on this verse saying, “For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he

was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears” (Heb 12:16-17). Scripture views Esau’s tears as unholy tears, like the tears of a little child who doesn’t get its way and tries to manipulate its parents into giving them what they want. Isaac will not be moved. He is, after all this, still a man of faith and a man who knows what has happened. But what he does next is most shocking, especially to Esau. It is difficult for me to know what caused Isaac to do it—other than that he was predestined to. Perhaps he suddenly recognized Esau for what he was. I don’t know.

The Anti-Blessing

“Behold, away from the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be, and away from the dew of heaven on high” (39). Isaac utters an anti-blessing. He now curses Esau. It is the exact opposite that was told to Jacob. It makes you wonder what Isaac might have had in store for Jacob. “By the sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother” (40). Has Isaac come to realize that God was right? Whatever the case, these words now fulfill the prophecy for the two boys. Yet, there will be struggle. “When you grow restless you shall break his yoke from your neck” (40). Throughout the long and bitter rivalry in the OT, Edom and Israel would have just this kind of relationship. Surely, Isaac’s curse is a prophecy

that many people will have to live under for centuries to come.

Esau's reaction is understandable in the flesh, to be sure. But it makes him look even more like Lamech the son of Cain than he did when he married the two pagan women. "Esau hated Jacob" (41). This is not the kind of hatred we discussed when we said God hated Esau. God did not harbor ill-will towards Esau. But Esau does harbor this towards his brother, for he wants to kill him (41). After his father dies, he will murder his brother. But out of respect for Isaac, Esau will wait to hatch his evil plan.

Let us skip ahead to the last few verses of our text and finish looking at Esau. He sees that Jacob would not take Canaanite women to wed. Isaac had now forbid Jacob to do what he apparently never spoke of to Esau (28:1, 6). Esau also learns that his own wives do not please his father (8). So what does Esau do? He goes and marries yet another wife, this time an Ishmaelite wife (9). Her name is Mahalath, and it probably means "intelligence."

He probably does not go to Ishmael personally, since the timeline shows that Ishmael is dead. Rather he goes to their tribe. Perhaps he is hoping that this might appease Isaac. After all, Ishmaelites are not Canaanites. But in fact, doing

this is the opposite of intelligence. It is a foolish move. It only goes to cement in our minds that he and Ishmael his uncle are in the same covenantal boat as one another, having been sent away from the covenantal blessings of God. For all of his pleading, all of his crying, all of work at gaming and cooking and preparing, Esau's die is cast.

Where is God?

We have now looked at the four individuals in the story of Jacob and the blessing of Esau. We have seen that Isaac is blind (in more ways than one), Rebekah is cunning and not in a good way, Jacob is a great deceiving and thief, and Esau is godless. Four characters. Four different ways of saying the same thing. This family is a spiritual wreck.

I have noted that the most striking feature of this story may be who isn't in it. Where is God in all of this? As a character, he is absent, and his absence is striking when viewed against the backdrop of these four individuals. Like Adam and Eve in the Garden when God leaves, so now four of their descendants act in sin while God is away. So where is God?

He is here.

Yet, he is here as the sovereign Actor who works all things according to the counsel of his will in his divine pur-

poses of election. We have seen hints of this in the blessing of Jacob, and how through the manipulation, deception, and deceit of Rebekah and Jacob, the younger ends up fulfilling the prophecy made at his birth. This does not excuse them. Rather, it simply shows that nothing can thwart God's sovereign decree, not even the will of Isaac to love Esau, the godless actions of Esau, or the manipulative actions of Rebekah and Jacob. What they have all done will have tremendously negative influences for all of them during the remainder of their lives.

But for now, the focus will stay on the promise. This comes to the forefront most especially in the last few verses we have left to discuss. Someone came and told Rebekah that Esau intended to kill Jacob (27:42). So she called for Jacob and told her younger son (notice the reference to the younger), “Behold, your brother Esau comforts himself about you by planning to kill you” (42). “Now therefore, my son, obey my voice” (the third time she tells him to do this). “Arise, flee to Laban my brother in Haran and stay with him a while, 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. Then I will send and bring you from there. Why should I be bereft of you both in one day?” (43-45). She

had just lost Esau to the evil of his own heart and the curse of Isaac. She does not want Jacob to be murdered on top of it.

Then Rebekah does something interesting. She tells Isaac, “I loathe my life because of the Hittite women” (returning to the theme that began our story). “If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women like these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?” (46). This question has a profound impact upon Isaac. Perhaps it awakens him from his senseless stupor.

Isaac now calls Jacob and blessed him and directs him to do as Jacob’s mother and Isaac’s father said. “You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women” (28:1). Instead, go to Paddan-aram [another name for the area around Haran] to the house of Bethuel your mother’s father, and take as your wife from there one of the daughters of Laban your mother’s brother. God Almighty [El Shaddai; God of the Mountain] bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you [the language of Adam and Noah and Abraham], that you may become company of peoples” (2-3).

Then comes the clincher. “May he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your seed with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings that God gave to Abraham!” (4). Here, then is the promise of the seed

continuing, now from Eve, then to Noah, to Abram, to Isaac, and to Jacob. This is the promise of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. God is fulfilling his word through the sins of this family, for God's sake, and for the sake of Abraham his servant.

In response to this command, Jacob—like his father before him—goes across the river Euphrates to the land of his ancestors, and there he will take a wife. Her name will be Rachel. And she will become the mother of our Lord Jesus. May this story teach you about **the nature of evil**, that it is not something we can know purely with our senses, but that it is something we can know especially when God is absent from a place. May **it convict you of your sins**. But may it also teach you that God is sovereign over them. He gets his way and does what he wants. **No one can thwart his will**. And know then that it was his will that his greatest promise would be fulfilled in his way, that he made sure that it would be, and that the seed of Jacob has come to take away your sins and to make you right with God by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone.

To God alone be the glory on this Sunday where we celebrate the Reformation.