



FAMILY DYNAMICS AND THE COVETED BLESSING

SERIES: THE JACOB STORY

Genesis 27:1–29

2nd Message

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Today we return to the Jacob story where the drama centers around the word “blessing,” found seven times in our text. What does it mean to be “blessed”? The first thing God did after creating human life was to **bless** them:

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Gen 1:28 ESV)

To be **blessed** by God implies being infused with life that is **abundant** (“*be fruitful and multiply and fill*”) and **victorious**, overcoming resistance and evil (“*subdue and have dominion*”). As one scholar writes,

God’s blessing is his formative, empowering word (often, with overtones of appointing destiny). It is not an empty pronouncement or simply an expression of wish or goodwill, nor is it a bare command...Rather, the blessing of God has content; it actualizes and enables.¹

God wants human beings to flourish, “like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaves do not wither, and all that it produces will flourish.” Despite man’s persistent rebellion in the opening chapters of Genesis, God set in motion his redemptive plan to bless the world through Abraham and his seed.

**“I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.” (Gen 12:1–3 NIV)**

What does it mean to be fully human? It is to be infused with life that serves and blesses others. Today we reach that sacred moment when Abraham’s chosen son Isaac will pass down the coveted blessing to the next generation. But what ought to be a holy celebration and witness of God’s goodness and grace, is hijacked by self-interest, deceit and manipulation. Everyone looks to the father to act as head of the home, but his passivity has made him a laughingstock. Far from being the spiritual leader, he uses this holy occasion to feed his own appetites. If he succeeds, he will place the family history at risk. At this feast there is no prayer, family unity or peace. Everyone arrives with a personal agenda and will stop at nothing to get what they want. All expressions of love are self-serving. Conversation is laced with deception, flattery, and blasphemy. Competition has created such a chasm that one half of the family can’t even speak to the other.

Many of us have had similar painful family dynamics. Celebratory gatherings can open up old wounds, reestablish pecking orders, and

reawaken our deepest, unfulfilled longings for expressions of love. Even the best homes can contain controlling forces that run as deep as the family history. When the festivities end, we wonder if we will ever shake our childhood identities and be liberated from the competition for that ever-elusive family “blessing.” The surprise of our text is that these dynamics occur within Israel’s chosen family. Just one generation after Abraham, the chosen family’s spiritual life has almost completely deteriorated. Our text addresses the question: How will God intervene to further his kingdom when the chosen family has all but denied his presence?

I. Pre-game Preparations: Isaac and Esau (27:1–4)

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.” (Gen 27:1–4 ESV)

Here you might ask, how can Esau expect to inherit the blessing after selling his birthright? Bruce Waltke suggests he shouldn’t, that they are inseparable. The birthright carries property inheritance rights. The blessing carries spiritual inheritance rights. Together they represent full family heritage and “bearing God’s promises into the next generation.”² Yet Esau’s foolish action has not alienated his father. Isaac addresses Esau with the is affectionate “my son” (echoing Isaac’s relationship with his father Abraham [22:7]), while Esau expresses his eagerness to serve his father. Isaac makes his request in great detail, almost living vicariously through his son, a man of “the hunt.” As Fokkelman explains,

With complete sincerity of purpose Isaac transmits all the strength, all the vitality he once possessed, all his destiny, all his blessedness tersely and in powerful language (therefore poetry! prose would not do) to his son.³

By providing the desired game, Esau will find the blessing he longs for. But he also finds pain. Isaac’s motivation is not love for his son, but “love” for the “savory” dish (mentioned six times in this chapter).

Isaac desires the wrong thing. Further, by blessing what God has cursed, he will engage in the ultimate evil to secure it. While Esau is eager to serve the father by feeding his appetites, ultimately he craves best thing, the blessing. One gives his love to feed his own appetites; the other feeds the father’s appetites to acquire love. Isaac’s request is framed with the word “death” (vv. 2, 4). This conveys a strong sense of urgency to Esau, but it may also the narrator’s hint at where such intentions lead.

Next, we witness Rebekah's counter-dialogue with her favored son.

II. Pre-game Preparations: Rebekah and Jacob (27:5–17)

A. Rebekah intervenes (vv. 5–10)

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." (vv. 5–10)

Now we learn Isaac hid his grand scheme. It seems he knew he was directly disobeying the divine oracle (25:23) and could not be open about his plans. But, as providence would have it, Rebekah is eavesdropping, which conveys this couple's longstanding distrust. Once Rebekah hears everything she leaps into action. She has a huge capacity for hospitality, for two young goats could feed a small army.

The scene recalls Abraham's hospitality to the three strangers (Gen 18), both in its urgency and display of generosity. But this gift of hospitality has taken a tragic turn! Rebekah doesn't confront her husband; instead she manipulates him in order to transfer the coveted blessing to her favored son, Jacob. Unlike Isaac, she wants the right thing, but she goes about it the wrong way. After years of a dysfunctional marriage, manipulation and peacekeeping seems far easier than the prospect of World War III resulting from a family confrontation.

Rebekah's word choice betrays this family's emotional distance. Isaac is "your father," and Esau "your brother." She then uses this emotional distance to her advantage. Rebekah's monopoly on family information gives her great leverage over her son. Jacob must "obey" his mother to get to his father. She remains in control, for Jacob must merely fetch the goats and bring the gourmet meal to his father. She is the cook; he is the waiter. Finally, to heighten the urgency, she adds the little phrase "in the presence of the Lord" to Isaac's blessing. God's name becomes a tool for the agendas of others. In the end, Jacob realizes he has just this one opportunity to receive the blessing. To get it, he must fully align himself with his mother.

But Jacob is a clear thinker. He considers the difficulties.

B. Jacob's concerns overruled (vv. 11–14)

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. (vv. 11–14)

Jacob knows he doesn't resemble Esau. Even a blind father "groping" in the dark can tell by Jacob's smooth skin that he is not Esau. Though Jacob admits he is a "smooth" man, he doesn't want to be a "mocker" in his father's eyes and subject himself to a curse (Deut 27:18). As Alter points out, "Jacob expresses no compunction, only fear of getting caught."⁴ So eager is Rebekah for her son to succeed

that she volunteers to take the curse if their plans go awry. Then she continues to press Jacob into action. He instantly obeys and does her bidding. He secures the young goats, and in no time she prepares the meal—a meal the father loves. Painfully, this is the only relationship where "love" is mentioned in the chapter. It is not the love between father and son, or brothers, or wife and husband, but of a father for his palate.

After the cooking frenzy it appears Rebekah shares Jacob's earlier fear. To ensure this scheme comes off without a hitch, Rebekah prepares more than food.

C. Rebekah: Seamstress and cook (vv. 15–17)

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 prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob. (vv. 15–17)

What follows will be an Academy Award-winning performance in a ridiculous Halloween costume. Rebekah takes Esau's "best garments" and places them on Jacob. "Best" is a weak translation; the compound adjectives mean "the greatest and most desirable" garments. I imagine these were Esau's hunting garments. Then she retrieves the skins of the young goats and sews them around Jacob's hands and the "smooth" part of his neck.

Place yourself in Jacob's shoes. How would you feel? This must have been extremely humiliating. It's clear that to get the family blessing he must dress like his brother and imitate his "gamy" behavior, for this is what moves the father's love. Jacob must deny who he is in order to have his father's blessing. Rebekah is not only dishonoring her marriage, she is humiliating her son. God gives his blessing by his sovereign grace, not through denial of one's identity.

Now it's time for the meal. With the tension mounting, Jacob comes on stage to approach his father.

III. The Meal: Jacob and Isaac (27:18–29)

A. The approach: Deceit an blasphemy (vv.18–20)

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." (vv. 18–20)

Jacob knows his lines. He offers the exact counterpoint to Isaac's initial address to Esau. Isaac initially appears inviting, but then he reveals his suspicions. The blind father wants more evidence to know which son has approached him. So Jacob issues a bold lie, claiming to be Esau, the firstborn, the one deserving the blessing. Before Isaac's suspicions can deepen, he presses his bedridden father to eat. But Isaac asks how Jacob could have returned from the hunt and made these preparations so quickly? Jacob responds with blasphemy: he attributes his success to the Lord. Has he learned this from his mother? Regardless, Isaac isn't fully convinced.

B. Groping in the dark (vv. 21–25)

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. (vv. 21–23)

Blind Isaac, relying on his sense of touch, asks Jacob to come closer. One wonders if Jacob is stung with pain at his words “my son...my son,” which shows his father thinks he has but one son, “my son, Esau.” The evidence Isaac receives is divided. His ears say it is Jacob, while his touch says it is Esau. With the score tied and the meal’s scent wafting before him, Isaac asks his son to tell him the absolute truth.

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. (vv. 24–25)

With his back against the wall, Jacob tells a second lie that is even bolder than the first. This betrayal gives Isaac the freedom to eat, and he does so with gusto. Jacob also provides wine, perhaps hoping to dull his father’s senses.

C. The blessing secured! (vv. 26–29)

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!” (vv. 26–29)

Isaac’s final request shows he still has a sliver of doubt, even as he eats—his craving overrules reason. Only after the meal, when he smells the son’s gamy garments, is he doubt-free. Taste relies mostly on smell, and the smell lifts Isaac’s senses into such ecstasy that he associates God’s blessing with the sensual smells of the field. Here Isaac reaches the height of disobedience, choosing to bless what God has cursed. But God has overruled, and the younger son of choice receives the blessing. Again we sense that Isaac’s every word lashes Jacob’s soul with the knowledge that his father never saw him as a son. Maybe you can identify with Jacob? I know I certainly can.

This is a troubling text. This dinner party for God’s new family was designed to be a holy occasion to impart the blessing of Abraham, with all its promises, from one generation to the next, yet no one has God’s interests in mind. There is no prayer, no truth telling, and no familial affection. Isaac desires the wrong thing and does it the wrong way with the wrong son. Esau thinks he can have the right thing, but he has already thrown away his birthright. Rebekah wants the right thing, but she does it the wrong way through the right son. Jacob, the mother’s manipulative tool, does her bidding, seeking the right thing the wrong way. So we must ask, where is God when his people forsake spirituality for control?

IV. Just Deserts

A. Everyone is rewarded according to his or her deeds,

The first thing we learn in this story is that each character gets their just desserts. God designs their history so that they receive the full measure of their deeds. Isaac’s life is a stark warning. **It doesn’t matter how well we begin the Christian life, it’s how we finish.** Isaac was the miracle given to a barren couple who treasured him. His childhood home was spiritually exceptional. His father was emotionally present. Faith was not just taught, but modeled. As an adolescent, he imitates his father’s faith, letting himself be bound by his father on the altar. This would become Scripture’s icon of obedience, foreshadowing that of our Lord Jesus. At forty he marries Rebekah, the paragon of hospitality. It is a marriage made in heaven. In his midlife years his faith is tested in a hostile world and, like his father Abraham, he learns to walk away from conflict.

But at sixty, Isaac sets his affections not on the son of divine choice, but on Esau. Isaac uses his son to feed his sensual appetites. The seeds of sensuality grow like malignant weeds, choking his soul’s spiritual sensitivities. Isaac ends his life passive, spiritually disabled and blind. Instead of rebuking Esau, he has become like him, willing to abandon the family’s spiritual destiny (“the blessing”) for a single meal. His obedience of God did not endure, and he suffered for it. **How we finish matters.** To our youth, this is not about following rules, but staying close to God, spending time with his Word, and letting Him inform our hearts, thoughts and actions. Obedience is the fruit of the Spirit.

What is the outcome for Rebekah? In choosing to deceive her husband, rather than confront him, she creates an even worse confrontation—not between husband and wife, but between the sons. Esau becomes so angry, he resolves to kill Jacob. So she sends Jacob off to Laban for just “a few days” (v. 44), but those “few days” turn into twenty years. She will not live to see his return. Thus, by manipulating her favored son, she loses both sons. Esau is forever estranged, and Jacob is exiled. Finally, in the narrator’s ultimate censure of her actions, Rebekah is never again mentioned in Scripture. Upon her death she is not even given an obituary, but, as Waltke observes, “the narrator memorialized Deborah, her nurse from childhood and closest surrogate (35:8). The silence is deafening.”⁵

Jacob also gets what he deserves. He wants the right things but gains them the wrong way. He becomes a bold-faced liar and a blasphemer. As he uses his father’s blindness to deceive him, so shall he be deceived under the cover of night by Laban, as we will see in the coming weeks. Later it will be Laban who “gropes” through Jacob’s tent, looking for his stolen idols. Jacob’s curse on the guilty party will fall on Rachel, the wife he loves, and she dies prematurely (35:19). Just as Jacob used animal skins to cover his “smoothness” (deceit), so his sons will deceive him with a garment soaked in the blood of a kid. Like his mother, he will spend his waning years lamenting the loss of his favored son. God is not mocked, even within chosen families. We reap what we sow (Gal 6:7–8). Yet this is designed not as punishment, but as discipline to change our character.

B. God overrules to accomplish his end his way

The second thing we learn is that God overrules everyone’s hidden agenda to accomplish his purposes, his way. God ordained that from the birth of these twins “the older would serve the younger.” Thus God would overturn the social order of the day. Neither Jacob nor

Rebekah needed to manipulate the outcome. God wanted to give the blessing. But when everyone in this family forgets His ways and adopts their own, God still overrules all to accomplish his purposes. The blessing goes to the son of choice.

This story had a huge impact on David and helped shape his faith. Once Samuel had anointed him, he never made an illicit grasp for the throne. He knew that if God ordained it, then God must give it without manipulation. May we do likewise.

C. Longings for the New Family with no emotional control

My third observation is that dysfunctional family relationships cause us to long for a new family that accepts us unconditionally and affirms our uniqueness. This is the marvel of Jesus the Messiah. Jesus came to create a new family, without sibling rivalry, where we are all favored sons and daughters and given “every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies” (Eph 1:3). Each of us is adopted by faith into a family where we are equally embraced with the Father’s infinite love. This is a wondrous blessing, without limits or measure.

To help us experience this, God has placed within each one of us the Holy Spirit, who cries out within our hearts, “Abba! Father!” (Rom 8:15). We do not have to compete for the Father’s affection; we are all children already sealed in his love. But love doesn’t fear the truth. In this family, “speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects in him, who is the head, even Christ” (Eph 4:15). As we grow, we begin to glory in our uniqueness as the Spirit equips us with spiritual gifts to bless others with his life and love. We don’t have to dress up in one another’s clothes and imitate our brothers and sisters; rather, we are uniquely designed to complement one another in service. When it all works together in harmony in service to others, it becomes an “ecstasy of community.” In his book, *Fearfully and Wonderfully*, Dr. Paul Brand writes as he reflects on his life,

sifting through memories to recall rare moments of intense pleasure and fulfillment. To my surprise, my passes by recollection of gourmet meals, vacation, and awards ceremonies. Instead, it settles on times when I have been able to work closely with a team in service to another human being. On occasion that teamwork has helped to improve sight, arrest the crippling effects of leprosy,

or save a leg from amputation. Sometimes those acts involved stress and apparent sacrifice... Yet those times of working together, when we focused all our concentration on the goal of helping another, glow with unusual luster. I was privileged to experience the ecstasy of community.⁶

What a marvelous family this is!

**Behold, how good and pleasant it is
when brothers dwell in unity!
It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down on the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down on the collar of his robes!
It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion!
For there the LORD has commanded the blessing,
life forevermore.**

Psalm 133

1. Michael L. Brown, “בָּרַךְ” (*bārak*), NIDOTTE, 1:743.
2. Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis, A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 377.
3. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis* (The Netherlands, Van Gorcum, Assen, 1975), 109.
4. Robert Alter, *Genesis* (New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 139.
5. Bruce K. Waltke, “Reflections of Retirement From the Life of Isaac,” *Crux*, December 1996/Vol. XXXII, No. 4, pg. 6.
6. Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, *Fearfully and Wonderfully, The Marvel of Bearing God’s Image* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2019),

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