Sinful weakness in Isaac & family (Genesis 27)

This chapter is a tragedy in the history of the patriarchs, full of selfishness and deceit. As with the nation of Israel, these could be "examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did." (1 Cor 10:6 NIV) With thought we find warnings but also some final encouragements. Four scenes reveal the weaknesses and sinfulness of this Abrahamic family.

Scene 1: Isaac desires to bless Esau (27:1-4).

Although he would live to 180, Isaac now 137 thought he was about to die. (Ishmael, Isaac's older brother, had died 14 years earlier at the same age.) He therefore wishes to bless Esau, his first-born son. This special blessing seems to be distinct from the birthright which Esau had already bartered away (*cf.* 27:36).

1. Isaac's desire to bless Esau in this fashion was directly contrary to God's statement about Jacob and Esau prior to their birth, that the older would serve the younger. *Cf.* 27:29 with 25:23. Isaac should not have forgotten and should not have worked against this.
2. Isaac appeared to have ignored the continued grief which Esau had caused him and Rebekah by marrying Hittite women (26:34-35; *cf.* 28:8). There was a spiritual danger in marrying women of the pagan people around them.
3. Isaac seemed to have been doing this privately and secretively, though a patriarchal blessing was an important event that would normally be witnessed.

Though we can only surmise the reason for Isaac acting in this way, it is clear that Isaac did not desire that which God was determined should be. Believers today sometimes fail similarly, asking with wrong motives (James 4:3) or not having "in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (Mat 16:23). Knowing the Word of God and submitting to it guards against this error.

Scene 2: Rebekah conspires to get the blessing for Jacob (27:5-17).

1. Although Rebekah wanted what God had promised (unlike Isaac), she used ungodly means to try and attain it.
   Rebekah obviously planned and carried out the deception of Isaac. Deception is a tool of Satan which he used against Eve, attempted against Jesus in the wilderness temptations and practices against people today as do his servants (2 Cor 11:14f). Rebekah was acting like a servant of Satan.
   In her deception Rebekah worked secretly to counter Isaac's intent, neither submitting nor even speaking to him about it. This is contrary to the submission which Peter taught (1 Peter 3:1-6) and of which Sarah was a model for godly women.
2. Rebekah's use of ungodly means revealed her lack of trust in God and fear of God. Instead she gave way to fear of losing the blessing for Jacob and sought to deceive Isaac. (*Cf.* 1 Peter 3:2, 6). She determined to accomplish what God had said and neither trusted God nor displayed a holy conduct that came from a fear of God.

When believers today lie, thinking to accomplish good by doing so, or compromise on biblical principles, thinking that they will accomplish greater ends, they mimic Rebekah. We must be on guard not to give in to fear, but believe that God will accomplish His intent when we obey His commands.

Scene 3: Jacob attains the blessing from Isaac by deception (27:18-29).

This scene relates the blessing of Jacob by Isaac, a blessing similar in content to the promises of God to Abraham. Jacob got the blessing instead of Esau but at a high price.

1. Jacob revealed himself as a deceiver.
2. Jacob practiced deception because his heart was inclined to follow the bad, ungodly counsel of Rebekah. He had no excuse, as the text indicates. Neither was he an inexperienced youth, but a man of probably 77.

This should highlight for all, young and old, the danger in bad counsel. We are in danger when we want what the counsel offers, or are ignorant of God's Word, or don't trust God to do what He promises.

Scene 4: Esau confronts his loss (27:30-40).

(Differences in understanding a prepositional phrase lead some translations to interpret verse 39 as a blessing, "your dwelling shall be of the fat of the land" rather than a curse as in the NIV which is more likely the case.)

1. A small comment reveals that Esau was not merely an innocent, injured party. He blamed Jacob for gaining the birthright through deception, showing no true repentance for despising his birthright by bartering it away for a bowl of stew (25:34).
2. Esau desired this blessing yet had disregarded the responsibility to respect his parents and live within the covenant commitment to God when he married two Hittite women.

Esau wanted blessing but missed the point of his relation to God (*cf.* Hebrews 12:16-17). Many people want the blessing of God and His salvation without seeing the unique relationship which the saved have to God and the responsibilities which that brings. Their hearts are not right.

This entire chapter is a sad chapter, showing the weakness and sinfulness of important Biblical characters and pointing to our own. The tragedy increased in the results. But some hidden encouragements may help us. We see that God accomplished his purposes despite the ungodly manner of the people. In contrast to suffering for ungodliness God offers peace and joy to those who walk by the Spirit. Also, there is no attempt to hide the miserable failure of this family to act in a God-pleasing manner, pointing to the divine nature of this book and providing the backdrop for the main theme, the marvelous character of God and His redemption of man. None deserve God's blessing, for we are all sinners. But by grace through faith we may receive forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

© 2012 David Manduka