



Week 5: (Isaac and Jacob)

Week 5, Day 1: Genesis 24:1-4, 10-21, 29, 34-38, 50-51, 62-67 (A wife for Isaac)

24 Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. *2* Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his house, who had charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh *3* and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, *4* but will go to my country and to my kindred and get a wife for my son Isaac."

10 Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, taking all kinds of choice gifts from his master; and he set out and went to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor. *11* He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water; it was toward evening, the time when women go out to draw water. *12* And he said, "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. *13* I am standing here by the spring of water, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. *14* Let the girl to whom I shall say, 'Please offer your jar that I may drink,' and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels'—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master."

15 Before he had finished speaking, there was Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, coming out with her water jar on her shoulder. *16* The girl was very fair to look upon, a virgin, whom no man had known. She went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up. *17* Then the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please let me sip a little water from your jar." *18* "Drink, my lord," she said, and quickly lowered her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. *19* When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw for your camels also, until they have finished drinking." *20* So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels. *21* The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether or not the LORD had made his journey successful.

29 Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban; and Laban ran out to the man, to the spring.

34 So he said, "I am Abraham's servant. 35 The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become wealthy; he has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female slaves, camels and donkeys. 36 And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old; and he has given him all that he has. 37 My master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I live; 38 but you shall go to my father's house, to my kindred, and get a wife for my son.'

50 Then Laban and Bethuel answered, "The thing comes from the LORD; we cannot speak to you anything bad or good. 51 Look, Rebekah is before you, take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has spoken."

62 Now Isaac had come from Beer-lahai-roi, and was settled in the Negeb. 63 Isaac went out in the evening to walk in the field; and looking up, he saw camels coming. 64 And Rebekah looked up, and when she saw Isaac, she slipped quickly from the camel, 65 and said to the servant, "Who is the man over there, walking in the field to meet us?" The servant said, "It is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself. 66 And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. 67 Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent. He took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

Understanding the Passage:

Abraham is advanced in age and wants to get his affairs in order before he passes. His life has brought him a wife, a household, wealth, and most importantly, his son. Isaac is the future of Israel. The covenant God made with Abraham is one that would be passed down through his generations, which means that Abraham knows how important it is to pick the right wife for Isaac. Isaac must marry someone from his father's homeland, not from the land in which he currently lives. This is about religion, not bloodlines, for if Isaac marries someone from a pagan religion, there is a risk of the entire household being converted away from worshipping Yahweh.

Abraham sends his most trusted staff member, the servant in charge of his entire household, to travel and find Isaac a wife. The fact that his employee takes jewelry, camels, and more would make his intentions very clear. His servant is quickly successful and locates Rebekah. She is an immediate answer to the servant's prayer. Twice in this chapter is it mentioned that the servant asked the God of his master to show him the right person in a very specific way. It is this prayer that would convince the servant, Rebekah's brother, mother, and Rebekah that this marriage is from God.

This passage illustrates a larger motif of divine guidance. God is at work and keeping God's promise to Abraham and his descendants. Abraham's servant practices prayerful petition and thanksgiving repeatedly. Notably, his servant remains nameless in this story. How strange for the servant to remain unnamed and yet play such a big role and example of faith in this story. This allows us, as servants of God, to relate to him and follow his example of remaining faithful regardless of the task set before us. When we become Christians, we

enter the service of God. We attempt to proceed faithfully through life in ordinary and seemingly insignificant ways, and God's purposes of blessing and work shows up in the lives of others through us.

By the end of this story a glimmer of the new generation comes. Isaac loves Rebekah! God's promises to further the generations are fulfilled here, but there is also love. The life of the faithful is more than religious practices and divine promises. God also has created us to love and be loved. It's a mirror of the love we receive from our Creator.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Notice how the servant prays. Is this a faithful way to pray? What comes from it?
2. Where have you seen God work through ordinary activities in your life?
3. God's guidance comes to the descendants of Abraham amidst failure and faithfulness. Where do you see God's guidance in your life?

Week 5, Day 2: Genesis 27:1-17 (Rebekah helps Jacob steal Esau's blessing)

27 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. 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."

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 savory 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 savory 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." 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." ¹⁴ So he went and got them and brought them to his mother; and his mother prepared savory 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 savory food, and the bread that she had prepared, to her son Jacob.

Understanding the Passage:

If ever the Bible sounded like a soap opera, it's the story arc of Isaac, Rebekah and their sons. This is not the first time we've seen sibling rivalry and favoritism between the twins Jacob and Esau. Sadly, it's also not the last. However, this is the point in Genesis that one might begin to notice a pattern of the younger brother being the one who "succeeds" or is blessed and lifted up. The Cain and Abel story gives us thematic preparation for the type of sibling dynamics that are coming. After Abel's death then the youngest brother, Seth takes the place of importance. We see this repeated with Isaac over Ishmael. We see this now

between Esau and Jacob. We even see it show up in the king David narrative. ‘The first shall be last’ teaching of Christ is present even here. God doesn’t do things as humans have designed. God, even in the beginning, shakes things up.

Isaac is close to the end of his days so he requests that his eldest son, Esau go out to hunt, bring back the meat and prepare a final meal for him. This is when he says he will give his eldest his blessing. This blessing is not just well wishes and kind prayers. No, this blessing would be considered Esau’s receiving of a sending forth and declaring him the new leader of the family. It would be seen as prophetic in nature: the one receiving the blessing would prosper and be fruitful. This is the moment when the head of the household passes the responsibility and inheritance to the heir, usually the eldest living son. But Rebekah has other plans. She has a favorite son and it’s not Esau. She instructs Jacob to follow her plan so that while Esau is out, they can trick Isaac and spoil this long-standing, sacred ritual between father and eldest son.

In this story the focus is sometimes largely on Jacob, but Rebekah cannot be ignored. She was the master-mind of this ploy all along. Regardless of the word from God she heard while pregnant (25:23), she is a trickster. She walks in the footsteps of many other tricksters in the Genesis story. Abraham and Isaac (at different times) claim that their wives were their sisters. Rebekah will also be followed by many tricksters: Laban, Rachel and Tamar. It’s easy for us to condemn such actions of deception, however one must take a closer look. For those who are marginalized in ancient societies, such as women, Rebekah is actually using wisdom and working within a system to survive. She was making a way for her son the best way she could. As a woman in an ancient culture she would have had no other methodology to achieve liberation from disenfranchisement. Once the blessing was given to Esau she would not get to share in the blessing and riches. It is in stories like this that we must lean into the messiness of Genesis and attempt to reject the good/evil moral standards of modern moral reasoning. A both/and mentality works better here. She and Jacob are tricksters *and* God also furthers the blessing of God’s people through them.

How should we interpret Jacob and Rebekah’s action in this story. God told Rebekah that “the elder would serve the younger” in 25:23. Esau had already sold his birthright to Jacob in 25:33. So it seems like the only person who wasn’t aware of “the plan” was Isaac. Their actions still seem to lack integrity and human decency. Many of us might wonder how God’s grace extends even to a cheat and rascal like Jacob? Jacob’s motivations and actions are not those of one who is pious and faithful and yet he remains God’s chosen one. This is good news for us even today. God works through what human beings make available, which is a perfect example of how we can’t mess this up. God is always good and works everything for the good of all creation.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Why is it good news that God radically includes swindlers and cheats in the story of God’s people?
2. Have you ever been cheated out of something important? How might this story impact your view?

3. Here we see a glimpse of God's upside-down kingdom. Can you think of other ways God doesn't follow the "rules" of mankind or pushes back on status quo?
4. What other places in Scripture is the both/and mindset needed for interpretation?

Week 5, Day 3: Genesis 27:18-29 (Jacob is blessed by Isaac)

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 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 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.*

*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!"*

Understanding the Passage:

The blessing is an important passage of power from one to another and is sealed in the act of sharing food. Later, Isaac notes he cannot take his blessing back because of the consumption of the stew. A blessing is not fully valid until a meal is shared.

Why stew? The random detail of the animal caught by Esau and made into a stew might seem insignificant. A reading of chapter 25 brings clarity to this scene. Stew is being eaten at another time where birthright and blessing are being discussed and stolen. Esau has been out hunting and is famished. He comes across his younger brother, Jacob, who is making stew. Esau is desperate and hungry and will die without the stew. Jacob takes advantage of this desperation and offers Esau stew on one condition, which is that Esau give Jacob his birthright. Esau, with no choice, relents. Jacob serves stew to Esau and takes his birthright. He will finish the task of securing his future by again serving stew to Isaac and stealing Esau's blessing. A truly devastating blow to his brother.

The blessing itself centers on vitality, power, position, and domination. Isaac calls upon God to be active in his son's life. Once it is done Jacob is now Esau's lord. Esau will receive a lesser blessing, but he will be under Jacob's yoke. He will only have moments of being free from it. This moment impacts both of their lives forever. Esau will have his own troubles and will marry outside of the community (a big no-no), but Jacob's life will also not be without strife. This moment exposes the existing animosity and carries it forward for generations.

These two boys like the nations they represent will always be at odds with each other. They were at odds in Rebekah's womb, they were born with Jacob holding Esau's heel, which was a symbol of overtaking. From Esau will come the tribe of Edom and from Isaac will come Israel... two nations that will not be at peace with one another.

One might take away from this family the notion of image. They should be the perfect family, right? Chosen by God to carry on the covenant. On the outside this family seemed to be traditional and have it all together: financially secure, a loving, monogamous marriage, two strapping healthy boys, both of whom were engaged in their own professions. However underneath the surface there was much discord. Rather than seeking the good for one another the brothers take advantage of their father's elderly state in order to benefit themselves.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. You may need to think creatively here. Have you ever received a blessing from someone? What was that like? What did it include? Reflect and share.
2. Can you identify with the relationships and dysfunction in this family? Look for the similarities. How might you welcome God into your relationships?
3. God's promise will continue through Jacob, the liar. How could God allow the liar to win in the end? Why is this good news for us today?

Week 5, Day 4: Genesis 27:30-45 (Esau finds out; Jacob runs away)

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 savory 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.

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.”*

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 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?”

Understanding the Passage:

Here it becomes clear that the blessing given to Jacob will stand. There is no ritual in place in which to revoke a spoken blessing sealed by the eating of the meal. Even though it was given in deceit, it will be so. When Esau finds out, he is devastated. He has been rejected by his mother, brother and now even his father. He begs his father to give him a blessing as well. Jacob finally relents and gives Esau a counter-blessing from Jacob’s. The riches of the earth will be far from Esau. He will live a violent life of strife. Perhaps the worst of all, he will serve his brother unless he can get out from under him.

Rebekah warns Jacob of Esau’s plan to kill him once Isaac dies. She says that Esau is “consoling himself” by plotting Jacob’s murder. He is a man consumed by vengeance now. Jacob flees in a turn of irony. The blessed one, the one who is supposed to be relishing his new position and wealth now becomes a refugee. One might wonder if a blessing received out of deceit can ever truly be a blessing at all? Rebekah, too, receives a curse of sorts. Her beloved son is initially expected to be away for a short while, but he actually is gone for over two decades. She dies before she can send word for him to return. Jacob will go forth as heir to the covenant made with God, but his life will not be easy.

We can be struck by how dysfunctional this family was, but their descendants continue to play out dysfunction. Fighting in the Middle East continues among people who are kin. Blessings and curses are passed down through the generations. We know that it is only with God’s help and Christ’s good work that all generations can be redeemed and healed.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Have you ever consoled yourself by plotting vengeance? How did things turn out? How did you move forward in your faith?
2. Have you ever “made something happen” and in the end it turned out poorly? Reflect on Rebekah and Jacob’s consequences of their deception.

3. Esau must live a life negatively impacted by his brother's sin. Have you ever had to live with the consequences of someone's sin? What is the faithful response to this?

Week 5, Day 5: Genesis 28:10-22 (Jacob's dream)

¹⁰ Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹ He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. ¹² And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³ And the LORD stood beside him and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; ¹⁴ and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. ¹⁵ Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." ¹⁶ Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!" ¹⁷ And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

¹⁸ So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. ¹⁹ He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first. ²⁰ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, ²¹ so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, ²² and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one-tenth to you."

Understanding the Passage:

While on his way to Haran to find a wife, Jacob stops and rests for the night. He uses a stone as a pillow. A funny thing to do. One might assume that this meant he was so tired he simply laid down outside. On the contrary, he took a stone that was probably utilized to seek dream oracles within the temple. The text does not indicate that Jacob desires to hear from God, but God still communicates with him.

In his dream, a ladder or stairway appears similar to a ziggurat, a way for the divine to traverse between earth and heaven. The angels are traveling up and down this structure. Heaven and Earth essentially have become one. This imagery is very important and a foretaste of the New Testament teachings about the Kingdom coming on earth as it is in Heaven.

Yahweh comes and stands with Jacob. One can picture the frenzied activity of the angels in the background and Jacob and God having a conversation in foreground. The lines between the eternal and the finite are blurred. One might even wonder if Jacob feels a bit like Isaiah, "woe to me, I am man of unclean lips" as he stands in God's presence after having swindled his dying father and enraged his brother. God willingly transfers the promise to Jacob and it is in this moment that the vision Rebekah received while pregnant becomes a reality.

Through Jacob all the tribes will be blessed. God will not abandon him through his struggles of living in a foreign land as an alien and servant of Laban.

Upon awakening, Jacob is in awe. Up until now, God has chosen Jacob. But it is in this moment that Jacob chooses God. Jacob makes the God of his father his own God. He takes the stone and pours oil on it. He creates an altar and gives the place a new name, Bethel, which means the 'house of God.'

This is a moment of great faith! But just as quickly... Jacob goes back to his old ways. He begins to negotiate with God: "If you do this then I will do this." Most people who experience the holiness of the presence of the Creator of the entire universe would fall on their face and worship. Not Jacob. He tells God that he will serve him only *if* God meets his expectations.

Making demands of God is reflective of a sick heart. Health and maturity of faith manifest in those who give freely of themselves and their resources. Jacob, who only plans to tithe (a one-time offering) if God comes through, is not to be emulated. Instead, we can follow the self-sacrificial picture of Jesus, who came to dwell among us and fulfill the promise once and for all.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Jacob is now a refugee in a foreign land. How does God care for him and meet him? Does God care for those who are seeking refuge in our time?
2. Can you find other places in the Old and New Testaments where sojourners, migrants, or aliens are mentioned? How are those scenes like this one?
3. What is Jacob's response to God's vision for him and his descendants? How would you have responded?

Video Discussion Questions:

1. What is the purpose of prayer? Why do you pray?
2. What can we learn from the Abraham's servant's prayer?
3. Share/reflect on a time where you were desperate in prayer. How did this impact your faith and relationship to God?
4. What is the significance of Isaac's blessing that is stolen by Jacob?
5. Name other places in Scripture and the story of God where the first is last, things happen "backwards," or that the younger is lifted up.
6. What do we do when we find ourselves in Esau's place where something has been stolen from us? What is a faithful response?
7. Do you have altars in your life? How have you marked the memorable moments where God was at work?
8. What are some ways you can make an altar to the Lord and remember what God has done? Be creative about new ideas.
9. Share a time that God has gotten you through a difficult season or situation. How did you continue to rely on God and stay close to your faith?
10. Discuss how the "if/then" concept is not necessarily applicable to faithful giving and generosity.