

Isaac's Descendants

Jacob Is Sent to Find a Wife

Genesis 27:46-28:9

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Jacob Is Sent to Find a Wife

Scripture

We are currently in a series of sermons on “Isaac’s Descendants.” After twenty years of barrenness, God gave Isaac and Rebekah twin sons, whom they named Esau and Jacob. As a young man, Esau despised his birthright and sold it to his twin brother, Jacob. Much later, Jacob deceived his father, Isaac, and received the blessing that Isaac had intended to give his older son, Esau. As a result of that double deception, Esau wanted to kill Jacob. And so Jacob was sent away to his mother’s family in Northwest Mesopotamia to find there a wife for himself.

Let’s read about Jacob being sent to find a wife in Genesis 27:46-28:9:

⁴⁶Then 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?”

²⁸Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and directed him, “You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women. ²Arise, 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. ³God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. ⁴May 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!” ⁵Thus 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.

⁶Now 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 27:46–28:9)

Introduction

In his commentary on this narrative, Dr. James Montgomery Boice, from whom I am drawing heavily for this exposition, begins with an illustration from the movie titled, *Ordinary People*. The movie is about a “typical” family living in the suburbs of Chicago. The story begins with the accidental drowning of the older son caused by his own foolishness. The younger son is racked with guilt so that he is increasingly incapable of coping with life. The mother is bitter and domineering, while the father is good-natured but weak. In the end, the younger son tries to commit suicide and the father leaves home. Boice wryly notes that this “is just a typical, ordinary family!”¹

The family of Isaac is not very different from the family depicted in *Ordinary People*. We have already seen that Isaac, Rebekah, Esau, and Jacob have all kinds of problems. In fact, last week someone mentioned to me that they all needed psychiatric counseling! Isaac was deliberately disobedient to the clearly revealed will of God. Even though she knew God’s promise to her about the covenantal blessing going to Jacob, Rebekah manipulated the situation to ensure that things went the way she wanted them to go. Jacob, whose name means “deceiver,”² deceived his older brother out of his birthright and his father’s blessing. And Esau

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 759.

² Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 94.

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was spiritually apathetic and unholy. What a family!

One wonders how God could work in such a family. And yet he did. God was at work in Isaac and his family in order to fulfill his redemptive purpose of providing a blessing to all the families of the earth through his elect seed.

Lesson

Jacob being sent to find a wife in Genesis 27:46-28:9 teaches us that God is a God of great grace.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Concern of Rebekah (27:46)
2. The Blessing of Isaac (28:1-5)
3. The Defiance of Esau (28:6-9)

I. The Concern of Rebekah (27:46)

First, let's look at the concern of Rebekah.

In the previous narrative, after Jacob had "stolen" Esau's blessing, Esau was bitter. Moses said in Genesis 27:41, "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.'" Rebekah heard about Esau's plan to kill her favorite son, Jacob. And so she told Jacob about it, and urged him to flee to Laban her brother in Haran and stay with him a while, until his brother's fury turned away. She was sure that after a while Esau's anger would subside, and he would forget what Jacob had done to him. Then, she would send and bring Jacob from Haran. I expect that she thought it would take a few weeks, or a few months, at most. She did not want to lose both her sons in one day (Genesis 27:42-45).

But how would Rebekah get Isaac to agree? Esau had already earlier married two Hittite women, and Moses noted in Genesis

26:35 that these two daughters-in-law “made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah.” So, Rebekah resorted to manipulation and deception once again to get Jacob away from Esau’s murderous threats, and **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?”** (27:46). And, as we know, Jacob was sent away to Haran to find a wife for himself.

Boice notes that one of the lessons that we should take away from this narrative is that *the fruit of deception always turn bitter in the mouth*. If we humbly submit to God and his will, we will prosper. We will be like trees planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season and whose leaf does not wither (Psalm 1:3). But, if we seek to accomplish our will by manipulation and deception, we will never be fully satisfied.

I would like to point out two results of Rebekah’s manipulation. *First, Rebekah lost Jacob*. I mentioned this last time. As far as we know, after Jacob left for Haran, she never saw him again. Rebekah thought that Jacob would be gone for just a short while, perhaps a few months, at most. However, Jacob spent twenty years in Haran, and Rebekah died before Jacob returned (cf. Genesis 35:27-29). In fact, Rebekah is never mentioned again in the entire Old Testament, except in one passage that notes where she and the other patriarchs and their wives had been buried in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre (cf. Genesis 49:31).

Boice notes that “the cost of sin is always much greater than we imagine it to be.”³ Rebekah thought that Jacob would be gone for just a little while, and then he would be back, and she would be joyfully reunited with her favorite son. She thought that the cost of her sinful manipulation would be small. However, the very thing that she feared actually happened. She was afraid that she would lose both her sons in one day (Genesis 27:45). Sadly, that is exactly

³ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary*, 761.

what happened. Jacob went to Haran, never to return during her lifetime. And Esau went to live in the land of Seir, and it seems that she did not see much, if anything, of Esau either.

What is it that you want in life? You will lose it if you seek to accomplish it by your own will rather than surrender your will to God. It is by losing your life that you find it. It is when you seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness that all these other things will be added to you (Matthew 6:33).

The second result of Rebekah's manipulation is that Jacob was demoted to a position of rigorous servitude. Jacob was the heir of the accumulated wealth of Abraham and Isaac. However, when he fled to Laban, he was forced to serve his uncle for twenty years for two wives and a large number of animals. It is not that Jacob was innocent in this either. He had willingly cooperated with his mother's manipulation to deceive his father and brother. Boice notes:

It is always thus. Those who have come to trust the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior—and who know the glory of the immortal God in him—are destined to be kings and priests for God and to reign with Christ. But that destiny is not compatible with willfulness. It cannot coexist with our sin. If we go our way, we will be crying out with Paul, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Rom. 7:24). Slavery for kings? Bondage for children of the Most High God? Yes, if we persist in our willfulness. But “thanks be to God,” there is provision for victory “through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (v. 25).⁴

II. The Blessing of Isaac (28:1-5)

Second, let's examine the blessing of Isaac (28:1-5)

After Rebekah expressed her concern to Isaac, he **called Jacob and blessed him and directed him, “You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women. Arise, go to Paddan-aram**

⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary*, 762.

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" (28:1-2). Isaac agreed with his wife Rebekah that Jacob should not marry a Canaanite woman. Earlier Isaac had been willfully disobedient, and had tried to give his blessing to his favorite son, Esau. But, he repented of his sinful disobedience, and now was determined to please God. So, he blessed Jacob in stronger terms than before (in Genesis 27:27-29). He said in verses 3-4, **"God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. 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!"** Isaac had finally come to understand and value God's covenantal blessing, and he acknowledged the sovereignty of God in bestowing his covenantal, electing blessing on whomever he willed. And so Moses noted in verse 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."**

Boice notes that the lesson that we should take away from this narrative is that *the will of God and not the will of man will be established ultimately*. He goes on to say that "the will of God is like an anvil. It is there for us to be conformed to, just as a bar of metal can be bent on an anvil and thus be molded into something useful. But if we do not want to be conformed to the wise and holy will of God, then it is like us beating a piece of wood against the anvil. It is the wood—ourselves—and not the anvil that will be broken."⁵

Isaac knew about God's prophecy to Rebekah that the older would serve the younger (Genesis 25:23), indicating that the covenant blessing would go to the younger twin. However, his favorite son was the older twin, Esau. And he willfully and disobediently had determined to bless Esau. But, he came to see that in spite of

⁵ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary*, 760.

his determination, God was in fact all-powerful, sovereign, and supreme. He surrendered fully and completely to the will of God. So, when he had a second opportunity to bless Jacob, he determined that it should be **“God Almighty”** who would bless Jacob. This was the name that God used when he revealed himself to Isaac’s father, Abraham, when he was ninety-nine years old and promised him and Sarah a son in their old age, well past the age of bearing children. And, of course, Isaac was the result of the promise of God Almighty to Abraham. So, now he used that very same name in blessing his son Jacob.

Again I ask, what is it that you want in life? Know that the will of God and not the will of man will be established ultimately. Do you remember Saul, before he become known as the Apostle Paul? He was trying to annihilate Christianity by throwing Christians into prison and even having some of them killed. When he was converted on the road to Damascus, he heard Jesus saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads” (Acts 26:14). Do you know what a “goad” is? It is a cattle prod, usually with a pointed end. So, if a cow went in a different direction than the cattle herder wanted it to go, he would prod it with a goad. Normally, an animal would turn in the right direction. But, a stubborn, willful, or stupid animal would kick the goad and get even more sore. That is what happens when we disobey the will of God. We get hurt, and God’s will shall ultimately prevail. So, do not resist the will of God.

III. The Defiance of Esau (28:6-9)

And third, notice the defiance of Esau.

Moses writes in verses 6-9, **“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,’ and**

that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and gone to Paddan-aram. So when Esau saw that the Canaanite women did not please Isaac his father, 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."

Isaac married **Mahalath**. She was his cousin, the daughter of his father's half-brother, **Ishmael**. Commentator Kent Hughes says:

Unspiritual, immoral Esau was slow to connect the dots. Esau was so clueless that he thought imitating Jacob's marriage might curry his father's blessing. Instead it demonstrated that he had no idea at all as to what God was about. An Ishmaelite wife (the daughter of Abraham's cast-out son) was not the way back to blessing! Kidner rightly comments, "Like most religious efforts of the natural man, [this was] superficial and ill-judged."⁶

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Jacob being sent to find a wife in Genesis 27:46-28:9, let us live as recipients of God's great grace.

The family of Isaac was an "ordinary" family. Even though they knew about God's covenantal blessings, they did not frankly live differently than any pagan family. The family members were involved in disobedience, manipulation, deception, and unholiness.

Let us be aware that God calls us to live differently in this world. God's sovereign, redemptive plan to send a Savior for sinners did go through Jacob. And Jesus was eventually born in Bethlehem. He lived a perfect life, and then he died on the cross to pay

⁶ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 358.

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the penalty for sinners such as ourselves. Now, God calls us to himself in salvation, and he calls us to be “extraordinary” people in whom his great grace is clearly evident.

God says to us in Ephesians 5:22–6:4:

²²Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.
²³For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁴Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. ²⁸In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰because we are members of his body. ³¹“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” ³²This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. ³³However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

⁶Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ²“Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), ³“that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” ⁴Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Would you like to know families who live like that? A wife who submits to her husband and respects him? A husband who loves his wife and is concerned about her spiritual growth? Children who obey their parents? Fathers who do not provoke their

children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord?

I know many families like that. And you do too.

What is that produces such “extraordinary” families? This happens when family members die to self, which is the result of family members meeting the Lord Jesus, believing in him, repenting of their sin, and surrendering their wills to him. We live in a culture that promotes the “personal self” above all else. But the Christian is one who puts Christ before self. The Christian is not self-willed, but is submissive to Christ.

You see, Christ is not only our Savior, but he is also our example in how to live in this way. He is the one who did not strive to be first but rather “emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:7–8).

If we are willing to do that, then we are well on the way to becoming the extraordinary people that God desires. And we will see our families transformed by the power of Christ at work within us.

So, whether married or single, whether old or young, let us live as recipients of God’s great grace in our lives. Amen.

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and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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