

Our Covenant God – Part Twenty Five

Blessing is a loving act of empowerment

The word “bless” in Hebrew means to kneel and it is an act of impartation. I can easily understand how we would kneel before God but the idea of God kneeling before a man disturbed me greatly ... until I considered how often I have knelt down before a child to talk to them eye to eye.

When you kneel you make yourself look smaller than you really are but your size never really changes at all. When you kneel before a smaller person than yourself you are not making yourself less powerful or less large. Instead, you are making yourself accessible to that smaller person, allowing and empowering them to be able to see your face close-up instead of from a far distance.

When God blesses us, He is making Himself accessible to us, allowing and empowering us to be able to see His face close-up instead of from afar.

In turn, we can bless God by praising His Name, making ourselves accessible to Him and giving Him the honor and glory that belongs to Him. Of ourselves we cannot bless God, but because He first empowered us, we can therefore give back to Him out of that which He has deposited / imparted into us.

Jacob and Esau

Genesis 25:19-28 (NKJV) This is the genealogy of Isaac, Abraham’s son. Abraham begot Isaac. Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah as wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan Aram, the sister of Laban the Syrian. Now Isaac pleaded with the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived. But the children struggled together within her; and she said, “If all is well, why am I like this?” So she went to inquire of the LORD. And the LORD said to her:

“Two nations are in your womb,
Two peoples shall be separated from your body;
One people shall be stronger than the other,
And the older shall serve the younger.”

So when her days were fulfilled for her to give birth, indeed there were twins in her womb. And the first came out red. He was like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau. Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau’s heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them. So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Here we see a summary of the start of Jacob and Esau’s lives. Esau’s name is a difficult one to understand and seems to mean rough or hairy. Jacob’s name means ‘hand on the heel.’

We have seen the prophetic nature of the blessing given by a father to his children. Now we see God pronouncing a prophetic declaration over these two sons, in much the same way as He did before to Abraham with Ishmael and Isaac.

Verse 29 then goes into detail about a life-defining incident that occurred between the two brothers:

Genesis 25:29-34 (NKJV) Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary. And Esau said to Jacob, “Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary.” Therefore his name was called Edom. But Jacob said, “Sell me your birthright as of this day.” And Esau said, “Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?” Then Jacob said, “Swear to me as of this day.”

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So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Jewish tradition states that this conversation between Esau and Jacob occurred on the same day that Abraham died. This is why, even today, red lentil soup is traditionally a food that Jewish people eat when they are in mourning. We know, by calculating their ages, that the twins were fifteen years old when their grandfather, Abraham, died.

If this Jewish tradition is correct, and I believe that it is, it would explain Esau's pre-occupation with his own mortality when he says "I am about to die." He certainly was not about to die, as his behavior was not that of someone that is dying of starvation. His thoughts, however, were dark and depressing, and he was questioning the very meaning of his existence. It is always good to ask why you are here on this Earth, but Esau had come to the conclusion that his birthright was of no use to him and thus he had no desire to even have it at all. His thinking seemed to be "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"

What was Esau's birthright?

Esau was the firstborn son. It was the custom for the firstborn son to receive a double portion of his father's inheritance. Isaac had inherited all of Abraham's immense wealth as well as the Abrahamic Covenant which God had established with him. Thus, if Isaac did not have more sons, Esau would inherit two-thirds of the Promised Land, while Jacob would inherit one-third.

But remember that there was a catch. In Genesis 15:13-14, God said to Abram, "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions."

Abraham was between seventy-five and eighty-six years old at the time that God spoke those words to him. He died at 175 years of age. Esau could easily calculate that this freedom and the possession of the land would not happen in his own lifetime. Therefore, he would not be able to personally enjoy the benefits of the covenant. Instead, a promise of slavery and affliction lay ahead. Who, in their right minds, would want such a birthright? Someone who was only looking at the benefits to themselves without looking at the larger picture further down the timeline, for part of that same birthright was to be part of the bloodline from which the promised Messiah, who would save the whole world, would come.

In summary, Esau's birthright was:

- His place in Isaac's family
- Two-thirds of Isaac's goods
- The blessing of Abraham, i.e. the Abrahamic Covenant
- Two-thirds of the Promised Land
- The Messiah's bloodline

And so, consumed by his mortality, Esau placed little or no value on his birthright, selling it for a pot of red lentil soup.

Here we see another name change. Esau's name changed to Edom, meaning red; because that was the color of the stew he traded his birthright for. This incident determined his identity and changed his destiny.

Later on, in Genesis 27, we read about Jacob deceiving his father in order to receive Esau's blessing, which as we have seen was a prophetic declaration of blessing over his life. When Esau found out about this, he was extremely upset. Genesis 27:36 "And Esau said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has

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supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!”

Interestingly enough, later on we see Jacob giving Esau his blessing back!

Genesis 33:10-11 (NKJV) And Jacob said, “No, please, if I have now found favor in your sight, then receive my present from my hand, inasmuch as I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God, and you were pleased with me. Please, take my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough.” So he urged him, and he took it.

But Jacob could not give Esau his covenantal birthright back, only material possessions.

Interestingly enough, God stayed faithful to Esau because of His covenant with Abraham, and gave him his own land, called Seir.

Deuteronomy 2:4-5 (NKJV) God told Moses to command the people, saying, “You are about to pass through the territory of your brethren, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir; and they will be afraid of you. Therefore watch yourselves carefully. Do not meddle with them, for I will not give you any of their land, no, not so much as one footstep, because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession.

The birthright and the blessing cannot be separated

Esau was not the victim he painted himself to be in Genesis 27:36.

Genesis 27:36 (NKJV) And Esau said, “Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!” And he said, “Have you not reserved a blessing for me?”

This verse is where we get the belief that Jacob means “supplanter.” We will look at that later on. Jacob never took his birthright away from him. Esau sold it to Jacob. Esau did not understand the principles of God. This is the problem with people who do not have a heart for God: they cannot see or understand things from God’s perspective. Esau viewed the birthright and the blessing as two things that could be separated. However, Paul tells us differently in Hebrews:

Hebrews 12:16-17 (Amplified) “That no one may become guilty of sexual vice, or become a profane (godless and sacrilegious) person as Esau did, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. For you understand that later on, when he wanted [to regain title to] his inheritance of the blessing, he was rejected (disqualified and set aside), for he could find no opportunity to repair by repentance [what he had done, no chance to recall the choice he had made], although he sought for it carefully with [bitter] tears.”

The blessing came with the birthright. They were two different things but they belonged together. They could not be separated. When Esau threw away his birthright he threw away his place as a son in the family. He was no longer an heir of the covenant.

Notice that Paul said that Esau was godless. In other words, Esau did not care about God; he did not have any place in his heart for God at all. Merciless means having NO mercy, childless means having NO child and godless means having NO God. When we don’t care about the things of God then we don’t care

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about God. If you care about God those things that matter to Him (in this case the Covenant) would matter to you. And they do! That is why you are doing this study! But Esau didn't.

This was Esau's blessing that Jacob took:

Genesis 27:27-29 (NKJV) "Surely, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the LORD has blessed. Therefore may God give you of the dew of heaven, of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, and let your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be those who bless you!"

This was the blessing reserved for Jacob:

Genesis 28:3 (NKJV) "May God Almighty bless you, And make you fruitful and multiply you, That you may be an assembly of peoples; And give you the blessing of Abraham, To you and your descendants with you, That you may inherit the land In which you are a stranger, Which God gave to Abraham."

Malachi 1:3 "Jacob I loved, Esau I hated."

In order to understand this verse one must understand the cultural Hebrew meaning of the word "hate." If I say that I hate, for example, dogs, it means that I intensely dislike dogs. But the word "hate" in the Hebrew can mean 'love less' or 'do not prefer' or 'reject'.

Because Esau despised and sold his birthright, he no longer had a place in the family. He was no longer considered a son of Isaac and was no longer an heir of the Covenant that God had made with Abraham. Understand that God rejected Esau because Esau rejected Him first and that God hates no one.

Thus, this verse could easily be translated "Jacob I accepted, Esau I rejected"

Jacob wrestled for God's blessing

Jacob was very different to Esau. His attitude about the blessing was the complete opposite. What Esau threw away, Jacob desired with a passion that could never be quenched or diluted.

Born last, grasping onto his brother's heel, Jacob was destined to end first. He bought his brother's birthright and lied to get his blessing. He ended up an exile from his whole family because he feared that his own brother would kill him. He married two sisters, Rachel and Leah. He had twelve sons and one daughter. Years later he returned to his homeland with his household. On the way to be reconciled with his brother he had a dramatic encounter with God and his name ended up being changed as well.

Genesis 32:24-30 (NKJV) Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" So He said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob." And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked, saying, "Tell me Your name, I pray." And He said, "Why is it that you ask about My name?" And He blessed him there. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."

We see here that Jacob's name was changed from Jacob, which means "hand on the heel" to Israel, which means "He will rule as God".

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I used to teach this as meaning that God changed Jacob from a supplanter / cheater to a prince / ruler of God. I based that on Genesis 27:36, where Esau said “Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!”

But Jacob doesn’t mean “supplanter” and the only person who ever used it in that context was godless Esau. Jacob means “hand on the heel” because when the twins were born Esau came out first and Jacob’s hand was on the heel of Esau’s foot. To interpret this as an act of supplanting one must interpret Jacob’s actions as him trying to pull his brother back into the womb so that he could be born first.

Bill Cloud, in his book called *Enmity Between The Seeds*, suggests that it is, however, more plausible that Jacob’s hand was on Esau’s heel as a defensive act to stop Esau’s foot from crushing Jacob’s head... and I tend to agree with his argument.

Consider the fact that God’s Word is full of patterns. Nowhere in the Bible is there a pattern of God’s people cheating their way into their destiny. It may have happened at times but it was not a pattern. On the other hand, there is a pattern found in Genesis that certainly could fit Esau and Jacob’s births:

In Genesis 3:15, God said to the serpent:

And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her Seed;
He shall bruise your head,
And you shall bruise His heel.”

He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise His heel. We know that this is the first Messianic prophecy. We also know that Jesus fulfilled it because Satan bruised His heel by killing him and Jesus bruised Satan’s head. A bruised heel will make you limp until it is healed but a bruised head is something that can kill you. Doubtless, Satan AIMED for Jesus head but because he had no legs even his best efforts could reach no higher than Jesus’ heel.

Esau’s foot trying to crush Jacob’s head would most certainly fit this Biblical pattern. If so, Jacob’s hand was on Esau’s heel to protect himself rather than to supplant his brother.

Jacob became Israel after God blessed him, changing his name to “He will rule as God”, taking us back to Genesis 1 where God said “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

God’s plan for Mankind has never changed. The purpose of His covenants can be summed up in this: to reverse the damage sin caused and reinstate us as His co-rulers over His Creation.

Homework Question # 1: What is the significance of Esau’s name change?

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Homework Question # 2: What is the significance of Jacob's name change?

Homework Question # 3: In what way did God hate Esau?

Homework Question # 4: What personal lessons do we learn from Jacob and Esau?
