

Chapter 4: The Blessing of Jacob

Genesis 26:34–27:46

There are no role models in Genesis 26:34–27:46. Esau, the man of the field (Gen. 25:27), sets his mind entirely on the things of this world from the beginning by taking two Canaanite wives. Isaac, whose own father explicitly forbade Isaac from taking Canaanite wives (Gen. 24:3), nevertheless sets his mind and heart on giving the patriarchal blessing to Esau in exchange for some food—the exact same price for which Esau sold his birthright to Jacob (Gen. 25:29–34). Rebekah, who was so industriously servant-hearted in the days of her youth (Gen. 24:15–20), now industriously orchestrates a plan to deceive her blind husband in order to steal the blessing for Jacob. Jacob, a “blameless” man (ESV: “quiet”; Gen. 25:27), protests his mother’s plan initially out of a concern for getting caught, but he becomes altogether blameworthy when he carries out the deception that his mother proposes.

In this mess, God is silent and seems absent. Nevertheless, we know that God is working behind the scenes to bring about the fulfillment of his original birth oracle, when he prophesied that “the older [Esau] shall serve the younger [Jacob]” (Gen. 25:23). Neither Esau’s baseness, nor Isaac’s gluttony, nor Rebekah’s treachery, nor Jacob’s deceptiveness can overturn the promises of God. Indeed, God is *not* establishing his kingdom on the merits of these broken, sinful people. Rather, God made the original birth oracle, and he sovereignly works in and through the events of this awful chapter “in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works, but because of his call” (Rom. 9:11). Through Jacob, God will bring forth the Lord Jesus Christ as the offspring of Abraham and Isaac (Gal. 3:16; Gen. 21:12) and Christ’s kingdom as the blessing through whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed (Eph. 1:11; 3:6; Gal. 12:3). In Genesis 26:34–27:46, we see vividly that *God blesses his people according to his purposes, not ours.*

Wrong Senses: Worldly Goals (Genesis 26:34–27:4)

The majority of Genesis 26 narrates how Isaac lays hold of the promises that God made to his father, Abraham. The last two verses of Genesis 26, however, change the subject to describe how Isaac’s son Esau took for himself two wives from the Canaanites:

[34] When Esau was forty years old, he took Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite to be his wife, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite, [35] and they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah. (Gen. 26:34–35)

Just as Isaac married Rebekah at age forty (cf. Gen. 25:20), so Esau marries his wives at age forty; however, Esau’s marriages are different from Isaac’s in two important respects: “When Abraham’s intense concern that Isaac should on no account marry a Canaanite is recalled [cf. Gen. 24:3–4], it is

somewhat unexpected that Esau should marry two.”¹ Esau is a man given over to his appetites—whatever he wants, he takes, without any thought of the consequences for him (Gen. 25:34) or to his family (Gen. 26:35). Kenneth Mathews observes that Judith only appears here in the Bible, while Basemath appears in all of Esau’s genealogies (Gen. 36:3, 4, 10, 13, 17), which possibly implies “that Judith was barren, motivating him to take a second wife.”² Even so, bigamy falls outside the scope of God’s command for the nature of marriage as a lifelong, one-flesh covenantal union between one man and one woman (cf. Gen. 2:24). We should note, though, that Abraham himself took at least one other wife beyond Sarah (Gen. 16; cf. Gen. 25:1–6), and so will Jacob (Gen. 29).

Forfeiting the Blessing

Still, Abraham’s and Jacob’s marriages to multiple women do not invalidate the promises of God toward them. On the other hand, if God has promised to give the land to Abraham’s offspring (e.g., Gen. 12:7) *and* to expel the Canaanites from the land (Gen. 15:16–21), then Esau should recognize that taking a Canaanite wife will disqualify himself from laying hold of God’s promises. Indeed, this seems to be the “good and necessary consequence” that Abraham deduces from God’s word when he insists that Isaac must not marry a Canaanite (Gen. 24:3–4).³ For Esau to take two Canaanite wives, then, becomes “a kind of prelude of his rejection.”⁴ That is, this seemingly unimportant remark gives critical background information behind the narrative of Genesis 27. Not only has Esau despised and sold his birthright (Gen. 25:34), he has taken Canaanite wives. In this light, we see that “Esau was not fit to inherit the blessing.”⁵ Additionally, this background information raises serious questions about Isaac. By faith, Abraham made the necessary arrangements to seek a wife from Mesopotamia for Isaac so that his son would not marry a Canaanite, but Isaac does nothing to seek out brides outside of Canaan for Esau or Jacob.⁶

Furthermore, in light of Esau’s persistent rebellion against God’s word and God’s birthright, we can clearly judge that Isaac is wrong to give the blessing to Esau rather than Jacob.⁷ Esau’s actions only confirm the original birth oracle that Esau must serve Jacob (Gen. 25:23), but Isaac stubbornly persists to bless Esau when he should bless Jacob. None of this excuses Rebekah and Jacob for their treachery in Genesis 27, but this information does explain some of their desperation. Isaac has abdicated his spiritual leadership in the family, and Rebekah steps in to fill the void that her husband’s failures have created. Here, Esau’s actions makes the lives of his parents’ bitter; in Genesis 27, it is the actions of the parent (Rebekah) who will make Esau bitter (Gen. 27:38, 41).⁸

Gluttony and Sensuality

In opposition to the testimony of God’s word and to the evidence of Esau’s life, Isaac summons Esau to give his oldest son the blessing:

[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)

The statement about Isaac's old age and dim eyesight is critical for understanding the passage as a whole. First, Isaac's old age tells us *when* and *why* Isaac is seeking to bless his son Esau. Isaac is old and near to death (Gen. 27:2), so he wants to bless his son before he dies. A similar scene will take place at the end of Jacob's life (Gen. 49) and Joseph's life (Gen. 50:24–25), but they summon *all* their male relatives without distinction (Jacob's sons and Joseph's brothers) "to bless them publicly and in this way to organize the succession." Here, Isaac strangely calls Esau alone to bless him to the exclusion of Jacob. Abraham also excluded all of his other sons to give "all that he had to Isaac" (Gen. 25:5). Abraham's other sons, however, were not the sons of his legitimate wife, Sarah, but only the sons of his concubines (Gen. 25:6). Esau and Jacob, on the other hand, are twin brothers from the same mother.

Second, Isaac's dim eyesight tells us *how* his plan will fail: "Isaac appears 'blind' in more than one way; he is blind to the betrayal of his wife and Jacob, apparently unaware of the forces that will rip apart his family."¹⁰ Indeed, Isaac is *blind* throughout this passage—not only blind to the trickery of Rebekah and Jacob, but he is also blind to the will of God in this situation. Isaac's blessing is not his to bestow as he alone sees fit, since his blessing is prophetic and spiritual in nature: "For the benediction here spoken of was not a mere prayer but a legitimate sanction, divinely interposed, to make manifest the grace of election."¹¹ To some degree, then, we must distinguish the *spiritual* benefits of the blessing from the *material* benefits of the birthright that Esau sold in Genesis 25:29–34.¹² Even so, the author of Hebrews suggests that Esau, by selling his birthright, also forfeited the blessing:¹³ "[16]...Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. [17] For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears" (Heb. 12:16–17). The birthright and the blessing are different in what they confer, but they are connected in their source, since both arise from God's gracious promises to his people. In spite of Esau's forfeiture of the birthright (and, therefore, the blessing), Isaac seeks to bless Esau with his *soul* (Gen. 27:4, 19, 25, 31)—that is, "with all the blessing that he had received and with all his desire and vitality. It is more than saying that he wished 'with all his heart' to bless Esau; it would be passing on his lifetime of blessing."¹⁴ Esau has disqualified himself from the blessing, but Isaac is blind to this spiritual reality. By determining to give the blessing to Esau, Isaac acts foolishly and sinfully.

The worst part of all this is the *reason* why Isaac chooses to bless Esau instead of Jacob: *food*. Previously, we read that "Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game" (Gen. 25:28), and now Isaac instructs Esau to hunt game and prepare "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. 27:3–4). In opposition to God's word and with a blind eye to Esau's actions, Isaac allows his gluttony to guide his blessing. As Gordon Wenham puts it, "Isaac's sensuality is more powerful than his theology."¹⁵ In Genesis 26, Isaac trusted the word of the Lord above his desire for food, by not going down to Egypt in the midst of a famine (Gen. 26:1–2, 6). Now, rather than a man who walks by faith, Isaac makes the same mistake as Esau by exchanging God's promises for a little food.¹⁶ Outside of Genesis 27, the Hebrew word for "delicious food" only appears elsewhere in the warnings of Proverbs 23:3 ("Do not desire his *delicacies*, for they are deceptive food") and Proverbs 23:6 ("Do not eat the bread of a man who is stingy; do not desire his *delicacies*").¹⁷ Even worse, Isaac makes the same mistake that Adam made by passively awaiting the forbidden food that his wife will give to him (Gen. 3:6) rather than leading his family spiritually according to the word of God.

The Deceptiveness of our Senses

On this note, the narrative sets up a shocking contrast: the man with the *impaired* sense (“his eyes were dim”) pursues sensual pleasures (“delicious food, such as I love”) at the expense of God’s word. Through the rest of this passage, Isaac will not only lean on his sight and his taste, but his hearing (Gen. 27:22), touch (Gen. 27:22), and smell (Gen. 27:27)—all five senses—as well.¹⁸ The fight of faith against the allurements and deceptions of our senses is the ongoing battle in the lives of God’s people. God calls us to *listen* to his word, no matter what our eyes, our hands, our tongues, or our noses may tell us. While God spoke to Rebekah in Genesis 25 and appeared twice to speak his word to Isaac in Genesis 26, God is tragically silent in this chapter as everyone follows their natural impulses and desires rather than the word that God has already revealed.¹⁹ Still, God’s silence does not mean that he is inactive. God will use even these events for his own glory and his purposes, blessing Jacob according to his own, sovereign election, even in spite of the will of Isaac.²⁰

Wrong Seeking: Worldly Control (Genesis 27:5–29)

Just as Sarah listened to Abraham’s conversation with the three visitors (Gen. 18:10), so Rebekah listens to Isaac’s conversation with Esau:²¹

[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.” [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. [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. (Gen. 27:5–17)

Notice the differentiation of Esau as *Isaac’s* son (“his”; Gen. 26:5) and Jacob as *Rebekah’s* son (“her”; Gen. 26:6), confirming that the division in the holy family from Genesis 25:28 still exists.²² Indeed, through this entire chapter, the entire family is never in the same place at the same time, and Esau never finds himself in the same place with Jacob or Rebekah.²³ While there is much to criticize about Isaac, Rebekah is equally flawed, albeit as a contrast and a foil to Isaac. Where Isaac is passive and decrepit, Rebekah is as active as she was when Abraham’s servant first encountered her at the well in

Nahor (Gen. 24:15–21).²⁴ Where Isaac is enslaved to sensuality, Rebekah’s mind is ruthlessly rational. Where Isaac ignores God’s birth oracle (Gen. 25:23), Rebekah is willing to do anything to fulfill it—even through the “immoderate zeal” that leads her into treachery and deceit.²⁵ The husband and wife are divided against each other in every possible way.

Worldly Control

In reaction to what she has overheard, Rebekah sets in motion a plan for Jacob to steal the blessing from Esau. Rebekah usurps God’s own authority by demanding that Jacob “obey my voice as I command you” (Gen. 27:8).²⁶ Just as Adam sinfully listened to the voice of Eve (Gen. 3:17) and Abraham sinfully listened to the voice of Sarah (Gen. 16:2; cf. Gen. 21:12), Rebekah sinfully instructs Jacob *twice* to “obey [lit., “listen to”] my voice” (Gen. 27:8, 43). Additionally, Rebekah twists God’s own commanding authority in the life of her husband by using the two imperatives, “Go” and “take” (ESV: “bring”; Gen. 27:9). These are the same two imperatives by which God commanded Abraham to “take” his son Isaac and “go” to Moriah to offer him as a sacrifice (Gen. 22:2). What were sacred words in the life of her husband become words of blasphemous authority in the voice of Rebekah. Later, Rebekah will repeat her command to “obey my voice” along with employing those two imperatives in Genesis 27:13 (“*go, take* [ESV., “bring”] them to me”). Ultimately, Jacob indeed will obey Rebekah’s voice by those same two verbs in Genesis 27:14 (“So he *went* and *took* them...”).

Now, Rebekah indeed is blameworthy for her actions; however, she is not the *primary* blameworthy figure in this story. Rebekah is stepping in to fill the vacuum of spiritual leadership that Isaac abdicated. While Isaac pursues the wrong goal (blessing Esau) for the wrong reasons (sensuality), Rebekah pursues the right goal (blessing Jacob), albeit in the wrong manner (deceit and manipulation). We should commend Rebekah for listening more carefully to God’s word by recognizing that Esau must serve Jacob (Gen. 25:23); however, we should also recognize precisely where Rebekah goes wrong. It is not merely that Rebekah does not trust *Isaac* to do the right thing. Ultimately, Rebekah does not trust *God* to do the right thing, so she takes it upon herself to make sure the “right thing” happens by any means necessary. Like Eve, Rebekah steps in to fill the void left by the spiritual abdication of her husband, bringing disastrous consequences upon the holy family (Gen. 3:1–7). The perennial temptation of women is to seek control in order to ensure that *their* vision is accomplished in the world. In the home, this means that wives seek to rule over their husbands (Gen. 3:16), especially when their husbands fail to lead their families. It is not that Rebekah should have gone along with Isaac’s sinful, selfish plan, in some false sense of “submission.” Instead, it is that Rebekah should have used her God-given strength to confront her husband and cry out to God, rather than seeking to control the situation herself. By taking matters into her own hands, Rebekah brought misery on the entire family.

An important contrast to this passage appears in Numbers 22–24, when the Moabite king Balak sent to the prophet Balaam, asking Balaam to curse Israel before Israel can destroy the nations of Moab and Midian. There, God supernaturally prevents Balaam from cursing his people, first by telling Balaam not to go at all (Num. 22:7–14). Then, God permits Balaam to go, but he sends an angel and causes Balaam’s donkey to talk (Num. 22:22–35). Ultimately, God supernaturally prevents Balaam from cursing Israel across three oracles, where each oracle confirms God’s blessing for Israel in grander ways (Num. 23–24). We do not know what would have happened if Rebekah and Jacob had confronted Isaac, or if they had sought the Lord’s blessing by prayer rather than deception;

however, it is possible that if they had done so, “as with Balaam, the Lord would have overruled the effort by some unusual means.”²⁷ And yet, how much pain and sorrow this family could have likely avoided by seeking to honor and obey God’s will and instructions, rather than taking matters into their own hands! Referring to Genesis 48, Derek Kidner writes, “Long afterwards Jacob would learn, as he blessed Ephraim and Manasseh, with what simplicity God could order such affairs.”²⁸

Faithless Faith

In Rebekah’s plan, the reason that Jacob must take animals from the flock is that they may prepare “delicious food” for Isaac, “such as he loves” (Gen. 27:9). Then, Rebekah says that Jacob will “bring” (Gen. 27:10) her food to Isaac so that he will bless Jacob instead of Esau.²⁹ Jacob protests, but not because of the immorality of the plan.³⁰ Instead, Jacob worries that if he *brings* Rebekah’s food to Isaac, he will “bring” a curse on himself (Gen. 27:12; cf. Gen. 20:9; 26:10). Specifically, Jacob worries that Isaac will feel the smoothness of his own skin, since Esau is a hairy man (Gen. 27:12; cf. Gen. 25:25). To address this concern, Rebekah promises that the curse will fall upon her, not him (Gen. 27:13), and then she fashions the skins of the young goats into fake hair for Jacob’s heck and hands (Gen. 27:16) to complement Esau’s “best garments” (Gen. 27:15). Jacob, clothed in Esau’s garments and holding Esau’s food, symbolically represents the older brother as he prepares to take the blessing for himself.³¹

We should, however, recognize that even though Jacob is acting deceitfully, he is nevertheless pursuing the *right* thing. Earlier, we read that Jacob is a “blameless [ESV: “quiet”] man, dwelling in tents” (Gen. 25:27). Jacob’s cunning sale of food to his famished brother for a birthright (Gen. 25:29–34) and his theft of Esau’s blessing prohibits us from declaring Jacob perfect in all respects; however, we see the fundamental difference between Jacob and Esau. Esau despises his birthright (Gen. 25:34) and he marries Canaanite women (Gen. 26:34–35). Later, Esau will seek to murder his brother (Gen. 27:41) and marry an Ishmaelite woman as his third wife (Gen. 28:6–9). The only thing Esau really wants is the material, worldly, temporal blessings that the birthright and blessings can offer to him. When he can trade his birthright for a meal, he willingly does so because the lasting, spiritual nature of his birthright means nothing to him. Rather than believing that God will not give the inheritance to the offspring of Canaanites, Esau intermarries with them. Esau truly is a man whose mind is set on this earth, a “man of the field” (Gen. 25:27). By contrast, Jacob sets his mind on God’s heavenly promises by faith, even if he often pursues those promises in deeply flawed, faithless ways.³²

Doubling Down on Deception

After all the preparations are made, Jacob fraudulently enters into his father’s tent to seek the blessing:

[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.” [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. [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. (Gen. 27:18–25)

Even though Jacob speaks only two syllables in Hebrew (“My father”), Isaac immediately senses that something is not right and asks the pointed question, “Who are you, my son?” (Gen. 27:18). Jacob overcompensates by using an unusually strong phrase to say “I am Esau” and then a superfluous number of words to try to pull off the ruse (Gen. 27:19).³³

Isaac, unsatisfied with Jacob's response, asks how *Esau* could have possibly have found game so quickly, to which Jacob replies not merely with a lie, but with blasphemy: “Because the LORD your God granted me success” (Gen. 27:20).³⁴ Still Isaac is not convinced, so he asks Jacob to come near to him to feel whether this is indeed Esau (Gen. 27:21). This is the moment that Jacob feared (Gen. 27:11–12), but Rebekah's plan of equipping Jacob with goat skins works so that Jacob does feel like Esau. Even so, Isaac has doubts: “The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau” (Gen. 27:22). Nevertheless, Isaac offers some kind of blessing to Jacob (“So he blessed him”; Gen. 27:23), even though the best part of the blessing will not come until later.

While Jacob previously overcompensated by speaking too much, Jacob now realizes that his father recognizes his voice. Through the rest of this encounter, Jacob speaks only one more word (two syllables): “I (am)” (Gen. 27:24).³⁵ Instead, Jacob serves his father the food and lets the elderly glutton eat (Gen. 27:25). Here, we read for the first time that Jacob also serves his father *wine*, which his father drinks. Although it is common sense that Isaac would want something to drink as he eats, it is a typical Hebrew narrative strategy to introduce an important, surprising detail late in the narrative. By the wine, Isaac's dull senses will only be further dulled, keeping him from thinking clearly and recognizing Jacob's deception.³⁶ Wine caused Noah (Gen. 9:20–21) to act against his better judgment and helped Lot's daughters conspire against their father (Gen. 19:30–38). Here also, Jacob uses wine to conspire against his father by leading Isaac to act against his better judgment by blessing Jacob instead of Esau.

Betraying Isaac with a Kiss

Thus far, Jacob's plan is succeeding. Only one test remains—the test of smell—before Isaac will give Jacob the blessing:

[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!" (Gen. 27:26–29)

At this point, Isaac is satisfied by what his hands feel, what his tongue tastes, and what his nose smells. His dim eyes cannot help him with sight (Gen. 27:1), and only his ears register any red flag to tell him that he is being deceived.³⁷ This point may be important, since God regularly teaches us to know the truth by *listening* to his word, rather than by following any other sense. For this reason, God explicitly forbids that we seek him by *sight* (Ex. 20:4–6), and he declares that we cannot find him unless we *hear* someone preaching his word (Rom. 10:14). Isaac's only hope for cutting through the deception is what he hears with his ears, and yet he ignores his sense of hearing in favor of what the rest of his senses told him. Jacob, like Judas, betrays the source of God's blessing with a kiss.³⁸

Disgraceful, Underhanded Ways

At root, Jacob is seeking God's blessing by ungodly means. Paul addresses the New Testament corollary to Jacob's actions in 2 Corinthians 4:2: "But we have renounced disgraceful, under-handed ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God." Allen Ross explains the timeless principle we should glean from Jacob's actions: "God will not permit his people to secure his blessings through deceptive and manipulative schemes."³⁹ God does bless Jacob, but he blesses Jacob *in spite* of Jacob's actions, not because of them. Ultimately, Jacob will suffer much from his deceit:

Jacob, the deceiver, is for his part cruelly deceived by his father-in-law Laban, who makes him marry the unlovely Leah, as well as beautiful Rachel. And Jacob never accepted Leah or her sons, and the bitter tensions between them would cloud the rest of his life. Like his mother Rebekah, he would spend most of his latter years mourning the loss of his favorite son.⁴⁰

God condemns all attempts to seek his blessing and to build his kingdom that stray from the foundation of his word. Instead, God insists upon building *his* kingdom according to *his* principles: by his word and his Spirit.

Blessed through an Elder Brother

But like us, Jacob gains a blessing when clothed as his elder brother (Rom. 8:16–17, 29): "In the same manner we are blessed, as Ambrose teaches, when, in the name of Christ, we enter the presence of our Heavenly Father: we receive from him the robe of righteousness, which, by its odour, procures his favor; in short, we are thus blessed when we are put in his place."⁴¹ God is gracious even when we are not faithful, as God demonstrates grace to Jacob through this blessing. Esau is a "man of the field" (Gen. 25:25), so his garments smell like "a field that the LORD has blessed" (Gen. 27:27). Derek Kidner puts it this way: "The hunter's garments, redolent of the country, evoke the promise of

the land, enhanced now to a vision of plenty (in terms to be amplified in, e.g. Deut. 11:11–15), not of mere living-space.”⁴² Of course, the land of Canaan points beyond itself to the heavenly inheritance that God’s people have in Christ: “the Lord did not formerly set the hope of the future inheritance plainly before the eyes of the fathers, (as he now calls and raises us directly towards heaven,) but he led them as by a circuitous course. Thus he appointed the land of Canaan as a mirror and pledge to them of the celestial inheritance.”⁴³

Then, Isaac blesses Jacob by declaring that “peoples” will “serve” him, and “nations” will bow down to him as he becomes lord over his brothers and his mother’s sons bow down to him (Gen. 27:29). The words “nations” and “serve” appeared earlier in the birth oracle three times, although the ESV used the word *peoples* to translate the first occurrence, and then left the other two occurrences untranslated: “Two nations are in your womb, and two *peoples* from within you shall be divided; the one *people/nation* shall be stronger than the other *people/nation*; the older shall *serve* the younger” (Gen. 25:23).⁴⁴ Later, Jacob will utter very similar words to his son Judah about his lordship over his brothers (Gen. 49:8), prophetically “connecting the blessing of Abraham’s seed with the rise of the kingship in the house of Judah.”⁴⁵ Finally, the line “Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you” (Gen. 27:29) comes straight out of God’s promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:3). The blessing is complete. Through Jacob shall the blessing of Isaac’s offspring run.

Wrong Sorrow: Worldly Grief (Genesis 27:30–46)

Jacob only scarcely misses Esau as his brother returns from the hunt:

[30] As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, Esau his brother came in from his hunting. [31] He also prepared delicious food and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, “Let my father arise and eat of his son’s game, that you may bless me.” [32] His father Isaac said to him, “Who are you?” He answered, “I am your son, your firstborn, Esau.” [33] Then Isaac trembled very 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 he shall be blessed.” (Gen. 27:30–34)

The last time we saw the verb describing Jacob’s having “gone out” when Esau arrives was in Genesis 25. There, the verb described how Esau “came out” of the womb as the older brother, before Jacob “came out” as the younger brother (Gen. 25:25–26).⁴⁶ By the time Esau returns from the hunt, the younger brother has so thoroughly displaced the elder brother that it is as though Jacob “came out” of the womb before Esau. Esau, unaware that his brother Jacob has already received the blessing, prepares the delicious food that his father requested, and takes it to his father with the request that Isaac would bless him (Gen. 27:31).

Once again, Isaac is confused by the appearance of his son, so he asks the identity of Esau (Gen. 27:32). When Esau responds that he is the firstborn, Esau (Gen. 27:32), Isaac “trembled very violently” as he asks who came in earlier (Gen. 27:33). Isaac’s fear is captured in extraordinary terms. Gordon Wenham explains that the verb for “tremble” expresses “intense fear and alarm by itself (e.g., by Joseph’s brothers when arrested, 42:28, by the people on Sinai, Exod 19:16, or by Abimelek visited by David, 1 Sam 21:2[1]). Here it is supplemented by the cognate noun ‘trembling’ and

superlative adjective ‘very great.’ Hebrew can hardly express Isaac’s panic more graphically.”⁴⁷ When Isaac states further, “Yes, and he shall be blessed” (Gen. 27:33) he probably “expresses more than mere belief that the spoken word is self-fulfilling; he knows he has been fighting against God, as Esau has, and he accepts defeat.”⁴⁸

No Chance to Repent

The news that Isaac has already given away the blessing devastates Esau:

[34] As soon as Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry and said to his father, “Bless me, even me also, O my 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 cheated me these two times. He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing.” Then he said, “Have you not reserved a blessing for me?” [37] Isaac answered and said to Esau, “Behold, I have made him lord over you, and all his brothers I have given to him for 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 but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father.” And Esau lifted up his voice and wept. (Gen. 27:34–38)

Matching the way that Isaac trembled “very” violently Esau cries out with an “exceedingly” (same word in Hebrew) great and bitter cry (Gen. 27:34). He pleads for his father to bless him also (Gen. 27:34), but Isaac responds that Jacob has come deceptively, and has already taken away Esau’s blessing (Gen. 27:35).

Worldly Grief vs. Godly Grief

Understandably, Esau is furious over Jacob’s deception. He makes a wordplay on Jacob’s name, since the word translated “cheated” comes from the same root word; however, we do not precisely know what this verb means, since it does not occur elsewhere with enough context to help us define a precise meaning (cf. Jer. 9:4; Hos. 12:3).⁴⁹ Although we know what Jacob has done to Esau, Esau is exaggerating Jacob’s actions by claiming that Jacob “took away my birthright” (Gen. 27:37), even though Esau willingly sold away his birthright.⁵⁰ We should note carefully that Esau does not take responsibility for his own actions. He is mad to have lost something, but he does not recognize any fault in himself.⁵¹ As the Apostle Paul explains, this is the difference between worldly grief and godly grief (2 Cor. 7:8–12). Worldly grief is an experience of sorrow over the *consequences* of sin, while godly grief is an experience of sorrow over the *causes* of sin.⁵² Therefore, worldly grief “produces death” because it is not true repentance, while godly grief leads to “salvation without regret” (2 Cor. 7:10). For those who sincerely repent from their *sin*—rather than simply raging about what they *suffer* because of sin—and look to Christ for salvation, God promises without qualification that our sins will be forgiven.⁵³

The Blessing for Esau

Again, Esau asks for a blessing from his father—any blessing that his father may have reserved for him (Gen. 27:36). Isaac’s response that nothing can be done at this point about what he promised to

Jacob reinforces the power of this blessing (Gen. 27:37). He has not offered kind wishes for Jacob's future; he has uttered an inviolable prophecy about Jacob's destiny.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Isaac does offer Esau a kind of blessing:

[39] Then Isaac his father answered and said to him:

“Behold, away from the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling 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 grow restless
you shall break his yoke from your neck.” (Gen. 27:39–41)

Even now, Esau could experience *some* of Jacob's blessing; however, to do so, he needs to forsake the blessing for *himself* and instead seek the blessing *in* and through Jacob.⁵⁵ Just as Abimelech stopped quarreling Isaac to make a covenant with him (Gen. 26:26–31), so Esau can stop fighting against Jacob to make a covenant with him. Instead, Esau insists upon his *own* blessing apart from Jacob and gets very little in return.

Esau will not gain the fatness of the earth or the dew of heaven, for he will live away from Jacob's blessings (Gen. 27:39). Furthermore, he will not live in peace, but will live by his sword as he serves his brother (Gen. 27:40). Eventually, though, Esau's descendants will “grow restless” and break away from the yoke of Jacob's descendants (Gen. 27:40). Gordon Wenham traces this promise through the history of the Old Testament:

Throughout the OT, Edom appears as a militant nation, often hostile to his brother Israel (Num 20:18; 1 Sam 14:47; 1 Kgs 11:14–16; 2 Kgs 14:7–10; Obad; Ps 60:10–11 [8–9]). From the time of David, Edom was part of the Israelite empire, but later it regained its independence (2 Kgs 8:20–22) and after the fall of Jerusalem took revenge on Judah (cf. Obad; Ps 137:7). It is perhaps these events to which “when you grow restless, you shall tear off his yoke” refer. Thus, the blessing of Esau does end with a glimmer of hope.⁵⁶

Ultimately, Esau gets what he truly wants: “So Isaac pronounces over Esau the appropriate destiny of the ‘profane person’: the freedom to live unblessed (39) and untamed (40).”⁵⁷ If he wanted the true blessing, he could have sought it in Jacob; instead, he seeks to live on his own, apart from God's covenant people and God's covenant blessing.

The Revenge of Esau

Although Esau does receive his own blessing, apart from the covenant blessing of Jacob, this does not satisfy him. Instead, he plots to murder his brother:

[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 Esau her older son were told to Rebekah. So

she sent and called Jacob her younger son and said to him, “Behold, your brother Esau comforts himself about you by planning to kill you. [43] Now therefore, my son, obey my voice. Arise, flee to Laban my brother in Haran [44] and stay with him a while, until your brother’s fury turns away—[45] until your brother’s anger turns away from you, and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I will send and bring you from there. Why should I be bereft of you both in one day?”

[46] Then 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?” (Gen. 27:41–46)

Esau’s reaction proves that his sorrow was not true repentance, but only anger.⁵⁸ Although Esau intends to delay Jacob’s murder, he plots his brother’s murder nonetheless. In doing so, Esau becomes “potentially a second Cain.”⁵⁹ In this, we see that Esau does not really want the blessing, *per se*. Rather, he wants the blessing *for himself*. That Jacob has something that he believes should be his does not humble Esau, but enrages him against the one whom God has chosen by grace.

The Intervention of Rebekah

When Rebekah hears of Esau’s plot, she intervenes swiftly. Once again, Rebekah commands her son, instructing him to “listen to [ESV: “obey”] my voice” (cf. Gen. 27:8). By instructing Jacob to go to Haran, we are seeing the reliving of the story of when Abraham sent his servant to Haran to seek Rebekah as Isaac’s wife; however, this time it is the patriarch himself who leaves, and not a servant as an emissary. Rebekah manipulatively gets Isaac to believe that the plan is *his* idea by off-handedly raising the terrible possibility that Jacob may marry a Hittite woman like Esau has done: “it played equally on Isaac’s self-interest and his principles. The prospect of a third Hittite daughter-in-law and a distracted wife would have unmanned even an Abraham.”⁶⁰ And yet, Rebekah’s plan does not go according to her plan. Rebekah intends that Jacob will only be gone “a while” (Gen. 27:44), or, literally, “a few days.” Furthermore, Rebekah’s intention is that she will not lose both of her sons in one day (Gen. 27:45). Nevertheless, Jacob remains in Haran for twenty years (cf. Gen. 31:41), never seeing his mother again. She does indeed lose both of her sons through her treachery.⁶¹ Although we do not find explicit condemnation of what Rebekah and Jacob do, we see the fruit of their actions. Indeed, God chose Jacob to receive the blessing, but the way that he and his mother took the blessing sows seeds of discord that will bear bitter fruit for decades and generations.

Discussion Questions

1. Where are you tempted by sensuality? What sights tempt you to lust with your eyes? What gluttony do you pursue by taste? Where do the smells in your nose lead you away from God’s word? What idolatries of comfort do you seek by touch? What sounds drown out God’s word from your hearing? Do you practice fasting to loosen the grip of sensuality on you?
2. Why does sensuality so powerfully threaten the spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ? Where have you seen the powerful, yet false, testimony of your senses lead you away from God’s truth? Why do we trust our senses above what we hear in God’s word? How are you seeking, by God’s grace, to

retrain your trust away from your senses and toward God’s word?

3. How are you tempted to pursue God’s blessing in the wrong way? In what ways do you seek God’s kingdom through “disgraceful, underhanded ways” rather than “by open statement of the truth” (2 Cor. 4:2)? Where do you tamper with God’s truth as you seek to build his kingdom according to your principles? What spiritual white lies do you need to repent from?

4. What leads you to repentance: the consequences of your sin, or the cause of your sin? Do you fear getting caught in this life more than you fear God’s judgment? Do you experience only worldly grief, leading you to sorrow and anger over the pain sin causes you? Or, do you experience godly grief, leading you to true repentance before God for sinning against his holiness?

Notes

1. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 205.

2. “If so, his situation recalls the same problem faced by Abraham and Sarah. Perhaps the author resisted including additional information on Judith since this similarity with Abraham and Isaac would distract from his interest in establishing the priority of Jacob (11:30; 25:21; 29:31).” (Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 415.)

3. “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.” (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1.6)

4. Calvin, *Genesis*, vol. 2, 77. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom02.iv.i.html>>

5. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 190.

6. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 215.

7. Kidner, *Genesis*, 165.

8. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 211.

9. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 205.

10. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 417.

11. Calvin, *Genesis*, vol. 2, 82. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom02.v.i.html>>

12. “Isaac is planning to give the patriarchal blessing, which must be distinguished from the material inheritance (birthright) discussed at the end of Genesis 25. The blessing has nothing to do with material goods or birth order. It is also important to distinguish the patriarchal blessing from the covenant blessing, though there may be areas of overlap. The covenant blessing is passed on to Jacob by Isaac in 28:3–4, but more important, is confirmed by God in subsequent settings (e.g., 28:13–15).” (Walton, *Genesis*, 554.)

13. Kidner, *Genesis*, 166.

14. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 476.

15. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 206.

16. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 190.

17. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 206.

18. “All five senses play a conspicuous part, largely by their fallibility, in this classic attempt to handle spiritual responsibilities by the light of nature. Ironically, even the sense of taste on which Isaac prided himself gave him the wrong answer. Rebekah had not the slightest doubt that she could reproduce Esau’s gastronomic masterpiece—had she often smarted under this?—in a fraction of Esau’s time. But the real scandal is Isaac’s

frivolity: his palate had long since governed his heart (25:28) and silenced his tongue (for he was powerless to rebuke the sin that was Esau's downfall); he now proposed to make it his arbiter between peoples and nations (29). Unfitness for office shows in every act of this sightless man rejecting the evidence of his ears for that of his hands, following the promptings of his palate and seeking inspiration through—of all things—his nose (27). Yet God put these very factors to work for him.” (Kidner, *Genesis*, 167.)

19. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 417.

20. “But let us weigh each of the circumstances of the case in its proper order; of which this is the first, that God transferred the blessing of Esau to Jacob, by a mistake on the part of the father; whose eyes, Moses tells us, were dim. The vision also of Jacob was dull when he blessed his grandchildren Ephraim and Manasseh; yet his want of sight did not prevent him from cautiously placing his hands in a transverse direction. But God suffered Isaac to be deceived, in order to show that it was not by the will of man that Jacob was raised, contrary to the course of nature, to the right and honor of primogeniture.” (Calvin, *Genesis*, vol. 2, 82–83. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom02.v.i.html>>)

21. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 428.

22. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 206.

23. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 473.

24. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 206.

25. Calvin, *Genesis*, vol. 2, 84–85. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom02.v.i.html>>

26. “It is most unusual for the verb צוּרָה ‘command’ to be used with a feminine subject (cf. Esth 4:5). This is the only example of the feminine participle of the verb in the OT. Here, then, Rebekah is portrayed as exerting all the maternal authority she can muster in order to make Jacob carry out her scheme.” (Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 207.)

27. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 477.

28. Kidner, *Genesis*, 166.

29. The ESV's use of “bring” rather than “take” (Qal לָקַח) in Genesis 27:9, 13 is confusing, since “bring” (Hiphil בָּרַח) is a different word that also appears in Genesis 27:7, 10, 12, and 14. The two words appear side-by-side in Genesis 27:14: “So he went and *took* them and *brought* them to his mother....”

30. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 216.

31. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 477–78.

32. Calvin, *Genesis*, vol. 2, 85–87. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom02.v.i.html>>

33. “Perhaps taken aback by his father's suspicion, Jacob overreacts in asserting his identity. The normal reply in Hebrew to his father's question is ‘Esau am I,’ but he uses a more assertive form ‘I am Esau’ and then rattles on about being Jacob's [*sic*; Isaac's?] firstborn, doing what he has been told, and would his father now please bless him.” (Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 208.)

34. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 478.

35. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 208.

36. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 209.

37. “Isaac conducts five tests concerning the identity of his son: logic (27:20), touch (27:21–22), sound (27:22), his word (27:24), and scent (27:27). Jacob dissembles through the first and the fourth, and his disguise gets him through the second and fifth. Only the middle one, the sound of his voice, fails.” (Walton, *Genesis*, 556.)

38. “Afterward Isaac seeks a kiss (v. 26) to which Jacob complies as a dutiful son (v. 27a). The poignancy of the parting kiss accents the despicable character of the son's treachery against his pitiable father (e.g., 31:55; 48:10; 50:1; 2 Sam 19:39). His betrayal with a kiss for personal gain was superseded in Scripture only by Judas's infamous kiss of Jesus for silver (Matt 26:48–49 par.). The kiss gave Isaac another opportunity to test his senses; his sense of smell told him that the son was the hunter, resulting in the offer of the blessing (vv. 27b–

29).” (Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 431.)

39. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 481.

40. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 216.

41. Calvin, *Genesis*, vol. 2, 91. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom02.v.i.html>>

42. Kidner, *Genesis*, 167.

43. “There is no mention of the heavenly kingdom; and hence it has arisen, that men without learning, and but little exercised in true piety, have imagined that these holy fathers were blessed by the Lord only in respect to this frail and transitory life. But it appears from many passages to have been far otherwise: and as to the fact that Isaac here confines himself to the earthly favors of God, the explanation is easy; for the Lord did not formerly set the hope of the future inheritance plainly before the eyes of the fathers, (as he now calls and raises us directly towards heaven,) but he led them as by a circuitous course. Thus he appointed the land of Canaan as a mirror and pledge to them of the celestial inheritance. In all his acts of kindness he gave them tokens of his paternal favor, not indeed for the purpose of making them content with present good, so that they should neglect heaven, or should follow a merely empty shadow, as some foolishly suppose; but that, being aided by such helps, according to the time in which they lived, they might by degrees rise towards heaven; for since Christ, the first-fruits of those who rise again, and the author of the eternal and incorruptible life, had not yet been manifested, his spiritual kingdom was, in this way, shadowed forth under figures only, until the fullness of the time should come; and as all the promises of God were involved, and in a sense clothed in these symbols, so the faith of the holy fathers observed the same measure, and made its advances heavenwards by means of these earthly rudiments. Therefore, although Isaac makes the temporal favors of God prominent, nothing is further from his mind than to confine the hope of his son to this world; he would raise him to the same elevation to which he himself aspired. Some proof of this may be drawn from his own words; for this is the principal point, that he assigns him the dominion over the nations. But whence the hope of such a dignity, unless he had been persuaded that his race had been elected by the Lord, and, indeed, with this stipulation, that the right of the kingdom should remain with one son only? Meanwhile, let it suffice to adhere to this principle, that the holy man, when he implores a prosperous course of life for his son, wishes that God, in whose paternal favor stands our solid and eternal happiness, may be propitious to him.” (Calvin, *Genesis*, vol. 2, 91–92. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom02.v.i.html>>)

44. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 209.

45. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 191.

46. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 226.

47. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 211.

48. Kidner, *Genesis*, 167.

49. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 211.

50. “Apparently Esau is more concerned by the loss of the blessing than by the loss of the birthright. Nowhere did he protest the relinquishment of the latter. He also never said to Isaac: “Have you only one birthright?” He is stretching the point to say that Jacob *took away* his birthright. What about Esau’s own culpability at that point, Jacob’s opportunism notwithstanding?” (Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 227.)

51. Calvin, *Genesis*, vol. 2, 96. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom02.v.i.html>>

52. Jacob Gerber, “True Repentance: What Does it Look Like?”, November 22, 2017. <<https://jacobgerber.org/true-repentance-look-like/>>. Accessed August 9, 2018.

53. “Here the admonition of the Apostle may suggest itself to our minds, ‘that Esau, when he sought again the forfeited blessing with tears and loud lamentations, found no place for repentance,’ (Hebrews 12:17;) for they who neglect to follow God when he calls on them, afterwards call upon him in vain, when he has turned his back. So long as God addresses and invites us, the gate of the kingdom of heaven is in a certain sense open:

this opportunity we must use, if we desire to enter, according to the instruction of the Prophet, ‘Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near.’ (Isaiah 55:6.) Of which passage Paul is the interpreter, in defining that to be the acceptable time of the day of salvation in which grace is brought unto us by the gospel. (2 Corinthians 6:2.) They who suffer that time to pass by, may, at length, knock too late, and without profit, because God avenges himself of their idleness. We must therefore fear lest if, with deafened ears, we suffer the voice of God now to pass unheeded by, he should, in turn, become deaf to our cry. But it may be asked, how is this repulse consistent with the promise, ‘If the wicked will turn from all his sins that he has committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live?’ (Ezekiel 18:21.) Moreover, it may seem at variance with the clemency of God to reject the sighings of those who, being crushed by misery, fly for refuge to his mercy. I answer, that repentance, if it be true and sincere, will never be too late; and the sinner who, from his soul, is displeased with himself, will obtain pardon: but God in this manner punishes the contempt of his grace, because they who obstinately reject it, do not seriously purpose in their mind to return to him. Thus it is that they who are given up to a reprobate mind are never touched with genuine penitence. Hypocrites truly break out into tears, like Esau, but their heart within them will remain closed as with iron bars. Therefore, since Esau rushes forward, destitute of faith and repentance, to ask a blessing, there is no wonder that he should be rejected.” (Calvin, *Genesis*, vol. 2, 95–96. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom02.v.i.html>>)

54. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 216.

55. “Esau seems to take courage; but he neglects the care of his soul, and turns, like a swine, to the pampering of his flesh. He had heard that his father had nothing left to grant; because, truly, the full and entire grace of God so rested upon Jacob, that out of his family there was no happiness. Wherefore, if Esau sought his own welfare, he ought to have drawn from that fountain, and rather to have subjected himself to his brother, than to have cut himself off from a happy connection with him. He chose, however, rather to be deprived of spiritual grace, provided he might but possess something of his own, and apart from his brother, than to be his inferior at home. He could not be ignorant, that there was one sole benediction by which his brother Jacob had been constituted the heir of the divine covenant: for Isaac would be daily discoursing with them concerning the singular privilege which God had vouchsafed to Abraham and his seed. Esau would not previously have complained so bitterly, unless he had felt that he had been deprived of an incomparable benefit. Therefore, by departing from this one source of blessing, he indirectly renounces God, and cuts himself off from the body of the Church, caring for nothing but this transitory life. But it would have been better for him, miserably to perish through the want of all things in this world, and with difficulty to draw his languishing breath, than to slumber amidst temporal delights. What afterwards follows, — namely, that he wept with loud lamentations, — is a sign of fierce and proud indignation, rather than of penitence; for he remitted nothing of his ferocity, but raged like a cruel beast of prey. So the wicked, when punishment overtakes them, bewail the salvation they have lost; but, meanwhile, do not cease to delight themselves in their vices; and instead of heartily seeking after the righteousness of God, they rather desire that his deity should be extinct. Of a similar character is that gnashing of teeth and weeping in hell which, instead of stimulating the reprobate to seek after God, only consumes them with unknown torments.” (Calvin, *Genesis*, vol. 2, 97–98. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom02.v.i.html>>)

56. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 212.

57. Kidner, *Genesis*, 168.

58. “It hence appears more clearly, that the tears of Esau were so far from being the effect of true repentance, that they were rather evidences of furious anger. For he is not content with secretly cherishing enmity against his brother, but openly breaks out in wicked threats. And it is evident how deeply malice had struck its roots, when he could indulge himself in the desperate purpose of murdering his brother. Even a profane and sacrilegious contumacy betrays itself in him, seeing that he prepares himself to abolish the decree

of God by the sword. I will take care, he says, that Jacob shall not enjoy the inheritance promised to him. What is this but to annihilate the force of the benediction, of which he knew that his father was the herald and the minister? Moreover, a lively picture of a hypocrite is here set before us. He pretends that the death of his father would be to him a mournful event: and doubtless it is a religious duty to mourn over a deceased father. But it was a mere pretense on his part, to speak of the day of mourning, when in his haste to execute the impious murder of his brother, the death of his father seemed to come too slowly, and he rejoiced at the prospect of its approach. With what face could he ever pretend to any human affection, when he gasps for his brother's death, and at the same time attempts to subvert all the laws of nature? It is even possible, that an impulse of nature itself, extorted from him the avowal, by which he would the more grievously condemn himself; as God often censures the wicked out of their own mouth, and renders them more inexcusable. But if a sense of shame alone restrains a cruel mind, this is not to be deemed worthy of great praise; nay, it even betrays a stupid and brutal contempt of God. Sometimes, indeed, the fear of man influences even the pious, as we have seen, in the preceding chapter, Genesis 26:1, respecting Jacob: but they soon rise above it, so that with them the fear of God predominates; while forgetfulness of God so pervades the hearts of the wicked, that they rest their hopes in men alone. Therefore, he who abstains from wickedness merely through the fear of man, and from a sense of shame, has hitherto made but little progress. Yet the confession of the Papists is chiefly honored by them with this praise, that it deters many from sin, through the fear lest they should be compelled to proclaim their own disgrace. But the rule of piety is altogether different, since it teaches our conscience to set God before us as our witness and our judge." (Calvin, *Genesis*, vol. 2, 100–01. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom02.v.i.html>>)

59. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 212.

60. Kidner, *Genesis*, 168.

61. "Rebekah's plan for Jacob to reside 'a while' ('a few days,' NASB) became twenty years of hard labor in Haran (31:41). She expects Esau's anger to subside after a time, but she never does send for him (vv. 44b–45a). Moreover, she reasons aloud, 'Why should I lose both of you in one day?' (v. 45b). Transparently, she has in mind the death of Jacob, but in what way could she lose 'both'? If she has in mind Isaac, she anticipates the murder of Jacob on the day of Isaac's death. Or she may have completely alienated Isaac by her complicity in the deception. More likely, we are to understand her remark in light of Cain's expulsion (or fear of retaliation) after the murder of Abel (4:14; cf. *Tg. Ps.-J.*). Her plan never materializes, however, for it is not Rebekah but God who beckons Jacob to return home (31:3,13), and it is not the subsiding of Esau's wrath but the anger of Laban and his sons that prompts Jacob to leave (31:1–2). Upon his return to Canaan, he reconciles with 'his father Isaac' (35:27), but there is no mention of Rebekah except her burial (49:31). She does in a sense lose both her sons on that regretful day." (Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 437–38.)