

Dr. Robert Vannoy, OT History, Lecture 26

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Isaac/Rebekah and the Early Life of Jacob

E. Isaac

1. His Birth, Genesis 17, 18 and 21

We concluded our discussion of Abraham yesterday, so we are moving ahead this afternoon to capital E, which is: “Isaac,” which is page four of your outline. We’re not going to discuss Isaac in any great length, we’re just going to make a few comments. Notice there are seven subheads there, first of which is: “His birth, Genesis 17, 18 and Genesis 21.” His birth is promised in Genesis 17 verse 19: God said, “Then God said, ‘Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.’” And then over in chapter 18, you have the repetition of that, we looked at this in connection with our discussion of Abraham, but verse 10 says, “Then the LORD said, ‘I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.’ Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him” and Sarah laughs. You read in verse 14, “Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year. Sarah will have a son. Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said ‘I did not laugh.’”

The birth then is described in Genesis 21, where you read in the first verse, “the Lord visited Sarah as he had said and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken, Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the set time which God had spoken to him.” Now you read in verse 5, “Abraham was 100 years old when his son Isaac was born to him.” We know that Sarah was ten years younger than Abraham so she was 90.

2. Isaac Being Offered, Genesis 22

3. His Marriage in Genesis 24

Alright 2. on your sheet is: “Isaac being offered, Genesis 22.” We discussed that chapter as the high point of Abraham’s faith and I’m not going to go back and discuss the

chapter again, although it's certainly a significant event in the life of Isaac.

3. "His marriage in Genesis 24." I discussed that yesterday sort of indirectly and we looked at this whole business of redemptive historical verses, and illustrative kind of use of some of these historical passages in the Old Testament. But just a couple comments on chapter 24, I think we see that Isaac is passive, his marriage is arranged for him by his father through his servant, and even beyond that, the servant asks for a sign and the LORD designates the woman who is to be the wife for Isaac. But the marriage is important because it's to be through Isaac and his wife, Rebekah, that the line of promise is to continue. So Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel, Abraham's nephew, is shown to the servant to be the one that is to be Isaac's wife. She willingly agrees to come back with the servant, and she and Isaac are married. Just from this relationship, later you see Jared is the ancestor and then Abraham and Nahor, who marries Milcah, Bethuel is the son of Nahor and Milcah, and Rebekah is the daughter of Bethuel. So in the line from Abraham here, Isaac marries Rebekah.

4. His Sons

Now, 4. on your sheet, is: "His sons," that is, the sons of Isaac, Genesis 25:19 and following. Genesis 25:19 is one of those structural divisions in the book of Genesis, you read, "These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son, Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac was 40 years old when he took Rebekah as his wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian from Paddan Aram, the sister to Laban the Syrian. Isaac entreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren. The LORD was entreated by him and Rebekah his wife conceived. The children struggled together within her and she said, "if it be so, why am I thus." She went to inquire of the LORD. The LORD said unto her 'Two nations are in your womb, and two manner of people should be born to you, and the one people shall be stronger than the other people, and the elder shall serve the younger.' And when her day to deliver was fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb and the first came out red all over like a hairy garment. She called his name Esau, after came his brother out and his hands were caught on Esau's heel. He was called Jacob. And Isaac was three score years

old when she bore them.”

So the thing to notice here again is that for 20 years Rebekah was barren, see in verse 20 it says “Isaac was 40 years old when he took Rebekah as his wife.” So when Jacob and Esau were born, he was three score (60) years old. So for 20 years she was barren, and I think again we can say that the promised seed does not come in the course of ordinary natural processes, but by God’s special intervention. Because you read in verse 21, “Isaac entreated the LORD for his wife because she was barren and the LORD was entreated by him and Rebekah his wife conceived.” So Isaac prays, the LORD answers, and then Rebekah is told she has two children in her womb who will become two nations and perhaps, even more significantly, that the elder will serve the younger.

5. The Covenant is Reaffirmed to Isaac – Genesis 26:1-5

5. is: “The covenant is reaffirmed to Isaac, Genesis 26, verses 1-5,” “Now there was a famine in the land--besides the earlier famine of Abraham's time--and Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines in Gerar. The LORD appeared to Isaac and said, ‘Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham.’” Here you get the repetition of the Abrahamic promises: “‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws.’” So the covenant promises are reaffirmed to Isaac. Down in verse 24 of the same chapter you read: “The LORD appeared unto him the same night and said: ‘I am the God of Abraham your father, fear not, for I am with you, and will bless you and multiply your seed for my servant Abraham’s sake.’” So you see we’re moving forward with this line of promise as it is affirmed then to Isaac.

Isaac Deceived by his Wife and His Son – Gen. 27

On your sheet is “Chapter 27,” where Isaac is deceived by his wife and his son, I’m sure you’re familiar with the general plot of chapter 27, but the outcome is that Isaac promises a blessing to Jacob, thinking he’s blessing Esau. The blessing which he gave Jacob really is the one that belonged to Jacob. But to back up a minute, it appears what Isaac tries to do here, is to act in contradiction to God’s previously revealed will when he decides to bless Esau. See in the earlier part of the chapter, he calls Esau and tells him, verse 4, “Make me savory food, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless you before I die.” Rebekah hears that, and in verse 7 Rebekah says, “I heard your father speak unto Esau, your brother, saying; bring me venison and make me savory food that I may eat and bless you before the LORD, before my death.” Now if you compare that to Genesis 25:23 that we read a few minutes ago, you remember at the time of the birth of Jacob and Esau, the LORD said; “Two nations are in your womb, two manner of people will be born of you, the one people shall be stronger, the elder shall serve the younger.” It appears that Isaac was really not prepared to accept that because the blessing that he gives to Jacob, thinking he’s giving it to Esau, is the reverse of that. You see in Genesis 27:29 “Let people serve you and nations bow down to you: be lord over your brethren.”

But in any case, Rebekah overhears Isaac’s intent to bless Esau, and she instigates then this plan of deception and speaks to Jacob and says to him, verse 8, “Now therefore my son, obey my voice, go now to the flock and fetch me from there two good kids of the goats; and I will make them savory meat for your father such as he loves, and you shall bring it to your father that he may eat, and that he may bless you before his death.” Jacob isn’t so sure about all this, he says his father may feel him, verse 12; “and I shall seem to him as a deceiver, I shall bring a curse upon me, not a blessing.” His brother was hairy and he was smooth. His mother says; “the curse be on me, obey my voice” and she puts skin of kid goats on his hands and the back of his neck, and makes the savory food. He goes in to Isaac representing himself as Esau.

God Accomplished His Will In Spite of Isaac's Failure of Faith

Now, Ellison, in a book entitled *The Fathers of the Covenant* says, "Rebekah and Jacob planned how to accomplish God's will, holding as they obviously did, the popular maxim: God helps those who help themselves." I think the question is, was this a proper procedure? Leupold in his commentary speaks of the inadequacy of faith that builds on human ingenuity. I don't think you can really justify the actions of Rebekah and Jacob, in spite of the fact that God had said the blessing should come to Jacob. They shouldn't have deceived Isaac. Of course, Isaac should not have attempted to thwart the divinely revealed will for the relationship between the two sons. Both sides it seems to me, are at fault, and undoubtedly, favoritism, played a part. If you look at Genesis 25:28, you read "Isaac loved Esau because he ate his venison, but Rebekah loved Jacob." So while the father favored the one son, the mother favored the other son. The father wants to bless Esau, the mother is looking out for the interests of Jacob. Undoubtedly that played a role in it. But I think the thing to notice, in spite of that, is that in the midst of sinful human actions, God overrules and accomplishes his will. So the end result is that the blessing that was intended for Jacob, goes to Jacob, not that God endorses the action. In spite of human sinful actions, God overrules and accomplishes his purpose.

So Isaac thinks he's giving the blessing to Esau, but it contains God's will for Jacob. That blessing is in verses 28 and 29 of chapter 27 where Isaac says: "God give you of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth and plenty of grain and wine, let people serve you and nations bow down to you, be lord over your brethren, let your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be every one that curses you, and blessed be he that blesses you." So that blessing is placed on Jacob, although he thinks it's on Esau. Notice he concludes with the repetition of the promise, one of the promises of God to Abraham, "Blessed be he that blesses you, cursed be every one that curses you."

Well, Isaac is very disturbed when he finds out what has happened. You read in verse 33: "Isaac trembled violently and said, 'Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him--and indeed he will be blessed!'" This was after Esau came and Isaac realized what had happened.

Esau's Response and Esau's "Blessing"

Now Ellison, in that same book, *The Fathers of the Covenant*, makes this statement, at this point, of verse 33, he says, "This is the clue to much in the story, however much we may criticize Isaac, he remains one of the heroes of faith. There must have been many moments when he wondered whether his wife was not right after all. Now suddenly he knew, he had not doubt that it was Jacob who had come to him, and he bowed to God's will. Not even Esau's tears could move him. Though he spoke of Jacob's guile in verse 35, there's no evidence that he ever reproved him, or Rebekah either. He was prepared to bless him again, knowingly and willingly, and he does that at the beginning of chapter 28 when Jacob flees his home to go to Laban's house in Mesopotamia."

Now, of course, with Esau, the situation's different. Esau is furious when he discovers what has happened, you read in verse 34; "When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceedingly bitter cry, and said unto his father, 'bless me, even me also, my father.'" And his father says "Your brother came with subtlety and has taken away your blessing." At the end of verse 36 he says, "'have you not reserved a blessing for me?'" Isaac answered Esau, 'I have made him lord over you and have made all his relatives his servants, and I have sustained him with grain and new wine. So what can I possibly do for you, my son?' Esau said to his father, 'Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!' Then Esau wept aloud. His father Isaac answered him..."

In verses 39 and 40 then you get and I'll say it in quotes, the "blessing" that's given to Esau. There's a translation issue there that's of some significance because it gives a very different understanding about what is going on. You can see the difference in the King James and the NIV translation, if you compare verse 28 with verse 39. Verse 28 is the blessing Isaac gives to Jacob thinking it's Esau, 39 is the "blessing" he gives later to Esau. If you read them, they're very much the same, particularly if you read it in the King James, see in the King James it says: "Behold, your dwelling shall be in the fatness

of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above, and by your sword shall you live and shalt serve your brother, and it shall come to pass when you shalt have the dominion, that you shall break his yoke from off your neck.” Now, the phrases are the same; the dew of heaven/the dew of heaven, the fatness of the earth/the fatness of the earth, they’re just reversed in order. In verse 28, “therefore God give you of the dew of heaven and the fatness of the earth.” In 39; “your dwelling shall be in the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven.” He reverses the two phrases. This should be 27 and 28.

The point of difference turns on the translation of this preposition. In the Hebrew that’s a *min* preposition, and the question is whether that *min* is to be understood as a *min* of source, or a *min* of separation. If you understand it as a *min* of source, in both cases, then the blessing that’s given there to Esau is basically identical to the one that had previously been given to Jacob. If you take it as a *min* of separation, then what you’re saying is like the NIV says, “you’re dwelling will be away from earth’s richness, and away from the dew of heaven.” In other words, not really a blessing, it’s more of a curse: “your dwelling’s going to be away from earth’s riches.” Of course, that’s exactly what was the case with Esau, because Esau become Edom, and Edom dwelt in that wilderness way to the south of the Dead Sea. It was a barren place, it was away from earth’s richness, away from the dew of heaven. I think what Isaac does, you see, he gives the same blessing as in that first verse in a sense, but there’s an ambiguity to it based on the use of this preposition, and the intent as far as the meaning is concerned. I think it was the opposite of what it was with Jacob.

Then it goes on of course, in verse 40 and says; “And by your sword shalt you live, and shall serve your brother, and it shall come to pass when you shalt have the dominion, that you shall break his yoke from off your neck.” What you get some hint of here is the subsequent history of the relationship between Israel and Edom, that is, the descendants of Jacob and the descendants of Esau. At various times, the Edomites were subjected to Israel. David subjected the Edomites initially and put fortresses in their territory. That fluctuated back and forth. At times they were able to throw Israel’s yoke off, but then they were re-subjected again.

That really went on all the way into the intertestament period when the Edomites eventually were pushed out of their own territory way to the south there. They came up and settled in southern Judah and were forcibly Judaized by the Maccabees. That is, they were made to circumcise, follow the law of Moses, and so forth. They became known as Idumeans, from the Greek of the designation “Edom.” And it’s out of that stock that Herod the Great came on the scene. Herod the Great of course, was the cursed King of the Jews. So you get this struggle between the Edomites and the Israelites; Jacob and Esau, stretching all through the subsequent history in the Old Testament, through the intertestament period, on to Herod the Great, who himself was an Idumean.

Isaac’s Last Days

Chapter 35:27-29; “Jacob came home to his father Isaac in Mamre, near Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had stayed. Isaac lived a hundred and eighty years. Then he breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, old and full of years. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.” So of course, this jumps ahead in the narrative of Genesis quite a ways, but we’re looking at this sort of topically at this point under the life of Isaac. His death was recorded in chapter 35.

F. Jacob

Jacob at Bethel

Let’s move on to F. which is: “Jacob.” First, “Jacob at Bethel,” we’ll go back and pick up right after the incident of the deception of Isaac. Chapter 28 tells us that Jacob left home after his deception of Isaac. You find in chapter 27, as background for this, verse 41, “And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing, and Esau said in his heart, the days of mourning for my father are at hand, then I will slay my brother Jacob. And these words of Esau, her elder son, were told to Rebekah and she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said unto him, ‘behold, your brother Esau, as touching you, doth comfort himself, purposing to kill you. Now therefore my son obey my voice and arise, flee to Laban my brother to Haran, and tarry with him a few days, until your brother’s

fury turns away. Until your brother's anger turns away from you, and he forget that which you have done to him, then I will send and fetch you away from there. Why should I be deprived also of you both in one day?" The idea being that if Esau really killed Jacob then she wouldn't have Jacob and Esau's life would be taken as well, and she'd lose both her sons. So she wants Jacob to leave and get out of that context.

Jacob's Blessing Repeated

It's interesting then what she does in chapter 27 verse 46 with Isaac. She goes to Isaac in verse 46 and says: "I'm weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth, if Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as those which are of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?" So she's really concerned for Jacob's life but when she speaks to Isaac she puts this other picture on the thing that she's concerned that Jacob not marry someone of the Canaanites. So Isaac then calls Jacob in the first part of chapter 28 and tells him: "You shall not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Padan-aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father, and take a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother." Then he repeats this blessing; "And God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful, and multiply you, that you may be a multitude of people. May he give you the blessing of Abraham to you, and to your seed with you, that you may inherit the land wherein you are a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham." So you have a continuation of the line of promise. So Jacob leaves and he goes to Haran.

Jacob at Bethel [Jacob's Ladder]

I already put this up, but look at it again, the generations, see here's Rebekah, whose brother was Laban, and Esau and Jacob are brothers. Jacob goes to Laban's house and eventually marries both Leah and Rachel, who are the daughters of Laban, that's jumping ahead of course. On the way, he stops to rest for a night at Bethel and the LORD appears to him in a dream at Bethel. This is in verse 12 and following in chapter 28. You read: "He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top

reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

Now at this point in Jacob's life the LORD had not yet personally appeared to him and reaffirmed this promise from Abraham to Isaac. Now we're moving to the third generation, to Jacob, but to this point in his life, as he is fleeing from Esau, and going to seek a wife from the household of Laban. God comes to him while he sleeps and I think the point there is again: God takes the initiative and he repeats the promise of Abraham, that had already been repeated to Isaac, and then adds to that, that he will be with him in his journey, and ultimately bring him back to the land of Canaan.

Now in the dream, in verse 12 you read, "there was a ladder, the top of it reaching to heaven, with the angels of God ascending and descending upon it." It seems to me that that signifies communion between God and Jacob. The angels ascend to God with Jacob's needs: Jacob was fearful, he was fleeing for his life. Then they descend, with God's grace and blessing for Jacob. That's just at least a suggestion as far as the significance of the symbolism there in the dream. When you get to the end of the chapter, after receiving that promise, he awakes in verse 16. He says, "Surely the Lord is in this place" and he takes a stone and sets it up, and pours oil on it. In verse 19 he calls the name of that place "Bethel" which in Hebrew means "house of God."

Then verses 20 to 22, he makes a vow, and he says: "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on so that I come again to my father's house in peace."...the King James says, "then shall the LORD be my God, and this stone which I have set up for a pillar shall be God's house and of all that you shall give me I will surely give a tenth unto you." Now Leupold, on

the middle of page 14 of your bibliography, pages 779-780, in his commentary on Genesis suggests that that translation is not the best translation, because he would put the apodosis in the conditional sentence, at the beginning of verse 22 rather than the end of verse 21. The difference that makes is this, you read 21: “So that I come again to my father’s house in peace and the LORD shall be my God, THEN this stone which I have set for a pillar shall be God’s house.” With the translation of the King James, and I believe that’s also the translation of the NIV and the NASV, Leupold says; if its placed earlier that apodosis would portray a cheap mercenary spirit, bargaining with God. In other words, if you do this, then you’re going to be my God. Where as if you put the apodosis at the beginning of verse 22, which you can do in the Hebrew, the construction would be the same. It’s just a *waw*. It’s a contextual thing, deciding which is the best way to go. It’s hard to decide. He would say, “so that I come again to my father’s house and the LORD is my God, THEN this stone which I have set up shall be God’s house.”

Now contrary to what Leupold says, Aalders in his commentary, prefers the translation as I’ve read it, and he says, he feels it indicates that “that Jacob had not yet reached the point of unconditional commitment to God, as his God. So he really is still bargaining with God. It’s evidence that he’s still somewhat selfish in his service of God. He has not yet fully surrendered his life to God’s service. He does not reach that point until later chapter 32 verses 24-30. I think that’s hard to say, it’s not something we can clear up with looking at the Hebrew construction, it’s something that’s interpreted: Is he really bargaining? Then the LORD will be my God--you prove yourself to me, then I’ll accept you as my God? I think that’s possible.

2. The Years at Haran – Gen. 29-31

Number 2. is: “The years at Haran, chapters 29-31.” There are a lot of things that happen at Haran. I think the thing to emphasize, to just get the large picture you might say, is that at Haran, the promise of the multiplication of the seed is incipiently fulfilled in the birth of eleven sons. That’s what happens at Haran, Jacob goes to Haran, he marries, and eleven children are born, not all from one wife, two wives and two

concubines, but eleven children. Those eleven children become the heads of the tribes of Israel. So, see that's significant, it's moving forward with this promise, the great seed, is being fulfilled in the events of Haran.

Jacob, Rachel, and Leah

Alright, to go back and pick up the narrative, when he arrives, he's met by his cousin Rachel, and taken to Laban his uncle. After a month living there, he agrees to work for his uncle for seven years in order to receive Rachel as his wife. You read in verse 16: "Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah was tender-eyed, but Rachel was beautiful and well-favored. And Jacob loved Rachel, and said, I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter." So that agreement is made. When the time of the wedding feast comes, after he's worked seven years, Laban gives Jacob Leah instead of Rachel. You find that in verse 21 and following: "And Jacob said unto Laban, give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her. And Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast. And it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter and brought her to him and he went in unto her. And Laban gave unto his daughter Leah Zilpah his maid for a handmaid. And it came to pass that in the morning, behold, it was Leah, and he said unto Laban, 'what is this you have done unto me? Did not I serve with you for Rachel? Wherefore then have you beguiled me?' And Laban said, 'it must not be done so in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. Fulfill her week, and we will give you this also for the service which you shall serve with me yet seven other years.'" "

Now, I think that narrative, at least for me, is difficult to understand how that could actually happen. But remember, they were feasting and celebrating, and it says that, "it came to pass that in the evening he took Leah." They were probably veiled, the women in that day. Leah was obviously a willing partner to this scheme. And in any case, Jacob is surprised that he has Leah instead of Rachel. He's given the excuse that we don't give the younger daughter before the elder. Now of course, you would think that that

should have been understood when the first arrangement was made. I think it's quite apparent here that Laban is manipulating Jacob. You see the irony of it, at this point Jacob is the one that gets deceived, as he had previously deceived his father Isaac. So you get in the next generation the reverse of that.

But after a week of marriage celebration, he gets his second wife, the sister of the first. I don't have time really to develop that much, I'll pick up here at the beginning of the next hour. I just came across something I want to read to you, we'll stop with this. This is from the last issue of the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. There's a review of a book here called "Biblical Limericks, Old Testament Stories Reversed" and some illustrations are given, again this is a book apparently of limericks of different situations in the Old Testament. But one of them that it gives here in this review is:

“Jacob worked out his full stint,
to win Rachel with never a hint,
that aught was awry,
and Laban so sly,
said now, newbie, read the fine print.”

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