

BREAD OF LIFE TORAH STUDIES

I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger... John 6:35

GENESIS 27

Isaac Blesses His Sons

Chapter 27 of Genesis has commonly been studied historically, with each of the players being judged for their outward actions. This has mystified commentators – How could Isaac be so blind in choosing Esau? How could Jacob and Rebekah resort to such blatant trickery, especially since Jacob is said to personify truth? When we find a passage of Torah that is mystifying to the Jewish sages, we invariably find clear pointers to the Messiah. The Torah is an organic, interconnected whole. When we study a particular text in the Torah, we must examine its relationship to the Bible as a whole, especially the Torah itself. A key to finding these relationships lies in listening to the echoes of word and phrase that reverberate from one place to another. This is called ‘thematic analysis’ and greatly deepens our understanding of the text.

On the surface, it is certainly a blatant display of deceit and trickery, and we could also see it as trying to bring about God’s will by their own strength, but we are going to look into this baffling story using thematic analysis, and in that way seek to understand if God is revealing something of the redemptive story, especially concerning His Son— in fact, the words “my son” reverberate throughout this text, appearing nine times in chapter 27, whilst the word “son” itself appears twenty-two times, and three times the father asks for assurances about the son’s identity. This alerts us to a profound underlying theme, which you may have already guessed at.

Now it came to pass, when Isaac was old and his eyes were so dim that he could not see, that he called Esau his older son and said to him, “My son.” And he answered him, “Here I am.” . . . “Now therefore, please take your weapons¹: your quiver and your bow², and go out to the field and hunt game for me. “And make me savoury food, such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die.” (27:1-4)

Isaac seemed to think his death was imminent – although he actually lived at least another 43 years after this event. A crucial aspect of this story is that ‘his eyes were dim’. One Jewish sage says that his vision was dimmed from the smoke of the idolatrous offerings of Esau’s wives. Certainly his marriage to two Hittite women, who were a vexation to Isaac and Rebekah, made him unfit to carry forth the Abrahamic legacy. There are no chapter divisions in the original Hebrew text, so we need to see that the two previous verses that speak of this subject are actually an introduction to this story. Another says “His affection for Esau and acceptance of gifts from his impious son had corrupted him, with the result that “his eyes were dim” and blinded to his faults... His powers of judgment had grown dim and he was not able to see reality.” Recall our last study where we saw that Esau was cunning in the art of trapping. Proverbs 23:3 *Do not desire his delicacies (same word) for they are deceptive food.*

We go on to read: *Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to Esau his son ...* According to Jewish commentary the verbal form used indicates that she “kept listening” to Isaac’s words through her prophetic spirit. Seen in this light, Rebekah acted under divine inspiration and therefore her words and actions take on a profound significance. Of course, she would not have forgotten the

¹ Items prepared and completed for a purpose.

² See Gen 21:20 (see study notes) The Hebrew word, torah (תורה), is derived from a root that was used in the realm of archery, *yareh* (ירה). which means to shoot an arrow in order to hit a mark. This verse seems to clearly link Ishmael and Esau.

revelation she received during her pregnancy, that “the elder shall serve the younger” (25:33), but we are not told if she shared this with Jacob.

We might also ask why Isaac found it necessary to eat Esau’s food before he blessed his son and died. Neither Jacob nor Moses had need of a plate of food in order to give their blessings.

The Plot to Receive the Blessing

We are now going to analyze the conversation between Rebekah and Jacob. (As you read through the following points, reflect and discuss them [if in a group]. I expect it will be a whole new way of seeing this story, so ‘chew slowly’.)

6-7 *So Rebekah spoke to Jacob **her son**, saying, “Indeed I heard your father speak to Esau your brother, saying, ‘Bring me game and make savoury food for me, that I may eat it and bless you in the presence of the LORD before my death.’*

- Rebekah relates what she heard, but she adds something we don’t see in Jacob’s words: ‘... *that I may eat, and bless you before the LORD before my death.*’ She understands that the giving of a final blessing over the firstborn son must be given in the presence of God and by Divine inspiration.

8 *Now, **my son**, heed my voice to that which I command you.*

- This the first of three times Rebekah commands Jacob to: “... heed my voice ...” (vss.8,13,43). She is using a great deal of authority and also assurance of the rightfulness of her actions. It seems that Rebekah is the partner in the relationship who is attuned to the voice and purposes of God.

9-10 *Go now to the flock, and get me from there two choice kids of the goats. I will make them savoury food for your father, such as he loves. “Then you shall take it to your father, that he may eat it, and that he may bless you before his death.”*

- Compare with v.4 – Esau’s “savoury food” will be hunted in the field, while the food Isaac will bring comes from the best of the flock.
- Why did she need two choice kid-goats to feed one man? Where else in scripture are two choice goats required? Could there be a link with the two choice goats that will be required for Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement?³

11-13 *“but my brother Esau is a hairy man and I am a smooth-skinned man. Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall **seem to be a deceiver** to him; and I shall bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing...” His mother said to him “Your curse be on me, **my son**, only heed my voice and go and fetch them for me.”*

- All Rebekah asked was for him to get two goats so that she could prepare food.
- There seems to be an anticipation of a curse, but Rebekah remains very forthright, even willing to take upon herself any curse that may come. (Prov 26:2 ... a curse without cause will not alight. Gal.3:13 “Christ has redeemed us from the **curse** of the law being made a **curse** for us.”)

15 *Then Rebekah took the choice clothes (‘precious garments’) of her elder son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them on **Jacob her younger son**.*

- What are these ‘choice clothes’ of Esau? The Hebrew word used to describe these garments means: *precious, to be desired, pleasant, excellent* – they are a precious covering/an outer

³ To refresh our memory, one is offered as a sin offering; its blood taken within the veil of the Holy of Holies and sprinkled on the mercy seat; the High Priest lays hands and confesses the sins and iniquities of the children of Israel upon the other, the scapegoat, and sends it into the wilderness. Both represent Messiah.

garment⁴ and they are in Rebekah's keeping! These are evidently not garments Esau regularly wears. Perhaps they are kept for him to be worthy of!

16-17 *With the skins of the goat-kids she covered his arms and his smooth-skinned neck. She placed the delicacies and the bread which she had made into the hands of **her son Jacob**.*

- *Delicacies* - From a root word meaning to taste or perceive mentally or spiritually.
- She is also giving him bread as part of this meal.

18 *And he came to his father and he said, "Father" and he said, "here I am; who are you, **my son**?"*

- Read this verse carefully. It doesn't name the speakers, but simply, "And he said" twice.
- This resonates with Genesis 27:1 where Isaac called Esau, his eldest son, and said to him, My son: and he said to him, Behold, here am I.
- It also resonates with Genesis 22, where *hineni*, "Here I am" features prominently.

19 *Jacob said to his father, "It is I, Esau your firstborn; I have done what you told me; rise up, I pray, sit and eat of my game that your soul may bless me."*

- A blatant lie! But could it be justified? God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. (Rom. 8:3) Were God the Father and Jesus himself Jesus being deceitful? Jesus knew very well who he was, but did not reveal his messianic identity – even being *numbered with the transgressors*; (Isaiah 53:12) as he *bore the sin of many* – whilst in his soul, he was the sinless, son of the Father.

20 *How is it that you were so quick to find, my son?" And he said, because the LORD your God arranged it for me⁵.*

- *Many see this as Jacob bringing God into the deception. Can you see it differently? Who did arrange it? Rebekah. We have suggested that she was obedient to the Spirit of God (even, in a sense, she represents the Spirit) - "Your God", arranged it for me.*

21-22 *And Isaac said to Jacob, "Come close, if you please, so I can feel you, **my son**; are you, indeed, my son Esau or not?" So Jacob drew close to Isaac, his father, who felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are like the hands of Esau his brother; so he blessed him.*

- The only thing Jacob could not disguise was his voice.⁶ Isaac was presented with a son who outwardly felt like *Esau*, but his voice had the *tone* of Jacob ... **so he blessed him!!**

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. Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come close, if you please, and kiss me, my son." So he drew close and kissed him; **he smelled the fragrance of his garments and blessed him...***

- *"That I may eat of **my son's** game and **bless you**." Interesting wording!!*
- *Note what is being offered here: tasty food to arouse the senses, including the **bread** Rebekah had prepared (v.17), **and wine**.*
- *Recall the words of Rebekah in verse 7. Even though Isaac was blind, she trusted that Jacob was presenting himself, not just before his earthly father, but before his heavenly Father.*
- This is the first mention of a kiss in the Bible. Its importance cannot be underestimated. It depicts a desire for a deeper intimacy. Prov. 2:12: *Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish from the way.* Indeed, Jacob expectation of death is the reason for this blessing.

⁴ Intriguingly, the Hebrew word *begeh*, translated clothes/garment, comes from a root word meaning treachery/deceit. That is its primary meaning, but it is almost always translated as clothing or covering of some sort – not necessarily a precious garment..

⁵ Such fortuitous provision had occurred before in Isaac's life, on Mt Moriya.

⁶ Heb. *kol*, from a root word meaning to call aloud. First use is Gen 3:8 "And they heard the sound (voice) of the LORD God walking in the garden..."

The Blessing - Isaac's spirit had been so aroused that the words that came forth from his lips were clearly inspired by God. We must ask the question: Would the same blessing have come from Isaac's lips if it was Esau before him? (We will look at this blessing below)

The Fragrant Garment⁷

For now, let us return to the precious garments that were in Rebekah's keeping, and which Isaac perceives as having the "fragrance of a field which the Lord has blessed". According to Jewish midrash, Esau's treasured garments, which were in Rebekah's keeping, were the same garments that God had made for Adam and Eve to cover their nakedness. This is supported by the fact that the first time that we find the words *skin* and *clothed* in the Torah is in the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden. It is said that Rebekah dressed Jacob in these vestments from Eden, as if to say, "In the very same skins that Adam wore, when he was expelled from the Garden, shall you wear, when you bring your father the savory food that I have prepared. The garments that marked man's expulsion from the Garden shall mark the beginning of his return."

Is there anything in the text to back up this view? When we listen carefully to the story of Jacob and Esau and their struggle for their father's blessing, we can hear the resounding echo of the Garden of Eden. The parallel between the two accounts is quite striking:

In order to get Isaac to eat from the savory food of Jacob, Rebekah borrowed from the cunning of the serpent in the Garden, thus a woman (pattern of Eve) and a man (pattern of Adam) will out-manoeuvre the cunning of the serpent (Esau) and return the lost blessing to mankind.

Rebekah and Jacob

Your brother came with *cunning* and he has taken your blessing (Gen. 27:35)

The Snake

Now the snake was more *cunning* than all the beasts of the field (& took the blessing from Adam). (Gen. 3:1)

The *first* time in the Torah that we find the words *clothed* and *skin* is when God *clothed* Adam and Eve in garments of *skin*. The *second* time is when Rebekah *clothed* Jacob in the *skins* of goats:

Rebekah and Jacob

And with the *skins ('owr)* of the kids of the goats she *clothed* his arms and the smooth of his neck. (Gen 27:16)

Adam and Eve

And the Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of *skin ('owr)*, and He *clothed* them.. (Gen 3:21)

The same verbs are used to describe both Eve and Rebekah *giving*, and Adam and Isaac *eating*:

Rebekah and Isaac

And she gave the savoury food and the bread ... into the hand of Jacob... And he (her son) brought it near to him, and he did eat.

Adam and Eve

...and she gave also to her husband with her, and he did eat (Gen. 3:6)

Death is associated with eating three times in relation to Isaac's eating of the savory food, and three times in relation to Adam and Eve's eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Jacob and Esau

And make me savoury food, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may *eat* that my soul may bless you before I *die*. (Gen. 27:4)

Adam and Eve

But of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil you shall not *eat* of it, for in the day that you *eat* thereof you shall surely *die*. (Gen. 2:17)

Bring me some game, and make me savoury food, that I may *eat* and I will bless you before the Lord before my *death*. (Gen. 27:7)

But of the fruit of the tree which is in the centre of the garden, God has said: You shall not *eat* of it, nor shall you touch it, lest you *die*. (Gen. 3:3)

⁷ The following insights are taken from: http://www.lookstein.org/articles/rebekah_eve.htm

...you shall bring it to your father, that he may eat so that he may bless you before his *death*..

You shall surely not *die*, for God knows that the day you eat thereof your eyes shall be opened...(Gen. 3:4-5)

Eve and Rebekah *gave*; and Adam and Isaac *did eat*. After Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they suffered spiritual death – in shame they "hid from the presence of the Lord God." When Isaac ate the food Rebekah (the Spirit) had prepared, and her son offered, he experienced spiritual rejuvenation, and continued to live for many years. His prophetic vision was restored, and he could *smell* the Garden of Eden: "See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed" (Gen. 27:27).

Isaac had become so deceived and addicted to the venomous game of Esau that he was spiritually blind. : "Now Isaac *loved* Esau because trapped game was in his mouth" (Gen. 25:28) If Isaac, whose spiritual vision was already weakened, had eaten, once again, from the 'cunning of Esau' and given his firstborn blessing to a son who was spiritually connected to the Snake of the Garden, the blessings given could not be rescinded.

This was a pivotal moment. Rebekah had to intervene to ensure that the patriarchal blessing flowed to Jacob, "a wholesome man, dwelling in tents," instead of an Esau, "a man who knows trapping, a man of the field" (Gen. 25:27).

The Blessing of Jacob

"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!"

The blessing portrays the curse on the ground of Eden being lifted, as is prophesied in Jeremiah 31:12 where the fullness of God's blessing is described as "grain, new wine and oil":

They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again. (I recommend reading the whole of Jeremiah 31)

But the blessing goes further than that, to be a Messianic prophecy: *Let peoples serve you and nations bow down to you.*

Phil. 3:10-11 *That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Added to that, the blessing contains a portion of the Abrahamic Covenant: *I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; [And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.]*" (Gen. 12:3) Isaac will give Jacob the full Abrahamic Covenant blessing before he sends him off to Laban.

The Grief of Esau

No sooner had Jacob left than Esau returns with savoury food for his father and the deception is revealed. Isaac trembled exceedingly: This phrase is very strong. It could be translated, "Isaac trembled most excessively with a great trembling." Why do you think such fear took hold of him?

Rashi, quoting Midrash explains, "He saw Hell opened before him." 'It was at this moment that Isaac realized just how completely he had misjudged the character of his son Esau. With Jacob in his presence he had sensed the fragrance of Paradise, which made him give a rich and perfect blessing. Now that Jacob had left and Esau had arrived, the vision of Hell replaced the sublime fragrance of Paradise. The phrase indicates that he had never known such fear in his life, even when bound to the altar to be sacrificed.'

34 *When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me; me also, O my father!"*

Read verses 35-38

39 *Then Isaac his father answered and said to him, "Behold, away from the fertility of the earth shall be your dwelling⁸, And away from the dew of heaven from above. 40"By your sword you shall live, And your brother you shall serve; But it shall come about when you become restless, That you will break his yoke from your neck."*...

Esau's grief at the loss of his blessing is very deep. His emotions spill over as he angrily perceives Jacob to have taken away both his birthright and now his blessing also, neglecting to acknowledge that he gave up his birthright for a bowl of pottage, thus despising it.

A bitter hatred of Jacob with murderous intent consumed Esau, and he vowed to kill his brother once his father, Jacob, had died (not knowing that he had many years yet to live). Rebekah, always on the alert, quickly makes plans for Jacob to flee to her brother Laban until his brother's fury dissipates.

Another Firstborn Son

We saw that Abraham loved his firstborn son, Ishmael, saying to God: *"O that Ismael may live before thee. ..."* (Gen 17:18); and here we see Jacob desiring to give the firstborn blessing to Esau, whom *he* loves – of course, both depict the flesh side of man.

In Exodus 4:22, Israel is also called God's "firstborn": *...Israel is my son, even my firstborn.* Like the Patriarchs, God desires for Israel, to receive his "firstborn son" blessing, but in order for him to receive it, the Messiah, who alone is worthy, had to stand in the gap. Only through the death of the perfect sinless lamb, can God 'turn a blind eye' to mankind's sin.

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor 5:21)

We also know that, *blindness in part*, was on Israel when Jesus came and for the most part, still is, but we are not to judge them for that, for Paul said:

Romans 11:25 *For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob. . ."*

Behind the disguise of Jacob stood the Son of Man and Son of the Father - the 'last Adam.' As those who are blessed to have had our eyes opened, we know that the curse of Eden is only lifted through Yeshua ha Mashiach, Jesus the Messiah.

⁸ Some older translations do not say "away from" the fatness of the earth...