

PARASHAH TWENTY-SIX

Genesis 27:30-28:9; Micah 1:1; 5:1-15; Romans 5:1-11

Notes by Tim Hegg

God's Blessing

Did Jacob obtain a blessing through deceit? Initially, the answer to this question is a resounding “yes.” Jacob deceived Isaac, and as a result received a blessing which, it appears, he otherwise would not have. Yet, when Isaac realizes what has happened, he nevertheless refuses to rescind the blessing, but rather affirms it—“yes, and he will be blessed” (v. 33). Perhaps he remembered that he had blessed Jacob with the covenant refrain, “cursed be those who curse you, and blessed be those who bless you” (v. 29). To remove the blessing could incur the promised curse!

Had Isaac forgotten the divine revelation given to Rivkah at the birth of the twins, that “the older shall serve the younger” (25:23)? Why does it sound a little bit like Isaac is “selling his blessing for a pot of stew?” Did Isaac use Jacob’s deception as the excuse for taking away from Esau what, by culture, was rightfully his? (The text might indicate that Isaac’s misgivings on the true identity of the son who was speaking eventually gave way to his realization that it was Jacob, but he “played along” in order to give the blessing to Jacob. That way, he ends up a victim rather than an unjust father in Esau’s eyes.) What reason can be given why Isaac insists that his blessing of Jacob must remain even after his deception is exposed? If Jacob had not deceived Isaac, would he have eventually received the blessing anyway?

All of these questions leave us hanging! We want Jacob to be blessed, because we know it’s God’s plan. But we wish the blessing could come through Jacob’s humble and righteous life, not through trickery. What is more, God appears to get His own hands dirty in the whole scenario, for He allows lies and deceit to be the channel through which the blessing comes!

In the end, though we have few answers that satisfy us, we must admit again what we have learned from the previous narrative: God’s purposes are not thwarted by the sinful acts of mankind. In the same way that the “Hagar” scheme could not disrupt God’s pledge to give the promised seed, so the deceit of Rivkah and Jacob did not throw a “monkey-wrench” into God’s designs for the maintenance of the Abrahamic covenant.

But perhaps what bothers us even more is that we too often identify with Jacob and Rivkah. Instead of trusting God to keep His promises, we connive ways to assure we get what we want. And, though God remains faithful to us, we nonetheless pay heavily for our unrighteous attempts to lock-up our personal security. Like Jacob, our selfish efforts to get what we’re sure we need usually sever relationships and bring hardship. Jacob was forced to flee as a fugitive, and ended up spending time working for an unreasonable father-in-law, who dished out to Jacob a heaping plateful of his own trickery. In contrast to Abraham and Isaac, both of whom are characterized as having lived long and been blessed (Abraham, “a good ripe age, old and contented”, 25:8; Isaac, “in ripe old age”, 35:29), the short commentary on Jacob’s life is quite different. He can only report that the

years of his life have been “few and hard” (47:9). Though God’s promises did not fail, the life of Jacob was dogged by hardship from the day he deceived his father until the day of his death.

All of this reminds us that though God’s purposes will be realized regardless of man’s disobedience, going our own way, and attempting to secure our own destiny, results in sorrow, not joy, and in struggles, not freedom. True joy and freedom flow from a fountain called “faith”—faith, the spring-cold water for the soul in the desert of life. Faith calls for patience, for trust, for believing that God will fulfill His promises in His way, and in His time. Faith refuses to resort to the strength of the flesh, even when all indicators say God doesn’t care or is unaware of my troubles. Faith confesses that God’s way is best, and that in the end this will be proven to all, including myself.

Why does Esau weep and wail? The depiction of Esau in our section is striking! The Hebrew is emphatic: וַיִּצְעַק צַעֲקָה גְדֹלָה וּמָרָה עַד מְאֹד “and he burst into great sobbing and was very bitter” (v. 34), to which is added (v. 39): וַיִּשָּׂא עֵשָׂו קְלוֹ וַיִּבְךְּ, “and Esau lifted up his voice and wept.” A touching scene! The first-born, the man of the field, the hunter, weeps at the loss of fatherly blessing. But how short-lived the sorrow! It turns quickly into anger and revenge: “First he took away my birthright....” (v. 36); “Let but the mourning period of my father come, and I will kill my brother Jacob.” (v. 41)

There are two forms of sorrow: one leads to self-pity and bitterness, while the other leads to repentance. One is the work of the Ruach, the other of the flesh. “For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death” (2 Cor. 7:10).

The sorrow of the world is usually attached to personal loss. Tears come when what is mine (or what I think should be mine) is lost. In Esau’s case, he had already demonstrated that the birthright (and its attended blessing of the first-born) carried little if any personal value—he gave it up for a single meal. Moses alerts us to the true motive in Esau’s heart: “he despised the birthright” (Gen 25:34). Then why such outrage now, when the blessing is actually given to the birthright holder? The answer must be found in the material possessions which the blessing carried. Jacob, now granted the right as the first-born, receives a double-portion of Isaac’s inheritance. He gets the fertile ground, while Esau (later Edom) will occupy the mountainous region— real estate with far less economic advantages.

The Writer to the Messianic Jews (Hebrews) makes note of Esau’s tears: (Heb 12:14-17)

14 Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; 16 that *there be* no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a *single* meal. 17 For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

What things characterize the two different kinds of sorrow, “the sorrow which is from God” versus the “sorrow which is of the world” (2Cor 7:10)? Obviously, Paul states the ultimate difference in the fact that Godly sorrow leads to repentance, a true mark of saving faith, while the sorrow of the world produces death. But in the temporal manner of

things, the two can sometimes look the same. After all, when one sorrows, the outward signs are often the same. There are, however, some characteristics of God-given sorrow that mark it out as clearly different than the sorrow of the world.

First, the sorrow that God gives *does not seek excuses*. A tell-tale sign of worldly sorrow is blame shifting. When one hears “I know what I’ve done is wrong, but ...,” one can be fairly assured that the sorrow is not the kind God gives. That is because Godly sorrow stems from a true assessment of one’s sin, and all excuses become unimportant. A second mark of Godly sorrow is that it *leads to genuine change in one’s behavior*. Worldly sorrow manifests itself in tears for a season, but soon the event is past and one continues on as before. Various means are employed to “get on with life” without honestly dealing with the problem. But the sorrow that is from God breaks the heart in such a way that only God, by His Spirit, can mend it. And when the heart is broken by genuine sorrow, its mending brings about lasting change. Thirdly, Godly sorrow is *not accompanied by a judgmental spirit*, quite the opposite. When one is truly sorrowful for one’s sin, there is no looking at others for comparison. One has gained a glimpse of God’s holiness, and this becomes the only necessary standard of comparison. Conversely, worldly sorrow will quickly shift to judging others, trying to console oneself with the idea that others are just as guilty, making one’s own sin seem less egregious. The thought that “everyone does it” finds no place in Godly sorrow.

Esau is a good example of worldly sorrow. His tears come at a time when he thinks there might still be a chance of reversal. His sorrow is partly demonstrated to change Isaac’s mind. But once it is clear that Isaac does not intend to withdraw the blessing from Jacob, the true nature of Esau’s heart is revealed. His sorrow is short lived. It quickly turns to hatred and vengeance.

So did Isaac bless Esau (or, “With a blessing like this, who needs a curse”)? The translations of vv. 39-40 vary, and actually give opposite meanings. Note the following:

See, your abode shall enjoy the fat of the earth
And the dew of heaven above.
Yet by your sword you shall live,
And you shall serve your brother;
But when you grow restive,
You shall break his yoke from your neck (JPS)

But the NASB has:

Behold, away from the fertility of the earth
shall be your dwelling,
And away from the dew of heaven from above;
And by your sword you shall live
And your brother you shall serve;
But it shall come about when you become restless,
That you shall break his yoke from your neck.

Does the text promise Esau a fertile land or not? Actually, both translations are possible, but the NASB is surely right. There is a play on the preposition מִן, “from,” which in the blessing given to Jacob is used in this way: “Now may God give you from the dew of

heaven,” while in the blessing to Esau the same term means “away from,” “away from the dew of heaven.” Jacob would dwell in the fertile land promised to Abraham and would inherit this land as the assigned heir of the covenant (28:4). Esau, on the other hand, would dwell in the mountainous regions, which, except for some few meadows, would not sustain crops. One writer has described the mountain regions of Edom as “the most desolate and barren mountains probably in the world” (Seetzen, quoted by *Keil and Delitzsch*, 1:278). Rather than being bound to land through agriculture, Esau would live by the sword.

History has borne out the reality of this prophetic statement. Edom (Esau) carved out a history replete with struggles to shake off the rule of Israel.

“After a long period of independence at the first, the Edomites were defeated by Saul (1 Sa 14:47) and subjugated by David (2 Sa 8:14); and, in spite of an attempt at revolt under Solomon (1 Ki 11:14ff), they remained subject to the kingdom of Judah until the time of Joram, when they rebelled. They were subdued again by Amaziah (2 Ki 14:7; 2 Chron 25:11ff), and remained in subjection under Uzziah and Jotham (2 Ki 14:22; 2 Chron 24:2). It was not till the reign of Ahaz that they shook the yoke of Judah entirely off (2 Ki 16:6; 2 Chron 28:17), without Judah being ever able to reduce them again. At length, however, they were completely conquered by John Hyrcanus about BCE 129, compelled to submit to circumcision, and incorporated in the Jewish state (Josephus, *Ant.* 13.9.1-14.7.9). At still a later period, through Antipater and Herod, they established an Idumæan dynasty over Judea, which lasted till the complete dissolution of the Jewish state.” (*Keil and Delitzsch*, 1:279)

And the story isn’t finished yet. Ishmael’s line continues intertwined with Esau’s descendents. The struggle continues. Who is the rightful owner of the inheritance? To whom does the land belong? Who is blessed, and who is not? God answered these questions long ago, but it will take Messiah’s return to bring everyone to accept His answer.

The *haftarah* chosen for this *parashah* was based, no doubt, upon the general theme as well as verbal connections. For instance, the blessing upon Jacob includes the words “Now may God give you of the dew of heaven...” (Gen 27:28), and as noted above, the “blessing” for Esau indicates that he would dwell “away from the dew of heaven” (27:39). In v. 7 of the *haftarah*, similar language is used: “Then the remnant of Jacob will be among many peoples like dew from Adonai, like showers on vegetation which do not wait for man or delay for the sons of men.” Likewise, the overall theme of the *haftarah* portion is the blessing that comes upon the “remnant of Jacob” because of the appearance of a Ruler, Who is “from eternity” and Who is born in Bethlehem Ephratah. This One is surely the Messiah and the Targum, along with the Sages (e.g., Ibn Ezra, Rashi, Radak), interpreted this passage messianically. Indeed, in some of the Torah lists, this section was also the *haftarah* for Num 22:2-25:9, the so-called Balaam Oracles, which contains the messianic prophecy, “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; A star shall come forth from Jacob, a scepter shall rise from Israel, and shall crush through the forehead of Moab, and tear down all the sons of Sheth” (Num 24:17).

The pre-existence of the Messiah as stated in Mic 5:2[1] is disputed by some. The phrase under question is: וּמִצְאָתָיו מִקְדָּם מִיְמֵי עוֹלָם, “and His going forth is from of old, from days of eternity.” The Stone Chumash translates “and his origins will be from early times, from days of old.” The question is whether the Hebrew indicates “eternity” or simply “previ-

ous days.” It is true that the phrase *yamei ‘olam* can refer to “former days” or “ancient time” (Deut 32:7; Is 63:9, 11; Amos 9:11; Mic 7:14). But it must also be noted that the concept of “eternity” in the Scriptures is spoken of by employing terms of limited duration. Thus, Dan 7:9 speaks of God as the “Ancient of days,” and Wisdom in Prov 8:22-23 is characterized as eternal by denoting its existence in the realm of time (note that both קָדֶם and עוֹלָם are used in this text). Further, as Hengstenberg notes (1.358), the Hebrew often heightens the meaning of a phrase by joining it together with a contrast. Thus, *kedem* generally denotes ancient time, and the addition of *mimei ‘olam* would extend this meaning. Thus, Micah’s prophecy of the Messiah combines the mystery of the Incarnation of Yeshua, our Messiah, for He is on the one hand Eternal, yet born of woman (5:3). Furthermore, it is through the appearance of this One that the remnant of Jacob is regathered and the blessings promised by the Almighty are granted to Israel in the last days.

So, the pairing of this *haftarah* with our Torah *parashah* is a clear statement by the ancient rabbis that blessings promised to Abraham, passed on to Isaac and to Jacob, and thus to the nation descended from Jacob, could only and ultimately be realized through the appearance of the Messiah and the work He would accomplish. It is to this reality that Yeshua spoke at His final Pesach Seder when, referring to the third cup, He said, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood” (Lk 22:20). In other words, the blessing prophesied by Jeremiah as the “new covenant,” in which the remnant of Israel and Judah would be regathered as one people with the Torah written upon their hearts and their sins and iniquities remembered no more, was secured by the sacrificial death of the Messiah on behalf of His people. The realization of the New Covenant is entirely dependent upon the “pouring out” of Yeshua’s blood as a sacrifice for sinners.

It was this theme, of the realization of the covenant promises to Israel by the work of the Messiah in redeeming His people, that motivated the choice of Rom 5:1–11 as the Apostolic portion for this Shabbat. Here, in the clearest of words, the Apostle shows the utter helpless condition of sinners and the inexplicable love of God in giving His Son to redeem them. Such love is magnified by the fact that not only were we ungodly when the Almighty redeemed us, but we were actively His enemies: “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (v. 10). Moreover, the theme of “peace” is heightened when we realize that as enemies we were at war with God! It was not merely that we were fighting against Him, rebels seeking to undermine and abolish His rightful place and authority. He also was angry with us. Paul began his epistle to the Romans by stating that “...the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (1:18). Yet in His love, He brought about reconciliation through the giving of His own Son. As our *haftarah* states: “This One will be our peace” (Mic 5:5). Therefore, Paul can assert, not that we *will have peace* but that we already possess it: “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Yeshua Messiah” (Rom 5:1), and he concludes this paragraph with: “And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Yeshua Messiah, through whom we have now received the reconciliation” (5:11). Note the emphasis upon “now” – “we have *now* received the reconciliation.” Those who are in Yeshua are the first fruits of the harvest that will take place in the final days when “all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26). In some measure, we possess now a genuine foretaste of the final restoration that will take place at the return of our Messiah. It is our privilege and calling, then, to live now in the reality of what will be completely fulfilled in the future. The peace we

have with God through Yeshua our Messiah, and the knowledge of His grace and will, are a sure and present foretaste of the future when there will be unending shalom, and God’s truth will be evident to all, as Isaiah prophesies:

They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,
For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
As the waters cover the sea.
(Isaiah 11:9)

One verse in our *parashah* has given rise to various interpretations, one of which has been used to support what has become known as the “Two-House” doctrine or teaching. The verse of which I speak is 28:3 –

MT	Lxx	NASB
וְאֵל שְׂדֵי יִבְרָךְ אֲתָךְ וְיִפְרֶךְ וְיִרְבֶּךָ וְהֵייתָ לְקָהָל עַמִּים:	ὁ δὲ θεός μου εὐλογῆσαι σε καὶ αὐξήσαι σε καὶ πληθύναι σε καὶ ἔσῃ εἰς συναγωγὰς ἐθνῶν	May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multi- ply you, that you may become a company of peoples.

The phrase that the Two-House teaching has seized upon is the last clause of the verse: “that you may become a company of peoples.” This is interpreted to mean 1) that Jacob’s descendants would be very numerous, 2) that they would be dispersed among the nations and lose their identity so that they would consider themselves as having no connection to Jacob [Israel], 3) that they would eventually be gathered together by God’s sovereign hand, and 4) would then realize that they are, in fact, the descendants of Jacob even though they are generally identified as of the “peoples” (עַמִּים = “of the nations”). In short, the Two-House teaching finds in this verse the idea that the “lost tribes of Israel” are those who have lost their identity as Jacob’s descendants but who are drawn to God and His Torah. It is then thought that the reason they are drawn to God, a specifically to His Torah, is that they are the “company of peoples” promised to Jacob. Once they realize who they really are, they affirm themselves as Jacob’s descendants.

However, the phrase קָהָל עַמִּים, “a company of people” may simply be an additional phrase synonymous in meaning with “make you fruitful and multiply you.” It most likely simply means “a multitude of persons” without the word *‘amim* (“people”) having any ethnic implications. The phrase is found three more times in the Tanach: Gen 48:4; Ezek 23:24; 32:3. Its use in Gen 48:4 is when Jacob recounts God’s covenant promises passed on to him by Isaac—a recounting of the blessing in our *parashah*. The two references in Ezekiel, however, describe an army or military company as a “company of people.” In these two instances, “a company of people” is used in its normal sense, to describe a multitude and obviously does not suggest any particular ethnicity.

Given these data, the phrase in Gen 28:3 should be understood as further describing what is meant by Isaac’s blessing Jacob with the words “May God ... make you fruitful and multiply you.”