

Righteous Supplanting – *Genesis 26:34-27:40*

Introduction – “**Supplant** {*suh-plant*} - to take the place of (another), as through force, scheming, strategy, or the like.”

We are in the middle of this long story where we know the end from the beginning. God told Rebekah that the younger would serve the older; Jacob was to be the Son of the Promise. Esau, the hairy beast, was preferred by Isaac because of his food. Jacob was a blameless man, loved by Rebekah for his character and as God’s choice. Esau despised his own birthright for a pot of “*red stuff – Edom.*” And now, Isaac, determined to disobey the Lord in his old age, sets the stage for a private giving of his blessing to only one of his sons, the wrong one. Believing God’s prophetic word, hoping to save her husband’s foolishness, and desiring to see her blameless son receive the promised blessing, Rebekah successfully protects the seed from the wily serpent. Understanding this correctly, the writer of Hebrews can say, “*By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come*” (Heb 11:20). Isaac and Esau were involved in an unrighteous supplanting attempt. Rebekah and Jacob succeeded in a righteous supplanting. The irony is not only thick; it confuses many.

Overview – This section begins with Esau’s rebellious marriages (26:34) which were a grief to his parents (v35), setting the stage for the next scene. In Genesis 27, Isaac’s eyes are dim (and not only physically), and summons his firstborn, Esau, to receive his blessing (v1). No doubt, this has been a secret plan in the making for some time. He sends Esau to hunt game and prepare a meal that they can eat together – away from the rest of the family (vv2-4). However, Rebekah overhears the exchange and recruits Jacob to deceive Isaac into giving him the blessing (vv5-10). Jacob is fearful the plan will not work and that instead of being blessed, he will be cursed (vv11-12). Rebekah reassures her son that she will bear the curse (v13). Jacob brings her some goats from the flock, which she prepares as a meal (vv14-16). Then, Rebekah covers Jacob with goat hair so he will feel like the hairy Esau (vv15-17).

It’s dicey, but Jacob convinces Isaac that he is Esau and succeeds in receiving his father’s blessing (vv18-29), a blessing of abundance, dominion, and divine protection. What Isaac gave was what he had received from Abraham and God. Just as Isaac finishes blessing Jacob, Esau returns with the meal for Isaac (vv30-32). Isaac “*trembles with a great trembling*” and Esau cries with a bitter cry (vv30-33). Their deception has been found out. Esau begs his father to bless him too (vv34-38). But it seems Isaac has changed: he does bless Esau, but the blessing is more like a curse, a veiled anti-blessing (vv39-40).

Righteous Deception – The law states, “*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor*” (Deut 5:20). But the Word also tells us that midwives lied and through their lies saved Moses (Exod 1:19-21). Later, Moses lied to Pharaoh (Exod 5:1). Jael lied (Judges 4:17-21) and so did Rahab, who is justified by it (James 2:25). These were all strategic lies against Satan and his forces who himself is a liar (John 8:44). These were all lies to protect others and prevent sin. Rebekah and Jacob were not the revolutionaries here. God had promised the blessing to Jacob. Rebekah is a woman who loves the covenant, loves the spoken Word she received from the Lord, and courageously moves to protect the seed of promise. She also looks to respectfully undermine her husband’s foolish plans before he ruins himself in utter disobedience to the Lord. Later, Abigail will do the same for her husband Nabal (1 Sam 25). Rebekah sets things up so that Isaac actually obeys God and brings the blessing to Jacob.

Observations on Rebekah and Jacob – If we are not careful, we find ourselves charging Rebekah and Jacob with the sin of breaking the ninth commandment. But you cannot find a word of criticism of these actions in the Scriptures. Rather, you see Isaac turn, repent, and in the end double-down on the blessing on Jacob (Gen 27:33-37, 28:3-4). It is Esau who sold his birthright; Jacob did not steal it from him (Gen 25:33, 27:36, Heb 12:16). Esau grieves his parents by marrying Canaanite women (Gen 26:34-35), and later Jacob will obey his parents and avoid the Canaanites (Gen 28:1). Rebekah respects her husband but is loyal to her God and is even willing to take the curse upon herself if one was to come from Isaac – and notice: one does not come.

The Upheld Anti-Blessing (vv39-40) – Isaac turns to Esau and seals his blessing to Jacob by removing it all from Esau. A better translation than the NKJV and AV is “*your dwelling shall be away from the fatness of the earth and away from the dew of heaven*” (v39, in the ESV, NASB, NIV). Verse 40 is a warning that Esau should stay in his place, serving his brother where he would find blessing. But Esau becomes another Cain (v41) and the Edomites would break the yoke that attached them to Jacob and the blessings on the land (i.e. 2 Kings 8:20-22).

Isaac and the Fear of God – When Isaac “*trembled with an exceeding trembling*” (v33) I believe he knew this was all from the hand of God. He was caught in his disobedience and fleshly appetite. This trembling was the fear of God, the right kind fear, a holy fear, a transforming fear, a converting fear. It was the fear that brings true repentance and reconciliation. “*The Fear of Isaac*” becomes a name of God (Gen 31:42, 53). It was this fear, this sense that God was very present, that you could not hide your sins, that He would judge it all and find you guilty, that then brought repentance. For God is not only judge. He is savior. Mercy and truth meet, righteousness and peace kiss (Ps 85:10) – in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Father of our Lord Jesus.

Fear from the Heart – There is a fearful expectation of judgment for those in covenant with God when they disobey or refuse to walk by faith (Heb 10:27). But for those walking by faith, there is no fear of judgment (1 John 4:17-19). And this is what stirred the heart of God to say, “*Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!*” (Deut 5:29). Consider the character and effects of godly fear:

The Character of Godly Fear – Godly fear is evidence of the grace of God (Heb 12:28) and is the fruit of God’s covenantal love upon us (Jer 32:38-40). It does not drive us away from God; it drives us away from sin (Prov 16:6). This fear creates confidence and is a “*fountain of life*” (Prov 14:26-27). This kind of fear is not in opposition to your assurance; it strengthens your assurance.

The Effects of Godly Fear – Godly fear produces right worship (Psalm 89:7 – “*God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints...*”), emphasizing devotion and sincerity, not entertainment and triteness. It keeps us from bending to worldly pressures and persecutions (Psalm 119:161, Matt 10:28). It promotes faithful ethics like honesty, hard work, and lawful treatment of others in the workplace (Neh 5:15). Godly fear produces humility (Rom 11:20) as well as much rejoicing (Psalm 2:11, 147:11).

Therefore, may God grant each of us a healthy portion of this godly fear and save us from our sins, our sinful desires, our twisted plans, and our fear of man. Deliver us, O Lord, to the place where Mercy and Truth meet.

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