

Jacob and Esau are Born

Genesis 25:19-28

Genesis 25:19-28 - *"This is the genealogy of Isaac, Abraham's son. Abraham begot Isaac. ²⁰ Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah as wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan Aram, the sister of Laban the Syrian. ²¹ Now Isaac pleaded with the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived. ²² But the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If all is well, why am I like this?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. ²³ And the LORD said to her: "Two nations are in your womb. Two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger."*

²⁴ So when her days were fulfilled for her to give birth, indeed there were twins in her womb. ²⁵ And the first came out red. He was like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau. ²⁶ Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

²⁷ So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents. ²⁸ And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob."

Background Notes

Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah. Her father Bethuel and her brother Laban were Arameans of Padan Aram. In Genesis 24, Abraham's servant traveled about 500 miles away from home to find a wife for Isaac. Abraham didn't want his son, Isaac, to marry someone outside his extended family, and certainly not a pagan Canaanite woman. Isaac and Bethuel, Rebekah's father, were first cousins. Even though Isaac was a generation older than Rebekah, Isaac was not too much older because Isaac was born when his mother Sarah was ninety. The age difference may have been as little as 10-15 years.

Isaac was sixty years old when Jacob and Esau were born (v26), so Isaac and Rebekah were married for 20 years before having children. Some people in our culture might say, "How great to be child-free for the first 20 years of your married life!" But that certainly was not the case in the culture of that time, because children were considered a great blessing from the Lord - and rightly so! **Children are a gift from the Lord!** Psalm 127:3 says: *"Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, and the fruit of the womb is a reward."* When it was apparent that Rebekah was barren, Isaac did the right thing - he prayed about the situation.

Let me share a humorous story with you. Verse 25 says that when Esau was born, he *"came out red... like a hairy garment all over...."* When our daughter Catherine was born, she was red all over because she was crying very loudly. I'll never forget my first glimpse of Catherine - I was sure something was wrong because she was so red! But the Lord

brought verse 25 to mind, so I thought, “Well, Esau was ‘red’ when he was born, and he grew up to be normal!” But I sure was glad that she didn’t look like a hairy garment!”

Doctrinal Points

1. God’s will is accomplished through answered prayer.

“Now Isaac pleaded with the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived”(v21). Wait a minute! Was the birth of these boys by answered prayer, or was it by the sovereign pre-planned will of God being worked out? It was **both!** We know God’s sovereign plans were being carried out because He had promised that a great nation would come through Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob and Esau were the only children who were born to Isaac and Rebekah. But we also know that it was answered prayer, because *“the LORD granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived.”*

How does this work? On the one hand, God’s sovereign and pre-planned will was being fulfilled, and yet there was also answer to prayers. We can’t completely comprehend how this works. We know that God has a sovereign pre-planned will. Ephesians 1:11s: *“In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.”* God knows the end from the beginning. Everything is in His plan. God never has to go through a “decision making process,” as we do. And yet God answers prayer. In fact, God’s will is accomplished through answered prayer!

Recently I was teaching a one-week course on how to interpret Scripture, and I asked a student how she had decided to come and study the Bible. She told me that she heard about this Bible college after she became a Christian, and she began to pray that she’d be able to study the Bible.

Meanwhile her father, who was not a Christian, had set some money aside for her college education. When he heard that his daughter wanted to go to Bible college he said, “No way!” Because he was so antagonistic to Bible college, she planned to go to a secular college - but she kept on praying that God would change her father’s mind. Well, guess what? A few weeks before classes began, her father changed his mind and said, “You can go to Bible college if that is what you really want. Here’s the money, you can go!”

God’s sovereign will from eternity past was that Jessica go to Bible college to study the Bible - but God also answered Jessica’s prayers! The same is true in your life and in my life. God’s will is accomplished through answered prayer.

2. God's will is revealed through answered prayer.

"But the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If all is well, why am I like this?" So she went to inquire of the LORD" (v22). Like Isaac, Rebekah did the right thing - she went to the Lord in prayer. When Rebekah asked the Lord for insight into her problem, He gave her an answer. He told her that she was going to have twins, and that these boys would be the fathers of two nations. The two nations would not be equal, however, and the older son would serve the younger son.

When we have problems, we should follow Rebekah's example. James 1:5: *"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him."* The context of this promise is the various trials we face in life. We can go to the Lord and ask Him for wisdom as to why He has allowed certain things in our lives, things that we don't understand. He promises here that He will give us insight, if we ask in faith.

The twins' birth was a preview of what was to come. Jacob, the younger twin, was grasping Esau's heel. When God answered Rebekah's prayer, He revealed His will. It was the sovereign will of God that Jacob was chosen over Esau. It would be through Jacob that the nation of Israel would come. It would be through the lineage of Jacob that the Savior for all mankind would come.

Romans 9:10-13: *"not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."*

The word "hated" here is not to be understood in the sense of an emotional hatred, but in reference to God's sovereign choice of Jacob over Esau. It could be said, relatively speaking, that God loved Jacob and did not love ("hated") Esau. God revealed His sovereign will to Isaac and Rebekah as an answer to Rebekah's prayer. It was not the answer they expected, and it was certainly not the answer that Isaac wanted to hear. But God's will was revealed.

God's will is revealed in answer to our prayers today as well. The question is, will we be willing to accept His will, and submit to Him? Sometimes it is very hard! For example, suppose we're praying for the recovery of someone who is ill, and God answers our prayers by revealing that it is His will for that person *not* to be healed here on earth – but will be healed in Heaven. That's not the answer we desired, and it may not be at all easy to submit to it or understand it, but sometimes that is God's will. Remember, God's will is revealed through answered prayer.

Practical Application

Don't play favorites with your children.

“So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob” (v27-28). Jacob and Esau were very different in their personalities and characteristics. Esau was a man of the fields; he became a skillful hunter.

Isaac favored Esau because he liked the wild game that Esau brought home. Jacob was not as “macho” as Esau. He was a mild-mannered man who stayed closer to home, and he was Rebekah’s favorite son. Sadly, Isaac and Rebekah “played favorites” with their children. This was wrong, and it definitely led to problems down the road. Don't play favorites with your children!

There can be a tendency for parents to have a “favorite” child. The athletic father, for example, may favor the son or daughter who is athletic over the child who doesn't like sports. If there are two daughters, the mother may tend to favor the daughter through whom she can best relive her younger years.

There are many factors that naturally cause us to play favorites with our children. Don't let it happen! It will cause problems, both present and future. It will cause family friction. There will be bad fallout - for sure! Don't play favorites with your children.

God has created each one of our children to be different. Each one is unique. Each child was given to us by the Lord, and is uniquely gifted and designed. As parents, it's up to us to recognize and encourage the strengths and gifts and talents of each child. It's up to us to help develop each one of our children for the glory of God, so don't play favorites with your children!