

DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

John Kitto, D.D., F.S.A.

Tenth Week -- Monday

ISAAC BLESSES JACOB

"So Rebekah spoke to Jacob her son, saying, 'Indeed I heard your father speak to Esau your brother, saying, "Bring me game and make savory food for me, that I may eat it and bless you in the presence of Yahweh before my death." Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to what I command you. Go now to the flock and bring me from there two choice kids of the goats, and I will make savory food from them 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.' . . . Now it happened, as soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting" (Genesis 27:6-30).

It is surprising how little we know of Isaac in comparison with Abraham his father and Jacob his son. Isaac makes no stir in the world, no noise; he excites no emotion. We only catch glimpses of him now-and-then, sufficient for us to recognize him as a dutiful son to his father, a loving son to his mother, an affectionate and doting husband, a biased father in regard to his sons, and a pious but weak old man. He seldom speaks. He lacks force of character and soon subsides into an instrument in the hands of others who use him for their own purposes.

It is the destiny of such men to be acted upon rather than to act upon others. So we never meet with Isaac in positive and decisive action but commonly find him in some instrumental position or other. He seems to have also been of a weakly constitution, for we read of infirmity or illness in none of the other patriarchs till they come to their deathbeds. But at an age far short of that which his father, and even his son, attained, we find him blind and feeble, confined to his bed and expecting to die. By far the most important and most fully recorded incident of his life occurs while he is in this condition.

We would suppose that the quiet and stay-at-home Jacob was more likely to be a favorite with such a father than the rough, boisterous and rambling Esau. But we constantly observe that persons manifest the greatest liking for those whose character and habits are least similar to their own, and this was the case with Isaac. Esau, not Jacob, was his favorite. And now believing his death to be near, he privately desired this beloved son to procure for him some of that savory food of which he was particularly fond. Afterwards he would bestow on him the paternal benediction.

This is overheard by Rebekah, whose skillful cunning contrives to pass off Jacob as Esau, and thus the blind old patriarch is led to believe that he is invoking blessings upon his elder and favorite son. The details of this scene of unprincipled deception, the more shocking from such advantage being taken of the infirmities of a father, are familiar to the reader.

It is the mother who suggests the plan and who, in fact, seeks to ease the alarm of Jacob's conscience by taking all the consequences upon herself. It is quite possible that she thought she was doing a duty. Knowing that the blessing Isaac was about to bestow on Esau belonged, in the purposes of God, to Jacob, and was his also as a portion of his purchased birthright, she might easily conceive that she was preventing a wrong and was only doing evil that good might come. It appears to us that Rebekah felt all to be right, both the means and the end. But though Jacob thought the end to be right he was staggered at the means, until his mother succeeded in soothing if not extinguishing his alarms. Jacob was, however, not a child. He was full forty years of age and very well capable of exercising an independent judgment in a matter which concerned him. All the responsibility of the transaction cannot be shifted to the mother, willing as she was to take it upon her.

With only a kid Rebekah prepares a "savory meat" for Isaac. How is it that Isaac, the possessor of numerous flocks, should depend upon his son's hunting for a feast which might thus easily be prepared to his liking with his own kids? And what kind of game might that be for which the flesh of a kid could be taken? In answer to this, it suffices to refer to a former statement, that an animal from the flocks or herds is rarely killed and eaten except to entertain a stranger; and the possessor of untold herds and flocks would deem it an unheard of extravagance to slay an animal to supply a meal for himself. Hence the Israelites in the wilderness, with all their cattle, groaned for the taste of flesh, which God supplied by miracle. Thus, it may appear that Isaac, at a hundred years old, scarcely knew the taste of kid's flesh. Or if he did, the flesh of a kid is not unlike that of a young gazelle; and prepared in the way that both are usually dressed in the East, might easily be taken for one.

Esau must have been a formidably hairy person, for in order for Jacob to pass for Esau the skin of the kid was placed by Rebekah upon Jacob's hands and the back of his neck. He was also clad in a garment of Esau's that his mother had in her keeping, notwithstanding that Esau had several wives and therefore a home of his own. It is surely enough to suppose that the fragrance of Esau's garment proceeded from the herbs and flowers of the field, his constant abode.

Now while Rebekah and Jacob had so carefully disguised his outward appearance, they had overlooked the necessity of disguising Jacob's voice, and thus the suspicions of Isaac were awakened. It was an alarming moment for that deceiver, a moment of agony--almost a sufficient punishment for his crime. But Isaac was satisfied with the feel of Jacob's hands and the fresh smell of his garment, and the much-desired blessing was bestowed.