

Title: Transforming Life Circumstances into Faith

Biblical Text: Genesis 25-26

Objectives:

1. Understand prophecy as a theophany and as a determining factor in the future of Jacob.
2. Find and consider external aspects that influence the life of Jacob.
3. Determine the importance of a special blessing and how God provides (i.e., Who is in charge? What is the background? What are the intentional decisions?).

Introduction

Jacob's life is similar to a roller coaster and has a unique form of faith development. Jacob was influenced by Rebecca's favoritism and Esau's rivalry. His life was a combination of suffering, pressure, antagonism, manipulation, and a discovery of a God who revealed himself in specific ways.

Rebecca's understanding of life, religion, and culture, created a lifestyle for her and her son. She was the artifice of Jacob's life. God provided Jacob with a mother to shape his life; however, we could consider that Rebecca's actions are a bit exaggerated.

While we review Jacob's life, let's see how God uses everything around him to take Jacob's fears away and create robust beliefs. We can even observe when Jacob entered into a contract with God when he understood the great importance of the divine blessing.

1. Understand prophecy as a theophany and as a determining factor in the future of Jacob.

Supporting Scripture: Ge. 25:21-23

Supporting Text:

Isaac's wife cannot bear children. For Rebecca, this barrier becomes a complex spiritual and emotional circumstance. This reality was painful for both Isaac and especially for Rebecca. In the Hebrew culture, being sterile was a representation that God had forgotten her; it was seen as more than a misfortune. Society, with contempt, believed her to be incomplete. After Isaac prayed, and perhaps Rebecca joined him in prayer, she became pregnant! A miracle was believed to have happened. We can speculate that the miracle represented many positive things for her.

Her pregnancy was, possibly, complicated. We see in the text that the babies were active. The text describes the baby's movement as complex, perhaps it was considered unusual and Rebecca became scared (or at least was concerned). Thus, she decides to use her devotion to God and consult him in regard to her babies. God answered her questions with an isolated response: a prophecy.

The prophecy creates expectations, especially in Rebecca's mind, because the prophecy marked the destiny of the twins and the destiny of the parents.

According to the narrative (Ge. 25: 28), each parent had a favorite child (each parent played a passive and active role in the life of the children, modifying their destiny). They even, over time, created an atmosphere of rivalry.

It is difficult to imagine Rebecca's faith, and what her internal reaction was to the prophecy that has been delivered; she hears the message delivered, but we are not certain of her reaction. The narrative does not describe the early life of the boys, we also do not have much information regarding their young adult lives nor much about their personalities, actions, etc. in those first years. It seems like she developed an inclination toward Jacob. Her understanding of the prophecy seems to be played out in her decisions. For her, the prophecy seems to be mandatory, yet, at the same time, she deliberately wants Jacob to be the best. Perhaps, there

was also an emotional and religious pressure at the time in which the prophecy was delivered. Can we hypothesize that Rebecca was obligated to make the prophecy happen? The theophany became the rule and the set of parameters; Rebecca was the tool to make it a reality. Did she respond to the pressure of fear? Did the prophecy become so important? Did she feel that disobedience to God could mean death or the end? If any of this is true, then fear can change/alter lives. Once Jacob blessed his son, Rebecca felt that she accomplished the goal. The fear she experienced is gone and the future is set.

2. Find and consider external aspects that influence the life of Jacob.

Supporting Scripture: Gen 27:5-12

Supporting Text:

Some studies reveal that Jacob was about 70 years old when he received the blessing. If Jacob's age is not accurate, for sure Jacob was old enough to make his own decisions.

However, according to the text, Jacob could have been about a twelve- or thirteen-years of age. He is the age of a teenage boy. His mother manipulated him and created drama under her cosmovision. Rebecca becomes an artist in managing/directing Jacob (i.e., at least in key areas and decisions).

The text does not inform us of what the rivalry was between Jacob and Esau or what aspects created favoritism for Rebecca and Jacob, we only know that it existed. We can also not see if Rebecca manipulated Isaac. We don't know if she worked to convince Isaac of God's design and prophecy, was she the one manipulating or redirecting the blessing?

We do not even know if Rebecca was trying to harm Esau (although collateral damage is obvious), or perhaps she knew that the prophecy rises beyond any culture or tradition rule regarding the primogeniture.

What we know is that Rebecca is looking to obtain the blessing for her favorite son, or she was convinced of the prophecy that she was ready to work and go against anything that could potentially hinder it.

At the same time, if Rebecca was concerned about the prophecy, is it possible that Jacob grew up with the pressure that he needed to be dependent on his dad? Was he vigilant of his father's health, was he plotting along to obtain his brother's blessing? Did the situation also create fear for Jacob? Did he believe he might not receive anything and fail in life? What were the emotions here?

We do not know for how long Rebecca plotted this conspiracy (or planned to make the prophecy possible), but she had the moral authority to tell Jacob what to do, and Jacob was submissive and obeyed.

Was the hypothetical fear a factor for why Jacob lived under his mother's will? Perhaps he was measuring his success based on his ability to obtain the blessing.

When we read this story, it is possible to conclude that both mother and son had a very close relationship, perhaps a conspiracy relationship based on the blessing's anxiety.

In any case, it seems like Jacob was under his mother's protection; he was not looking to fulfill the prophecy (just because the culture and religion indicated that Esau had the right to the blessing).

Even in the moment of the blessing, Jacob was convinced he could deceive his dad and walk away happy.

It could be said that Isaac was very old, that is true, but why did he not differentiate between his sons?

We can continue with more questions and speculations about this story; however, what we can observe is that Jacob has been influenced by his mother, his father, and even his brother to finally obtain the blessing.

3. Determine the importance of a special blessing and how God provides (i.e., who is in charge? the background, intentional decisions).

Supporting Scripture: 27: 27-29

Supporting Text:

In 25:31 Jacob is trying to negotiate an intangible blessing. He was taught, by his mom, that the blessing would become a key part of his life and the future of “something”.

There is no doubt that a blessing, from the religious perspective, became a source of good life, good luck, and prosperity. A blessing implied the transmission of benefits such as prosperity, power, and especially fertility; but, overall, a blessing was used to represent a direct connection between the source (in this case God through Isaac) and the receptor as the new bridge of that blessings for the next generations. In this view, a blessing is not just benefits, but also reputation, importance for the person, and a warranted relationship with the source (God). It is a concrete and public human-divine relation. At the same time, to possess the blessing becomes a worship of God and to assure His presence over this world.

We cannot define what Jacob’s faith means at that moment. There are many questions. If he listened to the promise God made with his grandfather, what did the promise mean for him a hundred and fifty years later? Did Rebecca understand it well? What did the blessing particular factors have and how did Isaac plan to deliver it for his primogenitor?

One of the aspects to understand is that the blessing was very important, it could be similar to the blessing Abraham gave to Isaac and how he had a prosperous life. Also, if Jacob could compare Isaac and Ismael, he could understand that there are different types of blessings, and he wants to receive the better one.

Perhaps, since he was a child, his mother was influencing him and convincing him that the blessing was something he needed to obtain as a spiritual and monetary prize. It was important in the lineage.

We do not know how many times Jacob tried to negotiate that blessing, but it would not be difficult to guess that he was trying multiple times until this conspicuous moment.

When Jacob was trading the benediction, he went against spiritual principles, sacred tradition, and even respect for his own family. His ambition (or what we can call pressure, or even fear, or anxiety) did not have limits.

Who was in charge of the blessing? How were blessings portrayed in the Old Testament?

Was the blessing planned by God for Jacob, or did Jacob need to work and make several attempts to obtain the blessing?

Jacob's work was done under the direction of Rebecca.

Conclusion

A blessing would become a treasure. With it, Jacob entered a very vertiginous life. From the time he was in Rebecca’s womb, Jacob was very active; he experienced the rivalry of his brother. Jacob could be compared with a diamond that needed to be polished. One could state that throughout his life he has experienced this polishing procedure. His mother was his guardian. She took care of him; it was critical to her that he receive the family blessing. Both Jacob and his mother knew the importance of him obtaining the blessing; they knew what the promise meant; and they were willing to obtain it no matter the costs.

We could state that the climax in Jacob's life was his encounter with God, the interaction occurred, and the divine blessing he received. The shortfalls in his life did not hinder him from seeking God. He sought in every way that relationship with the Lord. Today, we could compare Jacob's journey with our own spiritual journey.

Discussion Questions

1. What was the role of God when the prophecy was given to Rebecca about Jacob and Essau?
2. How external aspects in our lives can play a significant role?
3. Understanding blessings in the Old Testament, what would you do in Jacob's place?