

Jan 21, 2007 AM

BATTLE, BIRTH, AND BIRTHRIGHT
GENESIS 25.19-34

25.19–35.29 - characterized by *struggle, fighting, or battles*.

1. THE BATTLES BEFORE BIRTH (19-23)

Introduction (19-20): Genesis arranged around 10 “generations.” Isaac’s is the 8th. It is through Isaac that Abraham’s seed will be named. Cp. Gen 5 and Adam through Seth.

Padan-aram = upper Mesopotamia, city of Nahor (24.10). These are Arameans/Syrians. Cp. Dt 25.1ff.

Barrenness and intercession (21): Isaac like Abraham; cf. ch. 20 and Abraham’s praying for Abimelech’s household.

Barrenness as a theme. Sarah, Rachel (later) and throughout Scripture. Life will come through death; cf. Rom 4.

Death comes through Adam’s sin. Death must come. But God promises life on the other side of death. Rebekah “embodies” this.

God responds to the intercession of Isaac and Rebekah conceives. It is on the basis of the intercession of the one designated as “priest” that life (i.e., fruitfulness) comes to the wife and eventually to the world.

Sibling struggles (22-23): Struggling is set up as a major theme in the life of Jacob.

Gordon Wenham translates this as, “The children smashed each other inside her....” This drives Rebekah to prayer.

Question is quite literally, “If thus, then why this to me?” Interpretation: “What is going on here?”

Where did she intercede? Possibility of YHWH speaking directly. I think it likely that she went to Isaac who mediated a word from YHWH for her. Isaac has already been set up as an intercessor, and we have precedent for God speaking the woman through the mediator with the story of Abraham (cf. ch. 18). (If this is the case, then what Isaac does later in trying to give the blessing to Esau is a really bad move on Isaac’s part.)

v. 23 is the word from YHWH. There are two children at war (note: “two nations” and “two peoples”).

Cf. Gen 3 - nature of the fall was adultery between the woman and the serpent. (This is not physical. Idolatry is always spoken of in terms of adultery in the Bible.) The product of this idolatrous/adulterous relationship would be the seed of the serpent; who became “incarnate” in Cain. The woman would also be the mother of the true seed; Abel, then Seth. See Gen 3.20, “all living.”

Rebekah is a new Eve who is bearing both seeds from her body. War between those seeds.

One will be stronger than the other. The righteous will be stronger than the wicked.

The older will be a slave or will serve the younger. This picks up a well established theme about the younger replacing the older. E.g., Abel replaces Cain, Seth replaces Cain, Abraham replaces his older brother, and it will continue.

Ultimately this is realized in the fact that the younger, second Adam replaces the firstborn Adam. The firstborn is defiled and the younger must ascend to his place.

2. THE BRUISED HEEL (24-26)

Esau: red and hairy (25): “redness” is prominent in the text; probably has to do with Esau’s assoc. w/ blood. “Edom” is a play on “blood” as well as “red.”

“hairy” - Hebrew is essentially the word “Seir,” is also a name by which his descendants are identified (i.e., “Mt. Seir”).

Esau is bestial; i.e., he is like a beast of the field. He is wild and untamed and must be brought under dominion.

Jacob: the heel (26): Heel grabbing will be understood as being “deceiver” and “supplanter.” Should not be understood in negative terms. Jacob’s deceptions will be a tactic in his wrestling.

Note the future for Jacob at the ford of the river Jabbok; wrestles with “a man” who turns out to be YHWH. YHWH changes his name to Israel because, He says, “You have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.” (32.28). Israel means, “one who contends/perseveres/strives with God.”

God has put all of these struggles in his path so that he would have to wrestle, become strong, and be a good ruler.

Many have taken this as Jacob’s conversion experience, but if this is so, why is he struggling with Esau in the womb? If he is unconverted, wouldn’t he be friends with Esau up to this point? Jacob believes from the womb.

He will have to fight. He will have to wrestle with Esau, with Isaac, and with Laban. And he will realize in the end that he has been wrestling with God in one respect. And he will persevere.

Gen 3.15 - “Heel” is bruised. Jacob is that heel. He will endure the assaults, but in the end he will, indeed, prevail.

Alternative disregard the struggle in the womb and believe that God will bless people no matter if they are faithful or not. That turns into a fatalism that is not anywhere near the biblical doctrine of election (which, as Paul makes clear in Romans 9 is what is going on here).

3. THE BEAST AND THE BEAUTY (27-28)

A new Nimrod (27b): cf. Gen 10; Nimrod is a hunter.

A new Noah (27c): a “perfect” man, not “quiet” or “mild.” cf. Job 1.1, 8; 2.3; Gen 6.9

“Dwells in tents;” as opposed to dwelling in the fields. Jacob is a man of dominion and properly clothes himself with a tent (like God will do later in Scripture). Again, Esau is more like a beast and Jacob is more like “the man.”

A divided household (28): Isaac loved Esau *because he ate of his game*, but Rebekah loved Jacob. Isaac is aligning himself wrongly. We will see as the story unfolds that Isaac lacks proper judgment concerning his son and he, along with Esau, will be more controlled by appetite rather than what God says.

4. THE BATTLE FOR THE BIRTHRIGHT (29-34)

Whose god is his belly (29-30): Jacob is the one who must feed the “skilled hunter.”

Esau wants some of his “red” because he is weary. Note Edom above. It has been suggested that Esau might have thought that this was some type of blood stew. Pagans believed that drinking blood would give them power, life. This is something he wanted and was willing to grasp.

If this was the case, Esau would be violating the Noahic covenant which forbade the drinking of blood, which would fit Esau’s life of disobedience and disregard for God’s covenant. Nevertheless he wants immediate gratification of his appetites.

Love for the covenant (31): Promised to Jacob and he loves the covenant. So, Jacob takes the opportunity to see if this is the time for the exchange. Will Esau show any regard for the covenant, or will he sell it for cheap, showing that he doesn’t really care about it? The answer to these questions is made clear in the final verses of the chapter.

Despising the covenant (32-34): Legal transaction. Esau gives it up w/ no debate.

God’s commentary: Esau despised the covenant; cf. Heb 12.16

(1) Being the seed is a call to wrestle.

(2) We are not to be driven by our appetites by love for and faith in God’s word.