

Hebrews 11:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

Analysis

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. Despite being old and blind, Isaac blessed his sons by faith, speaking prophetically about their futures. The Greek *peri mellontōn* (περὶ μελλόντων, 'concerning things to come') indicates Isaac's blessings weren't mere wishes but prophetic declarations about God's sovereign purposes for his descendants. Though Isaac initially intended to bless Esau, God's elective purposes ensured Jacob received the covenant blessing (Genesis 27).

Isaac's faith appears in his acceptance of God's sovereign choice after discovering Jacob's deception. Rather than cursing Jacob or revoking the blessing, Isaac confirmed it: 'Yea, and he shall be blessed' (Genesis 27:33). This demonstrates faith's submission to divine sovereignty even when it contradicts personal preference. Isaac recognized God's hand overruling his own plans, surrendering to purposes higher than his own will.

This illustrates the Reformed doctrine of unconditional election—God's choice of Jacob over Esau 'not of works, but of him that calleth' (Romans 9:11-13). Isaac's patriarchal blessing carried covenantal authority, transmitting promises from Abraham through the chosen line. His faith believed God's purposes would prevail through his descendants, trusting divine promises regarding future realities he would never see fulfilled in his lifetime.

Historical Context

Isaac lived approximately 1850 BC. Ancient Near Eastern culture invested profound significance in paternal blessings, which conveyed inheritance rights, family leadership, and covenant promises. The firstborn typically received the primary blessing, making Isaac's intended blessing of Esau culturally normative. However, God had revealed to Rebekah before the twins' birth that 'the elder shall serve the younger' (Genesis 25:23), overruling cultural custom through sovereign election. Isaac's confirmation of Jacob's blessing, despite the deception, acknowledged God's predetermined purposes.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does Isaac's submission to God's sovereign purposes challenge your own response when God's will contradicts your preferences?
2. What does this passage teach about God's electing grace working through imperfect human instruments?
3. In what ways should faith in God's future promises shape how you invest in the next generation?

Interlinear Text

Πίστει περὶ μελλόντων εὐλόγησεν Ἰσαὰκ τὸν Ἰακὼβ

By faith concerning things to come blessed Isaac G3588 Jacob G2384
G4102 G4012 G3195 G2127 G2464

καὶ τὸν Ἡσαῦ

and G3588 Esau G2269
G2532

