

In the rest of the passage, Rebekah clearly did all the trickery. She gave the instructions, prepared the food, dealt with the problems (making Jacob's skin feel hairy) and then cemented her part in the scheme by taking on herself the full consequences of her actions (27:13). It was a rash thing for someone of her time to undertake, but in her favour, it must be accepted that she was doing this because of her conviction that the Lord's promises were properly to be given to Jacob, and she believed that she was being deceived by her husband who was himself planning to pass on the Covenant blessing without the whole family being present.

The story will continue tomorrow!

Application

It is sad to read of a breakdown in the trust between Rebekah and Isaac. However, trying to apportion blame in the midst of a situation such as this is like trying to apportion blame in the majority of marriage troubles: impossible. Once we know the details that help us to see Isaac's deception, then the whole story can be viewed with more equality by us today. It has too often been assumed that Rebekah was the deceiver, and she passed this on to Jacob, exacerbating the small degree of deception carried through to him from his fathers, Isaac and Abraham (mostly evidenced in their treatment of their wives, 12:10f.; 20:1f.; 26:6f.). Jacob's problems in later years might well be a result of both his parents, but they should not be thought of as the rejection of his father or the deceptiveness of his mother. It was more complex than that.

One thing is evident from this passage, and it is that in the complex relationships of marriage, quick assumptions are often somewhat wide of the mark! The reality of this situation was that the Lord was in control, and through this agonising process, Jacob was on a path that would lead him to deeper truths of faith. Whilst the Jacob we meet in this chapter is a timid man who was obedient to his mother, he would indeed inherit the blessings of God from Isaac, would receive from him the full Covenant of God for his descendants (28:4f.), and eventually become the mature man who would be named 'Israel' by the Lord (32:22f.) and become the father of twelve sons. This is a clear message to us that God can change people and use them; whatever the circumstances. We too easily judge people by what we see of them or hear of them from one moment of time, or one conversation. We are all more complex than that, and the Lord can do far more in us than we imagine, let alone what other people think of us!

Discipleship Challenges

Please use the programme of lifestyle challenges which can be found by following the link 'lifestyle challenge'. The downloadable 'worksheet' will help you follow through any challenge which you feel is right for you to take up.

Suggestions about discipleship and Christian lifestyle

Ask yourself whether you are too quick in your judgement of other people? It is wise for us all to assume that we are! The challenge we have is to be sufficiently focussed on the Lord to have a mature, forgiving and open-hearted attitude towards others, generally. This is not to say we should not exercise discernment and caution about those who we believe are do evil, but it is important that we have a right and godly attitude towards everyone. All of us need to be challenged about this from time to time!

Final Prayer

Holy Spirit, You have come and rested upon my soul. Fill me with love and compassion; grace and truth; integrity and honesty; and a sincere desire for justice in Your Name: and as You bless me now, flow out from me to others according to Your gracious will. AMEN

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Do you think it is possible to say who is 'in the wrong' within this story? What is the most important theme of the passage?
2. Share experiences within your group of what happens when people jump to conclusions too quickly about what happens in a marriage.
3. Who comes out best in this story? Why? And how does this benefit them, if at all, in the long run?

Prayer

Be gentle with us, Lord Jesus. We are too often drawn away from your side by sins which we know about but which plague our well intentioned faith. Give us grace to face the enemy who holds us in such bondage, and cast him out in Your Name. May we therefore come to know Your deliverance, rejoice in Your salvation, and praise Your Holy Name! AMEN

Further Suggestions for Prayer

Weekly Theme: the Church's task of Mission

Pray for any schemes you know of (such as 'Alpha', based in the UK) which the Lord is using to help people become Christians and also become part of the 'Body of Christ'.

Pray that evangelistic work in your own country be sensitive to the Lord's will for the people, especially the poor in soul and in spirit. Pray for people to be won for Christ.

Meditation

The names of the Lord tell us about His true nature and character;
And as we are made in His image, they tell us about ourselves as well!

He is the 'Lord of Hosts', the creator and leader of Israel's armies;
And in His strength, we can stand against all the works of the Evil One!

He is the 'The Lord who sees', who understands our hearts;
And through His gifts, we minister to those who need His care!

He is the 'Light of the World', who shines Salvation upon the world;
And in obedience to His call, we dare to proclaim His glorious Name!

He is 'The great "I AM"', forever the One who was, and is, and is to come;
And with this glimpse of His majesty, our lives are changed for ever!

He is 'the Lord of the Years', who holds eternity in the palm of His hand;
And as we are saved by grace, we rest completely secure, in Him!

For we, who think we know ourselves so well, will one day learn that
Only in Christ do we find out who we are, and who we are meant to be

Bible Study - Genesis 26:34 – 27:17

³⁴ When Esau was 40 years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite; ³⁵ and they were a source of spiritual grief for Isaac and Rebekah.

^{27:1} When Isaac was old and his eyes were so old that he could no longer see clearly, he called his elder son Esau and said to him, 'My son'; 'Here I am,' he replied. ² He said, "Look, I am old, and I do not know when I will die. ³ Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and bow, and go out to into the countryside, and hunt some wild game for me. ⁴ Then prepare for me the savoury food I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die."

⁵ Rebekah had been listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau, so when Esau went to out to the countryside to hunt for game and bring it back, ⁶ she said to her son Jacob, 'I overheard your father say to Esau your brother, ⁷ "Bring me game, and prepare for me the savoury food to eat, so that I may bless you in the presence of the LORD before I die." ⁸ Now my son, listen to me and do what I tell you. ⁹ Go to the flock, and get me two of the best kids, so that I may prepare from them the savoury food your father likes; ¹⁰ and you will then take it to your father to eat, so that he will bless you before he dies.'

¹¹ But Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, 'Look, my brother Esau is hairy, but I have smooth skin. ¹² What will happen if my father feels me; for I would appear to be tricking him, and bring a curse on myself rather than a blessing!' ¹³ His mother replied, 'Let any

curse fall on me, my son; just do what I say, go and get the kids for me.' ¹⁴ So he went to fetch them and brought them to his mother, and his mother prepared savoury food his father liked. ¹⁵ Then Rebekah took her elder son Esau's best clothes (which she had in the house) and put them on her younger son Jacob; ¹⁶ and she covered his hands and the back of his neck with the skins from the kids. ¹⁷ Then she gave Jacob the savoury food and bread she had prepared.

Review

This passage of Scripture is the first part of the famous story in which Esau is finally tricked out of his firstborn birthright by his younger brother Jacob, with the help of his mother Rebekah. As with all the stories of this part of Genesis, Scripture is concerned to tell us about how God's Covenant and the Lord's blessings were handed on from one generation to another. This passing on of the sacred inheritance was something that Abraham had been careful to secure by finding a wife (Rebekah) for his son (Isaac), and we might expect that Isaac would now do the same. We are not told why Isaac failed to do this, and we should not speculate on the reasons or assume that Isaac was therefore a weak man.

What Scripture has already told is that the relationship between the twins Esau and Jacob was not good, and there was considerable rivalry between the two. When the two sons were younger, Jacob had played a trick on Esau by which the older son had cursed his birthright (25:29-34). Then, in our passage today, we learn that Esau took two wives from local Hittite families, outside of parental consent, causing Isaac and Rebekah great grief. We might easily empathise with Isaac and Rebekah, but this whole incident opened up a sore division between them due to their favouritism; Isaac of Esau, and Rebekah of Jacob. Since birth, Rebekah had favoured Jacob because of a prophetic word from the Lord (25:23), but Isaac would not relinquish his belief in the assumed rights of the firstborn, and in the end, the decision would rest with him before he died. Isaac and Rebekah loved each other dearly (24:67; 26:8), but they could not agree between themselves on this, and the stalemate could well be the reason for their lack of authority about the marriage of their sons. Isaac would have to bear the disappointment in the end, but would he be able to accept the consequences? We will have to wait to find that out!

All of these complex family issues were clouding the story of God's Covenant and its blessings, creating great suspense about what would happen next. It is not surprising that the story of the trickery by which Rebekah and Jacob secured the Covenant blessing for Jacob takes more than a whole chapter of Genesis. We will split the story into three in order to make it manageable for study.

Today's passage is all about setting the scene, and we can scarce believe what we are reading. Rebekah and Jacob resort to intentional deception in order to ensure that Jacob receives the blessing from Isaac, by now an almost blind old man. Our sense of shock at this is only alleviated by the knowledge that Esau has already dismissed his birthright (25:29-34) and married outside the family line of Terah. It may seem awful to us from a human point of view, but scripture is obliged to tell us that God's will is about to be done through sinful means! We will have to stay with the story of Jacob far longer than this chapter of Genesis alone, if we are to discover how he finds peace with God after this cruel deception.

Going Deeper

Did you know that it was not just Rebekah and Jacob who acted deceitfully in the acquisition of the Covenant blessing? Going deeper reveals some other deception as well, and in the light of this, the deeds of Rebekah and Jacob were not quite as devious as we might think!

Isaac and Esau

The opening words of Genesis 26:34 clearly indicate that it is the beginning of a major new story. It is in fact the start of a long story about Jacob and Esau which goes on far longer than the birthright story of Genesis 27. This longer story is only completed after Jacob has learned some hard lessons of life over 20 years of living in the service of his uncle (Laban) in Mesopotamia, before returning to the Promised Land (33:15-17). Right at the beginning, the personal link between Esau and Isaac is heightened by the mention of his taking wives at the age of 40; the same age at which Isaac himself was married (25:20), and for the next five

verses, Isaac and Esau appear inseparable, despite the despairing and on-looking Rebekah (26:35, 27:5). These verses are indeed remarkable, but the reasons are not easy to spot. Several things in the story make the relationship between Isaac and Esau appear very close, yet the more we look at them, the more their actions appear to be deceptive as well as those of Jacob and Rebekah!

The possibility of deception on Isaac's part is hidden from us because of our unfamiliarity with the customs of the day, and needs explaining. When an old man came near to death, as we see in the story of Abraham (25:1-11) it was expected that the whole family to be called, and the old man would speak openly about what he wished to happen to his wealth. In this way there would be no argument about his intentions. There could have been many who thought they might inherit more from Abraham, for example, but his clear instructions could not be opposed because they were publicly known. Now if we contrast this with what was happening here, Isaac is reported to have failing eyesight (27:1), which hardly constitutes 'near death'; he is even reported as saying 'I do not know when I will die' (27:2), which in ancient times meant that he should not have yet called anyone for blessing! As for Isaac's age, he married at 40, his sons were born when he was 60 (25:26) and Esau was just over 40 in this story, making Isaac 100. He actually lived to be 180 (35:28), and was certainly alive many years later because Scripture records him greeting Jacob back from Mesopotamia (35:27), after 20 years! This makes the whole scene of this chapter appear rather false; Isaac may well have been an old man and failing in his abilities, but he was hardly near to death.

In addition, he spoke to Esau about giving his blessing without any reference to anyone else, something that was just not done; and his wish to bless Esau 'before I die' sounds hollow. Did he know that he would never be able to give Esau the Covenant blessing because of the Lord's prophetic words (25:23) and yet sought to give some form of private paternal blessing to Esau before his favourite son left the family home due to the family tensions, and set up on his own with his two wives? It is possible; but if it is true, the situation gets completely out of hand.

With words that speak overwhelmingly of Isaac's love for his adventurous son Esau, Isaac asked him to prepare a special meal, suitable for the blessing ceremony that was required for the passing of a blessing from father to son (27:4). Unfortunately for Isaac, Rebekah was listening (27:5) to what was going on!

Rebekah and Jacob

In the turmoil of family sensitivities that surrounded the whole issue of paternal 'blessing', Rebekah assumed that Isaac was secretly preparing to pass on the Covenant blessings of God which she fiercely guarded for her other son Jacob. See how Scripture in this passage calls Jacob 'her son' and Esau 'his son'; thereby emphasising the polarisation that had happened within the family! Rebekah was noted in her youth as one who was prepared to take swift action (24:58), and that capacity immediately swung into action, as she hatched a plot to deceive her husband directly, for the greater purpose of preserving the Word of the Lord spoken at Jacob's birth. Her seriousness is illustrated by verse 8, in which Rebekah told Jacob that he must do what she commanded; this is almost the only use of the word 'command' by a woman in scripture (with the exception of Queen Esther - Esther 4:5). She was certainly a strong woman; but whether Isaac was weak or being deceptive is not as clear.

Jacob's response to this is interesting. In the culture of the day, a son would be expected to be absolutely obedient to his father, and any departure from this would not be tolerated. It is a sign of how serious the rift within the family was that Jacob was meekly willing to listen to his mother, and not defer to his father and refuse the deception. In Old Testament teaching about the family, it was assumed that a father and mother were united (Deut 5:16; Prov 1:8; 6:20 etc), and there were few example of such lack of unity as in this story. Jacob, of course, was the same age as his twin brother Esau, and was hardly a young lad; he was around 40 at the time of the story! He had a mind of his own to follow what was happening, but still went along with his mother's plan, despite the risks. He knew full well he was entering into deception, and it seems that all he was concerned about was the awful consequences of being 'found out' (27:12). The deception of a father, and a blind man (in verse 12, 'mocking' or 'tricking') was a serious offence (see, for example, Lev 19:14; Ex 21:17).