

point of accepting the faith of his fathers, but the Scriptures do not say this directly. What they do say is that after the awful disruption of Isaac and Rebekah's family life due to this incident, Jacob left home. His father did then grant him the formal Covenant blessing as he left (28:3f.), but it took many years and many tortuous lessons of both life and faith for Jacob to finally come to the place where he owned the faith of his fathers, and for the Covenant blessings to be discovered by him through a highly personal experience of God (32:22-32).

The story of Isaac was one of the passing on of faith by the Lord through the family. The story of Jacob was that of a man who had to find faith for himself. Even to this day, the experience of faith of most people falls into one or other camp!

### Application

How often does division within the family create havoc and make good people blind to the Lord's will? It is hard not to reach the conclusion that whatever else was really going on in the minds of those involved with this incident, Isaac's blindness was not just physical! Rebekah too may well have over-reacted. What this did to Jacob as a sensitive son (25:27) is uncertain, but it showed itself in his distance from the Lord at a time when his parents really needed him to be spiritually aware and receptive.

For the many families which experience division and upset today over a multitude of issues including that of faith, the good news is that He will achieve His purposes, just as he did quite gloriously through Jacob. We often feel as if we are living within the snapshot of a story such as that in Genesis 27, full of intrigue and mystery, with uncertainty over people's motives and being surprised or even shocked sometimes by their actions. In the same way that we have found it difficult to be certain about who is intending what in our discussion of this text, we are often puzzled and find it hard to make sense of what happens around us. This does not mean that the Lord is not in control! Sometimes critical situations that appear to be at odds with God's great purposes will turn out to be crucial for the path of life the Lord has for us. I think it highly unlikely that Rebekah thought her panic response to help Jacob obtain his father's blessing would be revealed in God's Holy Word. Neither is it likely that Isaac would have wanted his less than happy favouritism of Esau, a man who would eventually cause real trouble for God's people, broadcast to the world!

## 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*

In what situations of life to you find it difficult to keep a focus on the Lord's overall will for your life? This is a tough question for each of us, but one which it may be wise for us to consider from time to time. Like all troublesome issues of life and faith, talking about these things can be a start; but if we can bring them to the Lord prayerfully and seek the Godly counsel of those who have discernment, then we can find the bigger picture we need in order to find peace.

## Final Prayer

Lord of love and power and grace and strength; fill our minds with Your Holy Spirit to inspire us with Your vision, Your purpose, Your plans and Your eternal future. As we open ourselves up to You, grant us peace and take away our fears. Through Jesus Christ we pray; AMEN

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. If you are in a group, discuss what you consider to be the truth about Rebekah's motives in this incident.
2. Discuss also what you consider to be the truth about Isaac's motives.
3. Look again at the blessing Isaac gives in this passage. What other passages of scripture does it link with?

## Prayer

We call on You, Lord God, our merciful heavenly Father, to show Your love to all who need your healing touch today; those who are ill, those whose lives are trapped by permanent or chronic conditions, those who may be dying or fear death, and all those who cry out to You because of their suffering. You know them better than we do; prompt us to help wherever we can, and be gracious to all these who suffer, we pray. AMEN

## Further Suggestions for Prayer

### Weekly Theme: the Church's task of Mission

Pray for the Lord to raise up people who will inspire the Church to boldness and confidence in proclaiming the Gospel in ways that show the care and passion of Jesus for all people.

Pray also for the many ways in which the people of God demonstrate the love of God to the world; and pray for your own church and its witness to the neighbourhood in which it is set.

## Meditation

Your Word, Lord God, is like a two-edged sword,  
Bringing the sharpness of truth which convicts the soul:

Your Wisdom, Lord God, is like an ever ready pen,  
Writing truth into the hearts and minds of those who listen:

Your Spirit, Lord God, is like a powerful wind,  
Blowing fresh air and new life into sinful, tired lives:

Your Salvation, Lord God, is like a safety helmet,  
Giving defence from evil yet offering clear vision of the world:

Your Glory, Lord God, is like a magnificent vision,  
A promise from You; a gift, and a taste of things to come:

Your Love, Lord God, is like nothing this world can offer,  
It's embrace is complete; unmerited, free, and everlasting:

Your Presence, Lord God, is all these things and so much more!

## Bible Study - Genesis 27:18-29

<sup>18</sup> So Jacob went in to his father, and said, 'My father'; 'Yes, my son,' he replied. 'Which one of my sons are you?' <sup>19</sup> Jacob said to his father, 'I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; sit up now, and eat my game, so that you may bless me.' <sup>20</sup> But Isaac said to his son, 'How did you find this so quickly, my son?' He answered, 'Because the LORD your God gave me success.' <sup>21</sup> Then Isaac said to Jacob, 'Come close then, so that I may feel you, my son, so that I may know whether you are really my son Esau or not.' <sup>22</sup> So Jacob drew close to his father Isaac, who felt him and said, 'The voice belongs to Jacob, but the hands are those of Esau!' <sup>23</sup> So he did not recognize him, because the hands were hairy like those of Esau; so he blessed him. <sup>24</sup> 'Are you really my son Esau?' he asked, 'I am.' He answered.

<sup>25</sup> Then Isaac said, 'Come near to me, so that I may eat my son's food and give you my life's blessing.' So Jacob served him food, and he ate, and gave him wine, and he drank. <sup>26</sup> Then his father said to him, 'Come close and kiss me, my son.' <sup>27</sup> So he drew close to his father and kissed him; and Isaac caught the smell of his garments, and blessed him, and said,

'Ah, the smell of my son is like that of the open countryside that the LORD has blessed. <sup>28</sup> May God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the wealth of the earth, and an abundance of grain and wine. <sup>29</sup> Let peoples serve you, and nations give you respect. Be the master of your brothers, and may your mother's sons give you respect. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you!'

## Review

The story of Jacob's stealing of Esau's blessing continues, but is not what it seems. A plain reading of the text appears straightforward; Rebekah had plotted to enable her beloved Jacob to receive the blessing that Isaac had intended to give privately to his favoured son Esau. The passage today highlights the dramatic tension of what happened as Jacob put his mother's plan into action and successfully received a blessing from his father. But if you read yesterday's full Bible study, then you will know that everything was not as simple as that! Isaac was indeed getting old, but all this happened 80 years before he actually died (35:28), and he did not follow normal practice for the formal inheritance of a wealthy man of those days (e.g. see Abraham, 25:1-11). This whole event was either intended by Isaac as a private blessing for his favourite son, or Isaac was attempting to pass his inheritance on to Esau by tricking Rebekah and Jacob! Who was deceiving who? It is certainly not yet clear!

Today's passage should be read carefully, to see whether it can shed any light on what was truly going on. Also, we should be wary because much of the discussion of this text in books and the preaching we hear about it, simply focus on the deception of Isaac by Rebekah and Jacob. No other possibility is usually considered.

Most of this text is a tense conversation between Jacob and Isaac. Isaac was uncertain about which son he was talking to, as is obvious from his frequent questions about who he was speaking to (27:18,21,22,24). At any moment we feel that Isaac, despite his failing eyesight, would surely realise that something was wrong and refuse to give the blessing, but he was finally convinced by three things; the feel of the hairy skin Rebekah placed on Jacob's hands (27:23), the smell of Esau's garments worn by Jacob (27:27) and the taste of the food Rebekah had prepared to imitate the cooking of Esau (27:25). Of the five senses, these three overcame the suspicions Isaac clearly had that he was not talking to his favourite son Esau, reflected in his caution that 'the voice belongs to Jacob' (27:22) and his failing eyesight. One might think that if Isaac was really that worried he could easily have sorted out who he was speaking to with some more searching questions. However, if Isaac was under the impression that he had given the instructions to Esau privately, then it would have been very distracting to suspect that he was speaking not to Esau but Jacob! How did he know?

At the end of our passage, Isaac conceded and gave a blessing to his son in the belief that it was Esau. Now Rebekah was concerned about two things, the inheritance of her husband's wealth, and the Covenant blessings of God; yet none of these were mentioned in the blessing Isaac gave! There was no direct connection between what Isaac said (27:27-29) and the Covenant, and neither did Isaac mention any apportionment of his wealth! It was a form of blessing for a firstborn with general declarations about wealth, dominance and respect, but it did not have the expected details about inheritance which made the whole story contentious in the first place! Who was deceiving who? We shall have to wait to see how the story concludes to reach a conclusion about this!

## Going Deeper

Today we will weigh up what this story says about Isaac and Rebekah by examining how the story fits with the rest of Scripture, and also by looking at some revealing words in the text. Then, if we look at what really happens to the Covenant promises, we find that they were passed on from Isaac to Jacob in a very different way than from Abraham to Isaac.

### ***Isaac, Rebekah, blessing, and the firstborn.***

In order to find some coherence in this story, it is best to stand back from what we can plainly read, and focus on other features of the text which may help us. We have already hinted that Isaac may well have been as deceptive as Rebekah within Genesis 27. Rebekah's deception is openly described, for she specifically acted to deceive Isaac to make sure that Jacob would receive God's blessing through Isaac. We might say that her actions were reasonable because they would ensure the fulfilment of prophecy spoken by the Lord at Jacob's birth (25:23). Isaac's deception was to attempt to pass on a blessing privately and without gathering the family, when his sight was failing but he was hardly near to death (according to Scriptural dates, see above). What else can help us decide how to interpret the strange features of today's text, and do they support any particular theory of what was going on.

We start by remembering that Rebekah was presented to us as a godly woman who was prepared to discern and follow the Lord's will (24:58f.) and who was loved passionately by Isaac (24:67; 26:8). When the twins Esau and Jacob were born, Esau was an adventurous youth, more like his mother, but favoured by his peaceable father, but the more staid Jacob was like his father, but was favoured by his mother! (25:27,28). The mix up of family emotions which this entailed became a recipe for disaster, bringing out the negative traits in all concerned. Isaac continued to favour the son whom God had not blessed (Esau) whilst it was Rebekah who defended the rights of God's chosen, Jacob. There are some family similarities here with Abraham's favouritism of Ishmael and Sarah's defence of Isaac her son. We can see this from a distance, but it was not apparent to Isaac! What great havoc is wreaked even amongst godly people, when personal choices and preferences are allowed to prevail over the Lord's!

Isaac, we recall, was presented in chapter 26 as a man of peace, yet capable of considerable wisdom which the Lord used to help him deal with the difficult circumstances that developed near Gerar and Beersheba where he set up his household. He was also presented to us as a worthy man of faith of whom the Philistine King Abimelech observed 'the Lord has been with you'! If Isaac was now attempting to exercise his own favouritism in the face of the Lord's will and in defiance of social convention, then we are now seeing a very different side of the man!

One reason why we should indeed be concerned about Isaac's intentions is the strong connection between the story of Abraham and Sarah, and of Isaac and Rebekah; we should expect Rebekah to enforce God's choice of heir, because Sarah did this with Isaac (21:8-14). Also, Rebekah's influence and importance is obvious in our text because of something we cannot see in an English translation of the Bible. The whole of this story (ch 27) is full of word repetitions which do not make sense if repeated in English; but they do in Hebrew, to make important points. Rebekah's name is often used (even where translations say 'she'), and her name is made up of three Hebrew consonants RBK. Two other words are also repeated frequently in the Hebrew, BRK meaning 'blessing' and BKR meaning 'firstborn'! You can see how the combination of these three words in this passage is something of a brain-teaser, as we are constantly slipping between one or the other of these words! The passage tells us that the Lord has given Rebekah the truth of the blessing of the firstborn (RBK ... BRK BKR!)

### ***Jacob, the blessing, and the Covenant***

All of this does not defame Isaac, it paints him as human, and unfortunately not the one who was in touch with the Lord's will at this point in the story. Like his father before him, he favoured the wrong child, and eventually has to accept this fact, years later (28:3f.).

It is possible that Isaac knew the Lord's blessing would have to be given to Jacob, but he wanted to give Esau his personal private blessing. If this was so, then Rebekah should perhaps be faulted for jumping to conclusions. In the midst of the family turmoil, she misread her husband's intention and was unnecessarily spurred into action in defence of Jacob. Also, if Isaac knew the day that would one day come, when he would have to follow the Lord's will and pass on the Covenant blessing to Jacob, it does make sense of Isaac's strange blessing at the end of today's passage. As we have seen, it does not mention the Covenant blessings (to compare, see 17:6f, or 22:17,18). Apart from speaking lovingly of the countryside, it had the effect of making the recipient (Jacob) senior in rank to all his brothers (27:29 – though we only know of Esau). Jacob thereby received the words of authority by which he would one day be entitled to the blessings of his father and the Covenant of God, but not at this point in time.

For now, we should focus on Jacob himself, as the recipient of this blessing by deception. What we know about him so far is not very complimentary. He has been described as a quiet son who stayed 'at home' (25:27) and he appears to have had little to do with his father, Isaac, the bearer of God's promises. We have been told by prophecy that he is God's choice as the next forefather of His people, but he seems an unlikely candidate. Now, in verse 20, Jacob said something significant to his father when asked why he had been able to find food quickly. Jacob replied with a 'white lie' ('... God gave me success') because of the deceptions involved, but in this reply he described the Lord to his father as 'your God'. He spoke as one who did not wish as yet to identify himself with the God of his fathers, Isaac and Abraham!

This was no small matter, and as we are talking about a grown man of 40 (26:34), his distance from the God of his fathers may have been one reason for Isaac's discontent with him as a son. We could also guess that perhaps Rebekah saw in Jacob a man who would one day reach the