

GENESIS 27:1-28:22

WAS REBEKAH'S DECEIT OF ISAAC NECESSARY?

In an attempt to try and catch us up this morning, we'll be covering Genesis Chapters 27 and Chapter 28. These are two chapters that are familiar to most of you. Just to remind you where we are in our study of Genesis – we just finished looking at the lives of Abraham and Isaac. Now the focus of Genesis shifts to the next generation, to Isaac's son Jacob. He will be the prominent character for the next nine chapters.

God providentially chose Jacob to be the child of promise – the one thru whom the Abrahamic Covenant will be passed. As flawed as Jacob turns out to be, He is still God's choice. In fact, if you will remember he was chosen before he was even born. Back in Genesis Chapter 25 the LORD told Rebekah when she was pregnant, "The older will serve the younger." This is the reverse of the normal practice of that day. Well, when it came time to give birth, Esau emerged first – he was the older – while Jacob, a close second, was the younger. So then according to God's pre-birth pronouncement, it was thru Jacob, and not the firstborn son Esau that God's covenant promises – the same ones that He made to Abraham and Isaac – would be fulfilled. This is God's sovereign plan and Rebekah knows this. God told her. Though it is never actually recorded in scripture it is safe to assume that at some point Rebekah shared this revelation she received from God on to her husband Isaac. Most certainly Isaac would have been aware of it.

Now, before I go any further let me ask you a question. Which overrides which? What God says or what man says?

What God says is all that matters. Keep this in mind as we go thru this story.

Jacob and Esau grow up and their parents each favor a different son. Isaac prefers Esau who is a rugged outdoorsman while Rebekah dotes on Jacob. Genesis Chapter 26 closes with a reminder of Esau's immoral

character. It states that Esau "made life bitter" for his parents (Genesis 26:35). This is where we left off last time. Esau grieved both Isaac and Rebekah with his self-seeking choices. He sold his birthright to Jacob for a pot of stew. Do you remember that? This was more than just short-sighted thinking on Esau's part. It showed Esau's utter contempt for his position as a firstborn heir. Then later, Esau ignored his parent's wishes and married not one, but two pagan Canaanite women. So that gives you a little background and gives you some insight into Esau's character moving forward into Genesis Chapter 27.

READ Genesis 27:1-4

It says in v 1 that "Isaac was old." At this point Isaac is 137 years of age. Not surprisingly his eyesight is failing him. Just a side note here... If Isaac is 137, how old are Jacob and Esau? Well, Isaac was 60 years old when they were born (Genesis 25:26) so that makes them 77 years old! Jacob and Esau are not young adults. They're older middle-aged men.

Isaac makes a request of Esau. It was something that Esau apparently had done for him frequently. Earlier we learned that "Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game (Genesis 25:28). Isaac asks Esau to bring him his favorite dish. When he does then he will give Esau his blessing. You see, in Isaac's mind he doesn't think he's going to live much longer. None of us knows for sure when we're going to die and neither did Isaac. He just thought he was about to die. As it turns out, Isaac will live for another 43 years!

READ Genesis 27:5-8

Rebekah concocts this plan which is described in verses 9 to 17. Let me summarize... Jacob is to dress in Esau's clothes and place hairy goatskins on his hands and neck and then she is going to skillfully prepare a substitute meal. Why is Rebekah going to all of this trouble? So that Jacob will receive Isaac's blessing instead of Esau, right? But here's the million-dollar question that has been debated by theologians for years: "Was Rebekah's deceit of Isaac necessary?" That's a really good question. So, let's think about it.

Who had God declared would receive the Abrahamic Covenant blessing? The younger son, Jacob. So then, no matter how you feel about Isaac and about his intention to bless Esau, what does it really matter? God has already spoken. God has ordained Jacob as the chosen heir of the promise. And we have already acknowledged that what GOD says overrides what man says. Right? So then, what she is doing is unnecessary.

Most commentaries will argue something to the effect that God used Rebekah's deceit of Isaac as the means of carrying out God's plan. Some will say that Isaac was wrong by ignoring God's choice of Jacob, that he intended to give the covenant blessing to Esau despite what God said. If that is the case then Rebekah's actions can be defended as she was helping God out and preventing the wrong person from receiving the blessing. Even our quarterly makes the comment that "God is able to accomplish His purposes thru flawed and even deceitful people." And while that statement may be generally true, He does do that, I don't think that's what is going on here.

I believe that this scheme was devised out of human reasoning, much like Abraham and Sarah's scheme with Hagar. Rebekah thinks she has to help God out. If she doesn't intervene then God's plan to bless Jacob with the Abrahamic Covenant will fail. Oh no! She has to right this wrong that is about to be committed! But I contend that it was all completely unnecessary. God's sovereign desires will still be accomplished regardless of what Isaac does. Isaac's blessing is not the controlling factor here.

READ Genesis 27:18-24

Jacob is a liar and a deceiver! Jacob goes to Isaac in the guise of being Esau and three times he lies to his father. Is lying a sin? Yes! But the plan works and Isaac, thinking he is blessing Esau, instead blesses Jacob. Isaac eats the meal prepared for him and then gives Jacob the following blessing that was intended for Esau...

READ Genesis 27:27-29

From these verses we see that for Esau, Isaac intended to give the blessings of wealth, power, and honor. We know that Isaac and Rebekah only had two sons so the words "brothers" and "your mother's sons" (both plural) in v 29 refer to other family members such as nephews, cousins, grandson and so forth. There is no separate Hebrew word for cousins.

As you read this blessing carefully you will notice what it does NOT contain. Remember those three elements of the covenantal blessing that God gave to Abraham in Genesis Chapter 12 and then reiterated later to Isaac in Genesis Chapter 26? I have been driving home these three key elements throughout the study of Genesis. They are: (1) land, "this land," speaking of the land of Canaan; (2) people, becoming a great nation; and (3) being a blessing to all the nations. These three elements are missing from this blessing. There is no reference to Abraham at all or to what God promised him. Now I agree that you see some references borrowed from the Abrahamic Covenant such as "Let peoples serve you" and "I will curse those who curse you, bless those who bless you." But you don't see those three key elements from the Abrahamic Covenant that I just mentioned.

Hey, I don't want you to feel too sorry for Esau. As we will see later in Genesis Chapter 33, Esau WILL in fact receive wealth, power and honor – those things that Isaac intended for Esau in the blessing he gave to Jacob instead. Esau gets blessed in the end. We will even see something shocking, which is, Jacob bowing down before Esau. These are some things that maybe you hadn't thought about before when you read this passage.

Well, back to our story...

READ Genesis 27:30-35

Esau is thinking that he's just been ripped off by Jacob and he's not happy about it at all!

READ Genesis 27:36

“He took away my birthright.” This is a lie. Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a pot of stew. That was a choice Esau made. Jacob didn’t steal the birthright from him.

READ Genesis 27:37-38

Isaac feels badly for Esau and so he gives him an obligatory blessing in v 39-40.

READ Genesis 27:41

Esau is so angry at Jacob that he wants to kill him. When Rebekah gets wind of this, she tells Jacob and for his own safety urges him to head northward to Mesopotamia, to Haran, to the house of Laban, Rebekah’s brother. “When Esau calms down I’ll send for you and you can come back.”

Sending Jacob away serves a dual purpose.

READ Genesis 27:42-45

First, the obvious one is that it protects Jacob from potential harm at the hand of a very angry Esau. But second, it leads Jacob to the place where he can potentially find a good wife from among the daughters of Laban. Basically, this follows the example of Abraham and Isaac who also found godly wives up in that same area.

READ Genesis 27:46

That takes us to Genesis Chapter 28. Jacob has packed his bags and is ready to head north.

READ Genesis 28:1-5

To Jacob, Isaac promises “the blessing of Abraham to you and your offspring.” This is of course a reference to the Abrahamic Covenant – to those three key elements discussed before. Just before Jacob leaves for Haran he receives the blessing that was intended for him all along as the covenant heir. Isaac knows that he is blessing Jacob. There is no deception this time. Let me say it one more time. The deceit of Rebekah and Jacob

was NOT necessary. God's sovereign plan would have been accomplished without it. God didn't need Rebekah's help. But it was the catalyst to get Jacob to move so that he could learn some important life lessons.

To drive home the contrast in the character differences between Jacob and Esau we have this next section.

READ Genesis 28:6-9

Esau rejects his parents' preference to take a wife from the daughters of his uncle Laban. We know this is what they want based on what they told Jacob earlier. Instead, what does Esau do? He chooses another foreign wife, the daughter of Ishmael, another one of Esau's uncles. Esau must know how much this action displeases Isaac and Rebekah, but he doesn't care. He does it anyway.

Meanwhile Jacob – he has left his home near Hebron and is traveling northward toward Mesopotamia, far away from the land of Canaan.

READ Genesis 28:10-15

In this dream God re-establishes the same promise to Jacob that He had made to Abraham and to Isaac. God adds one new thing – He promises that His presence will be with Jacob, which Jacob needed to hear being on his own.

READ Genesis 28:16-17

Out there in the middle of nowhere Jacob has this incredible worship experience with God.

READ Genesis 28:18-19

He names the place Bethel, meaning "house of God." Jacob sets up a stone to mark this special place. He consecrates Bethel to God. Years later when Jacob returns back home to the Promised Land, he will re-visit this very same sacred site.

READ Genesis 28:20-22

Jacob commits himself to God. Alright, so it's a conditional commitment, but at least it's a step in the right direction. At least now he is willing to follow God. He vows to be faithful if God will do these things for him. He promises the LORD a tenth of everything that God gives him. You think that maybe Jacob is a changed man. Well, we will see whether he is or not.

Application for Genesis Chapters 27 and 28

- You cannot thwart the ultimate purpose of God either knowingly or unknowingly. God had a purpose for Jacob and for Esau and He also has a purpose for us.
- Godly ends do not justify ungodly means. God did not need Rebekah's and Jacob's deception of Isaac to carry out His will.
- Our sins, our wrong actions have consequences. Sometimes those consequences are long, sad and painful. Jacob was forced to be away from his home for 20 years. Jacob and Esau had a strained relationship. Rebekah never got to see her favorite son Jacob again.
- God's promise to Jacob is His promise to us as believers: "I will not leave you until I have done what I promised to you." What has God promised to us that we haven't seen fulfilled yet? He will keep us secure in our salvation throughout this life; He will be with us whenever we die and are ushered into the presence of God; He will be with us until our future resurrection takes place. So then, this offers us believers great hope that the best He has planned for us is yet to come!