

Genesis 27-28:9 • A Family Divided

Introduction

Is it a comfort to find that Scripture is replete with examples of family issues, often in the same character as our own family issues, or concerning that this is the general state of what is supposed to be the closest and most important personal relationships? Some of the most common issues documented in God's Word where family relationships are concerned are provided in the lives of some of the most important and spiritual figures, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon and so forth. The common point of failure seems to reside with a personal lack of faith in God; when we fail to trust His Word and ways, it is always reflected in our personal dealings with others in general and specifically with family. One of the toughest behavioral issues we have to overcome is in living out our Christianity to the same degree and quality within our own household as it is exhibited to the world outside.

¹Now it came about, when Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see, that he called his older son Esau and said to him, "My son."

And he said to him, "Here I am."

²Isaac said, "Behold now, I am old and I do not know the day of my death. ³Now then, please take your gear, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me; ⁴and prepare a savory dish for me such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, so that my soul may bless you before I die."

[Read v.1-4] Isaac

Q: How do we already know that this is a home with problems?

A: In Gen. 25:28 we were told, "Now Isaac loved Esau, because he had a taste for game, but Rebekah loved Jacob." It would seem that the parents were split over the twin brothers early on, and that Isaac's love in particular was a carnal, fleshly love because of what Esau did for him.

Q: Isaac says he is old and does not know the day of his death. How close to the end of his life is he at this point?

A: He is approximately 137 years old, and according to Gen. 35:28 he lived to be 180—another 43 years from this point in time.

Q: So why is he so anxious to wrap up his affairs?

A: He is operating on his feelings of being old and having lost his sight.

Q: What is a scriptural example of passing along a blessing to two brothers where the younger is elevated over the older?

A: When Joseph brought his sons to Jacob, and even though Jacob was similarly blind at the time, he was divinely led to switch the order.

Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." So he said, "Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them." Now the eyes of Israel were so dim from age that he could not see. Then Joseph brought them close to him, and he kissed them and embraced them. Israel said to Joseph, "I never expected to see your face, and behold, God has let me see your children as well." Then Joseph took them from his knees, and bowed with his face to the ground. Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel's left, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel's right, and brought them close to him. But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, crossing his hands, although Manasseh was the firstborn. (Gen. 48:9-14)

Q: How does this passage reveal that Isaac is probably not operating in accordance with God's will?

1. He neither receives direction from the Lord to do this, nor does he inquire of the Lord to confirm this is the time and place for this action.
2. He is guided by the desire to satiate his earthly appetite, operating according to his fleshly senses and desires.

3. He seems to have forgotten what was stated by the Lord before his sons' birth, "The LORD said to her, 'Two nations are in your womb; And two peoples will be separated from your body; And one people shall be stronger than the other; And the older shall serve the younger.'" (Gen. 25:23)

Application: Problems inevitably ensue when God's will is subordinated to earthly appetites and desires. It often leads to replacing God's plan with our own or forgetting about His entirely.

⁵Rebekah was listening while Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game to bring home, ⁶Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "Behold, I heard your father speak to your brother Esau, saying, ⁷'Bring me some game and prepare a savory dish for me, that I may eat, and bless you in the presence of the Lord before my death.' ⁸Now therefore, my son, listen to me as I command you. ⁹Go now to the flock and bring me two choice young goats from there, that I may prepare them as a savory dish for your father, such as he loves. ¹⁰Then you shall bring it to your father, that he may eat, so that he may bless you before his death."

¹¹Jacob answered his mother Rebekah, "Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man and I am a smooth man. ¹²Perhaps my father will feel me, then I will be as a deceiver in his sight, and I will bring upon myself a curse and not a blessing."

¹³But his mother said to him, "Your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, get them for me."

¹⁴So he went and got them, and brought them to his mother; and his mother made savory food such as his father loved. ¹⁵Then Rebekah took the best garments of Esau her elder son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. ¹⁶And she put the skins of the young goats on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. ¹⁷She also gave the savory food and the bread, which she had made, to her son Jacob.

[Read v.5-17] Rebekah

Q: What is wrong with Rebekah? Why is she intent on carrying out this scheme?

A: She has either completely forgotten God's promise personally provided to her regarding her sons, or more likely is not acting out of faith. Like Isaac, she is equally caught up in worldly behavior which caters to her own appetite and desires.

Application: In the same character as her husband Isaac, Rebekah is either replacing God's plan with her own or forgetting about His entirely. Responding to someone's carnal actions with our own carnal actions is never the right response.

Q: Why doesn't she love both of her children equally?

A: As pointed out previously in Gen. 25:28, each of the parents had chosen one of their sons over the other. This behavior has now had many years to become firmly entrenched and follow them all the way into adulthood.

Q: What is the result of Rebekah's lack of consideration for Esau?

A: She is intent on seeing that Esau is left out and not willing to trust in the Lord for the proper outcome, even though the Lord had told her He had a plan for both which would favor her favorite. It's not just limited to advancing Jacob, but denying Esau.

Q: How can we be sure that Rebekah is no longer operating with a right spiritual character but, like Isaac, giving in to her fleshly, carnal nature?

A: The answer the Lord provided Isaac and Rebekah as to the struggle between the twins in the womb and the future reversal of their roles came about as the result of Rebekah inquiring of the Lord. In this case she is taking these actions completely on her own.

Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived. But the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is so, why then am I this way?" So she went to inquire of the Lord. (Gen. 25:21-22)

Point: Rather than seeking God's counsel on how to react to Isaac's actions based on **his** own carnal behavior, Rebekah counters with **her** own carnal behavior. Neither is truly trusting in God.

Q: How do Rebekah's approach and practices find fertile ground where Jacob is concerned?

A: This behavior is repeatedly found in her son Jacob not just at this time, but in many of his dealings with others going forward. Her carnal ways become his carnal ways.

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Q: How will her statement, “Your curse be on me” turn out to almost be prophetic?

A: Jacob may have received the blessing, but his 20+ year departure means he will never see his mother alive again. Both of them will have to deal with the consequences of what they have done.

Q: How do we know that Rebekah was a really great cook? What does this reveal something spiritually greater about her character and actions?

A: While Esau “went to the field to hunt for game”, (v.5) she counterfeits the dish with the meat of “two choice young goats”. (v.10) The ability to substitute goat meat for Jacob’s expectation for venison, combined with the instructions for how Jacob could deceive his father, all combine to reveal her as the ultimate deceiver.

Application: Knowing God’s plan is not a license to make it come true according to our own desires and timing; it still requires obedience and trust in Him regardless of the circumstances.

¹⁸Then he came to his father and said, “My father.”

And he said, “Here I am. Who are you, my son?”

¹⁹Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn; I have done as you told me. Get up, please, sit and eat of my game, that you may bless me.”

²⁰Isaac said to his son, “How is it that you have it so quickly, my son?”

And he said, “Because the Lord your God caused it to happen to me.”

²¹Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Please come close, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not.” ²²So Jacob came close to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, “The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” ²³He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau’s hands; so he blessed him. ²⁴And he said, “Are you really my son Esau?”

And he said, “I am.”

²⁵So he said, “Bring it to me, and I will eat of my son’s game, that I may bless you.” And he brought it to him, and he ate; he also brought him wine and he drank.

²⁶Then his father Isaac said to him, “Please come close and kiss me, my son.” ²⁷So he came close and kissed him; and when he smelled the smell of his garments, he blessed him and said,

“See, the smell of my son
Is like the smell of a field which the
Lord has blessed;

[Read v.18-29] Jacob

Q: What is Jacob’s basic problem when it comes to God’s plan for his life?

A: In spite of what the Lord revealed through Rebekah, he listens to the messenger rather than the Author of the message itself.

Point: This is a common behavior when believers are found to have adopted a false teaching or belief—they begin to elevate and follow a messenger who replaces or reinterprets the message of God’s Word with their own.

Q: How is Jacob a perfect example of the definition of a “hypocrite”?

A: What he says—in other words, his voice, does not conform with what he does—his fake appearance. Isaac is initially skeptical, knowing that Jacob’s voice does not match the counterfeit presentation of his physical attempt to appear as his brother.

Q: How does Jacob use his voice to not just misrepresent himself as his brother, but to actually engage in deceit? What are the lies which he specifically offers?

1. “...I am Esau your firstborn...” (v.19 & 24) He lies about his identity.
2. “...I have done as you told me.” (v.19) He did not hunt for game nor prepare the dish himself.
3. “...eat of my game...” (v.19) It is not venison but goat meat.
4. “...Because the LORD your God caused it to happen to me.” (v.20) He falsely attributes the circumstances to God’s will to explain away Isaac’s doubt.

Point: This last deception is one of the most commonly repeated tactics in the whole of history, to claim a divine intervention or involvement when there is none. Believers are often taken in by this because they do not investigate or test it against Scripture because they don’t believe someone would risk telling such a big, direct lie about God Himself.

Q: What else takes place in all manner of deceit which sounds very familiar where deception and betrayal are concerned?

A: In the same character as Judas who betrays Christ with a kiss, Jacob’s deception is made complete by kissing his father. (v.26-27) Isaac will once again be taken in by his fleshly senses.

²⁸Now may God give you of the dew of heaven,
And of the fatness of the earth,
And an abundance of grain and new wine;
²⁹May peoples serve you,
And nations bow down to you;
Be master of your brothers,
And may your mother's sons bow down to you.
Cursed be those who curse you,
And blessed be those who bless you."

³⁰Now it came about, as soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had hardly gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting. ³¹Then he also made savory food, and brought it to his father; and he said to his father, "Let my father arise and eat of his son's game, that you may bless me."

³²Isaac his father said to him, "Who are you?"

And he said, "I am your son, your firstborn, Esau."

³³Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, "Who was he then that hunted game and brought it to me, so that I ate of all of it before you came, and blessed him? Yes, and he shall be blessed."

³⁴When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me, even me also, O my father!"

³⁵And he said, "Your brother came deceitfully and has taken away your blessing."

³⁶Then he said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob, for he has supplanted me these two times? He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing." And he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?"

Q: What is particularly ironic about Jacob's deception involving the killing and substitution of a goat? How will this return as a major consequence later in his own life?

A: It parallels the deception his own sons will employ to deceive him as to what they really did to their brother Joseph. They will bring to him Joseph's tunic stained with a goat's blood so as to deceive Jacob as to what they actually did to Joseph, much in the character of Jacob's deception with his own father where Esau is concerned.

So they took Joseph's tunic, and slaughtered a male goat and dipped the tunic in the blood; (Gen. 37:31)

Q: What will this scheme cost Jacob?

A: In addition to the 20 years of separation, and the many similar problems experienced while living with Laban, he will live in fear of his brother and the eventual comeuppance Jacob believes he will experience for what he has done. Jacob knows that what he did was wrong in **both** the eyes of God and man.

Application: *While man can be deceived, God will never be fooled by our schemes; the more intense our efforts, the greater the consequences. Hypocrisy is the ultimate rejection of God's Word and ways.*

[Read v.30-40] Esau

Q: Why do you suppose that Isaac's initial reaction to the revelation of what actually took place was that he "trembled violently"?

A: Isaac knew that the situation could not be undone; even though Jacob had obtained the blessing under false pretenses, it could not be reversed. "Your brother came deceitfully and has taken away your blessing". (v.35) Jacob may be more upset with his own personal failure than with Jacob's deception.

Point: *There are other biblical examples which teach that one must follow through when one's word is given even if the other party uses deceit, such as when the Gibeonites tricked Israel into a treaty of non-aggression (Josh. 9), or when a vow to the Lord turned out to have devastating consequences, such as that of Jephthah. (Judges 11:29-40)*

Q: But how do we know for sure that Esau is not simply an innocent bystander in all that has happened?

A: First of all, he acknowledges having given away his birthright (v.36), but the writer of Hebrews further documents that while he was sorry to be experiencing the circumstances, he was not actually remorseful to the point that it led to repentance:

Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears. (Heb. 12:14-17)

Q: In v.35-37, what are the significant things which Isaac highlights as now belonging to Jacob?

1. "...your blessing." (v.35)

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³⁷But Isaac replied to Esau, "Behold, I have made him your master, and all his relatives I have given to him as servants; and with grain and new wine I have sustained him. Now as for you then, what can I do, my son?"

³⁸Esau said to his father, "Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father." So Esau lifted his voice and wept.

³⁹Then Isaac his father answered and said to him,

"Behold, away from the fertility of the earth shall be your dwelling, And away from the dew of heaven from above.

⁴⁰By your sword you shall live, And your brother you shall serve; But it shall come about when you become restless, That you will break his yoke from your neck."

⁴¹So Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob."

⁴²Now when the words of her elder son Esau were reported to Rebekah, she sent and called her younger son Jacob, and said to him, "Behold your brother Esau is consoling himself concerning you by planning to kill you. ⁴³Now therefore, my son, obey my voice, and arise, flee to Haran, to my brother Laban! ⁴⁴Stay with him a few days, until your brother's fury subsides, ⁴⁵until your brother's anger against you subsides and he forgets what you did to him. Then I will send and get you from there. Why should I be bereaved of you both in one day?"

⁴⁶Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am tired of living because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife from the daughters of Heth, like these, from the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?"

^{28:1}So Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and charged him, and said to him, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. ²Arise, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father; and from there

2. "...I have made him your master...all his relatives I have given to him as servants..." (v.37)
3. "...and with grain and new wine I have sustained him." (v.37)

Application: God holds us responsible where our own speech and actions are concerned, even if they are elicited by unrighteousness behavior. We are accountable for our own words and deeds even when the other party disregards their own.

[Read v.41-28:5] The Family

Observation: We must pay careful attention to all the references of time, particularly in Genesis when someone's age is specified, otherwise we will mistakenly believe each event is taking place right after the other without realizing that years or even decades separate them.

Q: How old was Jacob and Esau when this exchange occurred between Isaac and Rebekah concerning their taking wives?

A: Approximately 77 years old.

Point: First of all, this shows how long these family dynamics have been building over a very long time; secondly, it may also suggest another area where no one was seeking the Lord's direction. Ultimately their decision is based once again on feelings and a sense of desperation rather than in the course of inquiring of the Lord.

Q: What might be telling about the way Rebekah phrases the "problem" Jacob is having with his brother Esau?

A: She not only advises Jacob to flee "until your brother's anger against you subsides", but additionally until "he forgets what you did to him". (v.45) It's as if Rebekah had no role in the deception and Jacob acted alone. At this stage, Esau's rage seems to be directed solely at Jacob.

Q: How long would it be until Esau's rage subsides to the point that Rebekah calls for Jacob to return?

A: As mentioned previously, Rebekah will die before being able to fulfill this promise. This is one of the reasons Jacob will be so fearful of Esau when he once again flees, in that case from Laban back toward Esau. Jacob never received a report from his mother that there was any change in Esau's disposition and will operate under the assumption that nothing has changed and most likely has grown even worse.

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take to yourself a wife from the daughters of Laban your mother's brother. ³May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. ⁴May He also give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your descendants with you, that you may possess the land of your sojournings, which God gave to Abraham."

⁵Then Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Paddan-aram to Laban, son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau.

⁶Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-aram to take to himself a wife from there, and that when he blessed him he charged him, saying, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan," ⁷and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Paddan-aram. ⁸So Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan displeased his father Isaac; ⁹and Esau went to Ishmael, and married, besides the wives that he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth.

Q: Did Rebekah deceive Isaac again by not telling him about Esau's plot and instead raising the issue of marriage?

A: While what she said was probably most certainly true, there is still an element of deliberate omission. She is not telling the whole truth where either of their sons are concerned.

Q: Why did Rebekah need to secure Isaac's personal approval to send Jacob away like this?

A: If Jacob simply up and fled, it was very possible that it would be interpreted that he has abandoned his inheritance and all that came with it in the course of Isaac's blessing. Rebekah is once again operating in a fleshly manner to retain the fruits of their deception.

Q: What might be interesting about the blessing Isaac expresses in v.4?

A: Isaac hopes that God will convey the same blessing upon Jacob which He bestowed on both Isaac and Abraham.

Q: How does this blessing fit into the overall importance of the story?

A: It is the only blessing which really matters, directly coming from God and passed along to Jacob's descendants along with the Promised Land. It was not Isaac's to give, and could have been provided to Jacob by God in the same way it was directly revealed by God to Abraham and Isaac, even if he had not been deceived into blessing the wrong son.

Q: What may be ironic about Jacob having to spend decades in a place named "Paddan-aram"?

A: It can be translated as "their ransom is high". Multiple ransoms is essentially what he is going to have to pay not just for his own life, but famously for each of his wives. In fact, when Jacob comes back still fearing Esau's vengeance, Jacob will send multiple "ransoms" ahead of him in attempt to appease Esau.

Application: No human conniving or attempted manipulation can bestow God's will and blessing on another. The blessing Rebekah and Jacob tricked out of Isaac was not the more important one which needed to emanate from God. Man's ways are not God's ways.

[Read v.6-9] The Grudge

Q: His good intentions aside, what did Isaac once again do for Jacob which he did not do for Esau?

A: Isaac blessed Jacob but did not reciprocate for Esau.

Q: So what did a 91 year old "teenager" naturally do?

A: He saw that "Jacob had obeyed his father" in this, so Esau naturally rebelled to marry those who "displeased his father Isaac".

Q: What additional past family problem has now had time to fester, grow and become the ultimate stumbling block?

A: Just as Abraham's sons Ishmael and Isaac took different paths, so does Isaac's sons Jacob and Esau. Ishmael has become such a part of the Canaanites that he can fully seduce Esau with the same. This is but the beginning of a repeated theme of deeper spiritual warfare and deception which runs through Scripture.

Application: *Unaddressed sin always leads to more sin; rebellion always leads to greater and more grievous disobedience. The worst casualties are most often the loved ones closest to us.*

Overall Application

It is interesting to note that although God will both choose and yet individually call not only Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that they still had to choose to respond and live in accordance with God's Word and ways. Neither they nor any of their descendants—either ethnic or spiritual, are automatically qualified without choosing to respond out of obedience. When they do not follow through, the Lord's discipline always ensues along with the appropriate consequences. In the end, it is almost always those who are closest to us who become the collateral damage of our own misbehavior.