

Lesson 2 | September 10, 2023

Isaac Blesses Jacob

Study Text: Genesis 27:1–46

Central Truth: God’s plan for humanity will be fully realized despite the sinfulness of people.

Key Verse: Genesis 25:23

The LORD said unto [Rebekah], Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger (KJV).

The LORD told [Rebekah], “The sons in your womb will become two nations. From the very beginning, the two nations will be rivals. One nation will be stronger than the other; and your older son will serve your younger son” (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will examine the account of Jacob stealing Esau’s blessing through deceit.
- Students will recognize God’s plans prevail despite human failures.
- Students will search their hearts to ensure they are not allowing or rationalizing deception in their lives.

Introducing the Study

Say: Few emotions are more powerful than greed, jealousy, and resentment. Unchecked, they can lead people to do almost unimaginable things. Today’s lesson examines a familiar Bible story, reminding us that our own human thoughts and desires can sometimes keep us from fully trusting God. Yet His plans and promises will always come to pass in the end.

Opening Activity—Sibling Rivalry

Ask: Have you ever been part of a sibling rivalry? How did this rivalry manifest itself? Kids might compete to see who succeeds at sports or gets better grades. Even adults might joke with their brothers and sisters about their own accomplishments. But not all sibling rivalries are friendly. In fact, they can be harmful, even dividing families.

Say: Today’s lesson looks at one of the most familiar sibling rivalries in history. The struggle between Jacob and Esau started before they were even born. It eventually became so heated, it split their family in two. However, as ugly as the rivalry was, it did not thwart God’s covenant plan and promises. We can trust God to work out His plan in our lives too. Our job is to accept that plan—whatever it may be. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As we read through the narratives of the Old Testament, it can be difficult to view the characters as everyday human beings with the same kinds of emotions, passions, and flaws we struggle with. But when we come to the story of Isaac's two sons, human frailty takes center stage.

Part 1—Plot to Deceive Isaac

Isaac Plans to Bless Esau

Genesis 27:1–4

Say: The Book of Genesis contains account after account of conflict and deception within family relationships, particularly siblings: Cain and Abel (4:1–8); Noah's sons (9:20–27); Isaac and Ishmael (21:8–10); and Joseph and his brothers (chapters 37–50). This ongoing enmity was foreshadowed at the Fall: Eve's offspring would be at war with the serpent's offspring (see 3:15) throughout history, pitting Satan and his forces against the family of God—particularly His Son. Although human conflict was the inevitable result of the Fall, God's plan will triumph. We see this reality on display in the story of Jacob and Esau. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Genesis 27 must be viewed in light of 25:19–34. God had blessed Isaac and Rebekah with twins. God revealed to Rebekah that the elder would serve the younger (25:23). God's plan diverged from the most basic cultural norms of that time. The elder son received the inheritance and held the favored position in the family. Yet throughout Genesis, God fulfilled His plan in ways that ran counter to society's expectations. The descendants of Adam and Eve's third son, Seth, would be chosen as God's people (chapters 4–5). Isaac was chosen over his older brother, Ishmael (17:18–19). Joseph and Judah were both chosen over their older brothers (37:3; 49:8). Even Rachel was chosen over her older sister, Leah (29:16–18). The message is clear: God's favor is not based on natural rights but His sovereign and eternal purposes.

In Genesis 27:1–4, Isaac was near death. Nearly blind, he called for his elder son, Esau, to receive the fatherly blessing—his birthright—after preparing Isaac's favorite meal. The birthright included a double portion of the inheritance and signified a position of honor in the family. Although it was reserved for the eldest son, it could be transferred. In fact, just such a transfer had happened when Esau foolishly traded his birthright to Jacob in exchange for a meal (25:29–34). Scripture makes it clear Esau “showed contempt for his rights as the firstborn” (verse 34, NLT) and that God intended for Jacob to receive those rights (verse 23). Yet Isaac still determined to give the birthright to Esau, his favorite son.

Discuss

? What are some reasons God may have chosen to bring about His plans through unexpected means?

? Describe a time when God's plans surprised you. What caused you to be surprised? What did you learn from the experience?

Rebekah Plots for Jacob

Genesis 27:5–13

Say: We often hear people lament the dysfunction of family relationships today, but this is nothing new. Isaac and Rebekah had been childless, just like Abraham and Sarah, but God intervened to give them children—twin sons (see Genesis 25:21–28). But then Isaac and Rebekah’s parental favoritism not only aggravated the conflict between their children, but it also led to division in their own relationship. Isaac wanted to bless Esau over Jacob despite God’s plan. Rebekah conspired to deceive her husband and secure the blessing for Jacob, no matter what. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Genesis 27 is certainly not the Israelites’ finest hour. We know this was the family through whom all the world would be blessed, but their divisions were deep. In verses 5–6, Isaac spoke to “his son” Esau, while Rebekah spoke to “her son” Jacob. Rebekah had overheard Isaac’s plan to bless Esau, so she quickly acted to exploit her husband’s blindness and frailty. She planned for Jacob to receive the birthright before Isaac even knew what had happened (verses 7–10).

Rebekah may have been distressed by Isaac’s plan to grant Esau the birthright without Jacob present. This demonstrated a clear lack of respect for the process, since both sons would receive a portion of their father’s blessing. Yet Rebekah’s ruse was more destructive than any oversight, intentional though it may have been.

Knowing her husband could become suspicious, Rebekah plotted for Jacob to play the part of Esau convincingly. Two goat hides and a delicious meal would give Isaac all the sensory evidence he needed to hand the birthright to his younger son. Jacob had concerns about the plan. His mother had placed him in a difficult position (verses 11–12). Should he honor his mother’s command or his father’s will? In the end, his greatest concern was that his father would curse him, passing down a public reprimand or word of contempt that would follow him and result in misfortune or even death. Rebekah responded to Jacob’s concerns in a way that might seem startling at first, calling the curse to fall upon herself.

It was a grievous wrong to deceive a blind, dying man in this way, much less one’s father and husband. Rebekah knew the plan of God and recognized Jacob should receive the birthright, but she brought about God’s will using ungodly tactics. She is scarcely mentioned after Genesis 27. Her death is not even recorded (though her nurse Deborah’s death is recorded in 35:8). In the end, this was another example of the way God honors His promise despite the behavior of His chosen people.

Resource Packet Item 1: Family Dysfunction

Distribute the worksheet and discuss it together as a class. Be sensitive to any hurts and issues students may be facing, reminding them the body of Christ can help each other work through issues of dysfunction as we follow the Lord together.

Discuss

? What are some ways Christians might be tempted to take matters into their own hands when they feel God’s plans are threatened?
? How do you respond when your circumstances seem to be at odds with God’s plans? What are some right and wrong responses?

Part 2—Isaac Deceived; Jacob Blessed

Jacob’s Deception Is Effective

Genesis 27:14–24

Say: The Scottish author Sir Walter Scott wrote, “Oh, what a tangled web we weave, When first we practise to deceive!”¹ Lies rarely stand alone. They soon require more lies and deception to cover them. Sadly, this is what happens in Genesis 27:14–24 when a frail, blind Isaac is deceived by his wife and son. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jacob did as his mother directed, killing two young goats. After Rebekah prepared the meal, she dressed her younger son in Esau’s clothes, then covered his arms and neck with the skin of the goats. This would leave Jacob’s skin feeling like that of Esau, who was a rugged, hairy man, in contrast to the fairer Jacob. Finally, Rebekah gave Jacob the food and sent him to his father (verses 14–18).

Jacob quickly identified himself as Esau to his father, emphasizing he was Isaac’s “firstborn son.” Jacob’s lie grew in response to his father’s question: How could it be Esau had finished his hunting so quickly? Jacob answered, “The LORD your God put it in my path!” (verse 20, NLT).

Now Jacob was not only deceiving his father but also adding blasphemy to his offenses by using the name of the Lord in vain, using the Name for wrong purposes. It is also noteworthy that Jacob referred to God as “the LORD your God.” Scholars note that Jacob did not refer to the Lord as being *his* God until after encountering Him in a dream during the journey to Haran (28:20–22). It was only after the promise is fulfilled in him that Jacob worshiped the Lord.

Back in chapter 27, Isaac’s suspicion of the situation was palpable (verses 21–24). First, he asked to touch his son to confirm that he was, in fact, Esau. He also noticed his son’s voice did not sound like Esau’s voice. But Isaac ignored these clues. After all, his son’s hands felt like Esau’s hands. He asked one more time: “Are you really my son Esau?” And Jacob answered, “Yes, I am” (verse 24, NLT). Sadly, Jacob and Rebekah’s deception polluted this powerful moment of promise and blessing.

Resource Packet Item 2: Deception

¹ Sir Walter Scott, *Marmion: A Tale of Flodden Field*, Canto Sixth, The battle, stanza xvii, Project Gutenberg, accessed April 19, 2022, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4010/4010-h/4010-h.htm>.

Distribute the worksheet and discuss the ways Christians are sometimes tempted to cut corners to achieve certain results. Encourage students to ponder the personal reflection questions on their own this week.

Discuss

? Sometimes even Christians are tempted to believe the end justifies the means. How can we know when we have crossed that line?

? Why is it dangerous to compromise in order to bring about right results?

Isaac Blesses Jacob

Genesis 27:25–29

Say: Have you ever seen God take something flawed or regrettable and turn it into something that perfectly aligns with His purpose? That is what happens in Genesis 27:25–29 when Jacob and Rebekah’s ruse succeeds. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Genesis 27:25, Isaac—having been persuaded that Jacob was Esau—asked to enjoy a celebratory meal with his son. After partaking of the food and wine Jacob gave him, Isaac asked “Esau” to come closer and kiss him. This paternal kiss was not merely a sign of affection, but constituted an important part of the ritual. Intended to demonstrate loyalty, it makes the scene even more sadly ironic.

Isaac smelled “the outdoors” on Jacob as he leaned closer (verse 27, NLT), since he was wearing Esau’s clothes. The smell and the feel of the fur on Jacob’s arms helped to convince Isaac he was speaking with Esau. Although Isaac understood the value of the birthright blessing, he took surprisingly little care to ensure it was delivered properly. As a result, he blessed Jacob (verses 28–29).

This blessing from father to son was much more than a formality. It was not a wish, hope, or prayer; it had legal force. Because God had chosen this family to bring about His covenant, Isaac’s blessing would be prophetic and spoken with God-given authority. Give special attention to the words of this blessing. It refers to all God had conferred upon Abraham: prosperity, dominion, protection, and the promise to bless all the nations of the earth through him and his descendants. This blessing was bestowed on Jacob despite his deception. God’s plan would move forward, even through flawed, fallen people.

Resource Packet Item 3: Sins of the Fathers

Distribute the worksheet and discuss it in class. Note that even the patriarchs struggled to fully trust the Lord. How might we learn from their examples?

Discuss

? Some Christians believe past failures disqualify them from taking part in God’s plan for the world. How can Isaac and Jacob’s story give them hope?

? What would you say to a Christian who is overwhelmed with discouragement over past failures?

Part 3—A Deceiver Revealed

Esau Receives an “Anti-blessing”

Genesis 27:30–40

Say: Although Jacob had received his blessing, this dramatic scene was far from over. Esau soon returned from his hunting trip. The conflict that ensued had long-lasting consequences. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Mere moments after Jacob had received the blessing and departed from his father, Esau, who had returned from the hunt, brought the food he prepared and announced: “Sit up, my father, and eat my wild game so you can give me your blessing” (Genesis 27:31, NLT). Isaac responded: “Who are you?” (verse 32, NLT). A short time earlier, he had shrugged off his concerns when Jacob did not sound like Esau during the critical moments of the blessing. Now he fell into utter confusion at the sound of Esau’s voice.

One can sense Isaac’s deep emotion after Esau identified himself. A beautiful family event had turned tragic. Yet in that chaotic, emotional moment when Isaac “began to tremble uncontrollably,” he demonstrated a mental clarity he had not shown with Jacob: “I blessed him just before you came. And yes, that blessing must stand!” (verse 33, NLT). Isaac knew God’s will had been accomplished, although his own plans were dashed. Isaac may have had the wrong son in view, but he spoke the blessing of the firstborn over Jacob. It carried the full force of a vow spoken before the Lord.

Esau was devastated. Verses 34–36 reveal a range of emotions: bitterness, false hope, fury, and desperation. Yet the reality is, he had despised his own birthright and given it to Jacob in the first place.

Isaac responded to Esau’s outburst with blunt truth: Jacob had received all the blessing entailed, including his descendants’ dominance over Esau’s line. Nothing remained to be given. Yet Esau continue to plead and weep.

Finally, Isaac answered. But his words to Esau were far from a blessing. In fact, some scholars refer to them as an “anti-blessing” that would follow Esau’s lineage for many generations, even centuries. To understand its meaning, we need to look back at Jacob’s blessing—and Abraham’s covenant promise. Jacob’s line would enjoy prosperity, but Esau’s line would “live away from the richness of the earth” (verse 39, NLT). This would be the land of Edom (see 32:3; 36:1–9). Located southeast of the Dead Sea, the region of Edom is a dry, desert wilderness bearing little resemblance to the lush, fruitful areas covering much of Israel.

Furthermore, while the whole earth would be blessed through Jacob’s seed, Esau’s descendants would be known as people of conflict and war. This reality is demonstrated

throughout the Old Testament, particularly in their acrimonious relationship with Israel (see 1 Samuel 14:47; 2 Kings 14:7–10; Psalm 60:9–12). From the time of David, Edom was part of Israel’s empire; thus, “serving Jacob” (see 2 Samuel 8:11–14). However, as Isaac had stated, Edom would break free from Israel (2 Kings 8:20–22). After Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians (in 586 BC), Edom took a measure of revenge against Israel (Psalm 137:7; Obadiah 10–14).

Discuss

- ? What is your assessment of what happened to Esau? What can we learn from his life?
- ? What are some long-term effects of family conflict?

Jacob Must Flee from Esau

Genesis 27:41–46

Say: Not surprisingly, Esau was furious with Jacob to the degree that he wanted to murder him. This sad situation led to a bitter, long-standing family feud. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Esau immediately began devising a plan to murder Jacob once their father was dead. Jacob was forced to flee and live with his uncle Laban. This was a welcome development for Rebekah, who was concerned about Jacob finding a suitable wife (Genesis 27:46) among the Hittites, a people group who were not under the covenant. While part of Laban’s household, Jacob would marry Leah, who would give birth to Judah and continue the lineage to Christ and the ultimate fulfillment of the covenant. Indeed, God’s wonderful promise continued to be kept, step-by-step, even amid turmoil and strife.

Discuss

- ? Describe a time when conflict led to something good in your life.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Although Jacob and Esau experienced much more turmoil in the coming years, they were reconciled in Genesis 33. By God’s grace and power, even the most dysfunctional family situations can be resolved.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Make an effort this week (as far as you are able) to reconcile with someone whose relationship with you is strained.
- Pray with one another at the end of class, asking God to encourage those plagued by memories of past sins or grieved because of a broken relationship.
- Seek accountability with a trusted believer to help you resist any temptation to act dishonestly or unethically, no matter how justifiable the situation might seem.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Prayer of Blessing.
Numbers 6:22–27

Tuesday:

Blessings for Obedience.
Deuteronomy 28:1–14

Wednesday:

Blessed Are God's Dependents.
Psalm 146:1–10

Thursday:

Unexpected Blessings.
Matthew 5:2–12

Friday:

Spiritual Blessings in Christ.
Ephesians 1:3–14

Saturday:

Bless and Be Blessed.
1 Peter 3:8–12