

Isaac: Family Deception, Blessing and Consequences

Genesis 27



BSF Lesson 17
Notes
Genesis

Focus Verse

"Isaac trembled violently and said, 'Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him – and indeed he will be blessed!' " – Genesis 27:33

- Dysfunction and Deception Within the Family – Genesis 27:1-29
- Distress and Division Within the Family – Genesis 27:30-46

Engage

This week's lesson reveals a profoundly dysfunctional family at the center of God's plan to save the world. Does that surprise you? What do you expect from the people and plans of God? **Isaac's family story is filled with deception, scheming and brokenness.** In the same way, people in our lives often disappoint or hurt us. Our families also have issues. If we are honest, our own weakness and sin can be very discouraging. How do you explain the gap between God's standard and human reality? God chooses and uses flawed people in His perfect plan.

God's plans cannot be thwarted by human failing, which is inevitable. No human plot or plan can overrule the sovereign purposes of God. What people intend for evil, God can use for good. Do you think your family or your life is beyond usefulness to God? Think again. We find hope knowing God's purposes prevail despite opposition or complacency. **God's perfect plan does not depend on your perfect obedience.** God accomplishes what we cannot. What messy situation in your life do you need to trust God to transform for His glory?

Dysfunction and Deception Within the Family – Genesis 27:1-29

Isaac's Plot – 27:1-4

Abraham approached the end of his life well-prepared. He found a bride for Isaac and secured all his other children in lands far away. Perhaps his example motivated Isaac in Genesis 27, where we see Isaac as an old man. **Isaac believed his death was drawing near.** There is no indication that his death was imminent, but he stated, "I am now an old man and don't know the day of my death." We know Isaac experienced some physical limitations of old age, including blindness. Life is finite, a fact most people try to ignore or avoid. Consciousness of the brevity of life sharpens life's priorities.

Isaac urgently sought to secure Esau as heir that day "before he died." Genesis 35:28 indicates Isaac lived to be 180, giving him decades to live with the consequences of his actions this day. His methods in this exchange raise questions. In that culture and time, fathers normally blessed their heirs with joyful, public celebrations such as Abraham held for Isaac.¹ **Instead,**

Isaac privately called on Esau to provide him a tasty meal of game, his favorite and Esau's specialty, as a condition to receiving his blessing. Isaac's motives and understanding are not clearly stated, but certainly questionable.

We assume Isaac knew of God's prophecy regarding his choice of Jacob, not Esau.² Isaac's manipulative plot started an ugly family battle. God's choice of Jacob, not Esau, was preeminent. Isaac ignored not only God's expressed will but also the different attitudes of his two sons toward God's promises and commands. Isaac's partiality and inaction contributed to the family's discord. Isaac decided to give Esau something God did not want him to have.

Although Esau previously decided the birthright was worth less to him than a bowl of stew, he now tried to get it back from Jacob through his father's scheme. Esau thought God's blessing could be sold, earned or stolen. **Esau's attitudes and actions indicated wrong thinking about God.**

Biblical Theme: A Father's Blessing

The Nuzi tablets, a collection of more than 5,000 legal and business documents from the second millennium B.C., show that a father's blessing was recognized culturally as a form of a last will and testament. Even though blessings were spoken and not written, they were legally binding.

The blessings of the patriarchs were also prophetic. God made a covenant with these men – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – to establish the nation of Israel. God the Holy Spirit spoke through the patriarchs and foretold future blessings. At times, the Holy Spirit overturned natural desires and customs to extend the patriarchal blessing as God ordained. Although a prophet personally wished to bless one person or nation, God's will prevailed.³

The apostle Peter explained that the prophets often did not fully understand these prophecies since they predicted future events. Yet God's faithfulness to fulfill the details of His promises supports the claim that these words were from God, not the desires or imaginations of people. "... no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20-21).

Rebekah's Counterplot – 27:5-13

When Rebekah overheard Isaac speak to Esau about the blessing, she sprung to action. As soon as Esau headed out to hunt, she called Jacob and devised a plan of her own. Rebekah knew well God's prophecy that Jacob, not Esau, was God's choice. Esau's disobedient marriages to two Hittite wives caused her grief.⁴ She likely knew that Esau had sold Jacob his birthright. Jacob was her favorite.⁵ Whether or not she thought she was upholding God's decreed will, Rebekah sought to undermine Isaac's plan with her own manipulative scheme. She was not trusting God to deliver what He had promised. **Rebekah sought to fulfill God's plan and her desires in her own way, rather than waiting on God.**

Rebekah plotted to deceive her husband and led Jacob into sin against God and his father, Isaac. Rebekah's plan was bold. She would prepare a meal like the one Esau had likely learned to cook from her. Jacob would impersonate Esau to serve the meal and

snatch the blessing. Rebekah relied on sinful methods to seek the right thing. **Obedience to God never requires compromise with sin.** Because God is holy, God's people must be holy in motives and in methods.⁶

Jacob expressed fear of being caught and cursed, but he did not object to his mother's plan. How much sorrow was caused because Jacob did not say, "This is wrong. This is sin." Rebekah did not weigh her choices or the consequences for herself and her beloved son. Her reply, "My son, let the curse fall on me. Just do what I say," reveals her casual attitude toward this serious offense. She told Jacob that Isaac would confer the blessing "in the presence of the Lord" (27:7), but she failed to see her actions within the view of Holy God. At this point, the four family members had this in common – they each valued their own will more than God's righteous character. **None were afraid to sin in the presence of the Lord to get what they wanted.**

Deceitful Plot Deployed – 27:14-29

Preparations to deceive – 27:14-17

Jacob expressed concern about his smooth skin (27:11-12). **Rebekah's plot required careful planning as the deception escalated.** In a somber reminder that she was harming both her children, she took "the best clothes of Esau her older son" and put them on "her younger son Jacob." She exploited Isaac's blindness to accomplish her plan. She covered Jacob with goatskins and prepared him to take the substitute meal into his blind father. This ridiculous costume highlights the foolishness of sinners who attempt to hide from the God who sees and knows all. Isaac might have been fooled, but God was not.

Lies and more lies – 27:18-26

When Jacob brought the dish to his father, Isaac recognized Jacob did not sound like Esau. As always, lies require more lies to stay alive. **Truth does not change; lies must be maintained.**

- "I am Esau your firstborn." – Jacob lied to answer Isaac's question about his identity.
- "I have done as you told me." – He lied using information from his mother to cause his father to believe.
- "The Lord your God gave me success." – This lie invoked God's name, giving God credit for the meal.
- "I am." – Jacob lied again when Isaac felt his covered skin and asked, "Are you really my son Esau?"

Thoroughly deceived, Isaac ate and drank, then he called his son to come forward for the blessing.

Isaac blessed Jacob – 27:27-29

God overruled all the plotting and scheming to accomplish His determined will. When Isaac spoke, God's fourfold prophecy filled his heart. Isaac believed these words were for Esau. Isaac must have imagined that he had, in fact, convinced God to change His mind. Yet God sovereignly overruled Isaac's desires. God remained true to His Word with this chosen blessing for the nation that would rise through Jacob.

- **Fertile land** – The blessing includes phrases suggesting bountiful goodness, abundant provisions, joy and peace.

- **Ruling leadership** – Jacob's son Joseph would rule from Egypt. Later Israel would rule over the Edomites. Ultimately, Jacob's descendant, Jesus Christ, is exalted to rule over all.⁷
- **Family headship** – Isaac thought he made Esau "lord over" Jacob, but God accomplished His purpose.
- **Identification** – God would be so closely involved with Jacob that to curse or bless him would be as doing so to God.

The Doctrine of Works

Most people believe that if the "good" things they do outweigh the "bad," all will be well with God for eternity. This thinking counts on the fact that there is enough good in you to make up for your failings. It is always wise and right to weigh the thinking of this world against the truth in God's Word.

Important questions must be raised. **Can we, in our humanness, offer God anything that is purely and genuinely good?** All humanity is so ruined by sin that even our best attempts to do good rise from imperfect motives.⁸ Certainly, people do things that benefit others and promote good things like peace, love and justice. There is a brand of human virtue, but the best humans can offer on their own is not good enough. Our best cannot come close to the perfection God requires because our best is tainted with sin.⁹ **We cannot earn God's favor by our own works.** Ephesians 2:8-9 says this clearly: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." God's favor did not rest on Abraham, Isaac or Jacob because of their own merit. In fact, their imperfections only highlight God's undeserved grace.

Human works do not contribute to salvation. The Holy Spirit awakens saving faith in an individual. By faith in the finished work of Christ, God transfers the perfect righteousness of His sinless Son to the believer. That process is called justification. This amazing gift of a goodness that is not our own only serves to glorify God. But another question emerges. **If human goodness or works cannot save me, are they important at all?** Ephesians 2:10 completes this thought and answers this question beautifully. "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." The Holy Spirit within the believer creates appetites, attitudes and actions that glorify God. True saving faith produces good works, providing evidence of the spiritual life within. A saved life is a changed life.¹⁰

Those who trust human works to earn God's favor are left in a challenging position. No one can deny the internal struggle of the thought life, selfish motives and hurtful actions, despite our best efforts. And while you might end a day feeling reasonably good about what happened, you can never know if the good you did was enough. The best hope of feeling good about yourself is to compare yourself to someone you think is worse. None of these things bring lasting hope or confidence.

What is it like to know that the only good within you is not your own? How helpful is it to realize that when God looks at you, He does not see your faltering steps, flawed motives or outright failures? How wonderful is it to know that by God's power alone you can overcome sin, die to yourself and obey God? Our only boast is Christ; there is no room for human pride. Because Jesus perfectly pleases God, God sees you as whole, not broken. **Because the Holy Spirit stimulates God-pleasing thoughts and actions within you, the good works God has prepared for you can be accomplished. But they are accomplished in His power alone.** At the end of the day, the high points and low points rest in the finished work of Christ. He has already paid the price for your failures. God gets the glory for what you did right, because He did it. Romans 11:35-36 offers God the glory due His name: "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them? For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen."

Truth Revealed – 27:30-33

Isaac's full stomach and perceived victory offered only fleeting pleasure. As soon as Jacob left Isaac, Esau arrived armed with tasty game for his father. We cannot estimate the force of God's sovereignty thundering on Isaac when he heard Esau's voice and asked, "Who are you?" Before God and Esau, Isaac trembled violently. **A blessing once spoken could not be revoked.** Jacob's deceit did not change the outcome. God overruled human scheming and accomplished His determined will. God is never deceived, nor does He make mistakes or change His mind.¹¹

God overruled Isaac's self-serving plot and kept him from further sin. **Isaac accepted God's will and confessed God's blessing to Jacob would stand – "indeed he will be blessed."** The New Testament confirms Isaac's repentance and submission to God's will for both sons and commends Isaac's faithful blessing of Jacob and Esau.¹²

Esau's Response – 27:34-38

Esau cried loudly and bitterly when he heard the news, not in repentance, but because he lost what he wanted. Sin causes sorrow, but not all sorrow over sin is godly or productive. 2 Corinthians 7:10 says, "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death." The just consequences of sin can lead to repentance or bitterness. **Esau's words and tears were for himself.** He pridefully sought status, rights and power apart from the living God. Esau refused personal responsibility for his problems. He blamed his brother for taking advantage of him twice and ignored the fact that he callously sold the birthright to Jacob for a small, temporary gain.

Birthrights and blessings for the firstborn included property and power. Isaac had intended to give this to Esau. Esau continued in a mournful demand that Isaac still could offer a blessing reserved for him – "Bless me – me too, my father!" **Isaac had nothing left to offer that would make Esau happy.**

Esau deliberately rejected God in exchange for passing pleasures. He valued the visible, immediately tangible delights of the flesh more than the invisible and eternal delights within God's promises. Hebrews 12:16-17 describes Esau as godless. He despised God, His gifts and His promises.

Esau's "Blessing" and Simmering Hatred – 27:39-41

God's blessing to Abraham transferred to Jacob, promising that those who cursed him would be cursed. Esau's hostility toward Jacob and rebellion against God put him in a dangerous position. **Isaac's prophetic words about Esau's future capture the hardships he and his descendants faced.** The consequences before him did not prompt repentance. Instead, Esau, like Cain, walked away from God and raised a nation to stand against Him.¹³

Esau's land would be dry and barren, in stark contrast to the fertile land promised to Jacob. Esau's nation, later known as Edom (which means "red"), was a mountainous stronghold with little rain and few fertile places. The phrases, "live by the sword," "serve your brother" and "throw his yoke" speak of the Edomites' constant battles against Israel and others.¹⁴

Sin and rebellion against God escalate when people refuse to repent. Esau did not recognize his own sin but continued to blame Jacob. God dealt with Jacob's sin, as we will see in upcoming chapters. But hatred ruled Esau's heart, and he wanted Jacob to suffer. His smoldering anger blossomed into a desire to kill Jacob, perhaps to regain the birthright and blessing. With a calloused heart, he boasted of his murderous plan to others. Bitterness grows a deep root in a human heart and leads to greater sin.¹⁵

Rebekah's Scheme and Sorrow – 27:42-46

Rebekah heard of Esau's murderous threat against Jacob and quickly warned him. She took aggressive control of her son and told him again to "do what I say." She told Jacob that Esau wanted to kill him for "what you did to him." The Bible is silent about what Isaac or Esau knew about Rebekah's role in Jacob's deception. **Rebekah's sin and manipulation brought costly consequences.** She hoped Jacob would only have to flee until Esau's anger cooled, but she never saw her beloved son again.

Genesis 27 could be the story of a family united by love for God and love for one another. Instead, father, mother and sons tried to manipulate God and devalued His promises. They turned on each other and pursued selfish motives through deceitful means. They were not in control; God was in control. **No human plot or plan can overrule the sovereign purposes of God.** He rules and overrules to fulfill His perfect and holy will. God can use sinful people in His perfect plan because He redeems what sin destroys.

Hold Fast

The Lord is sovereign. God has all power and authority to fully accomplish His perfect will. What God decrees and determines will come to pass despite human opposition or failures. God remains faithful to His character, His will and His Word in everything He accomplishes. God declared that Jacob, not Esau, would inherit the blessing and birthright. Their limited understanding, deceptive scheming and attempts to manipulate God did not change anything. God's eternal purposes stand firm. Believers find great comfort knowing God's eternal purposes cannot be shaken.

Isaac's lack of sensitivity and submission to God created a disturbing dynamic in his family. Though not outwardly assertive, Isaac was strong-willed. He disregarded Esau's irreverence for God. He loved food and comfort. Perhaps spiritual complacency blurred his spiritual discernment. His lack of spiritual leadership was likely a factor in the unhealthy dynamic within his own family. All four members of this family were involved in a

web of deception and manipulation. God, however, cannot be deceived. God knows the secrets of every human heart.¹⁶

God overruled Isaac's intentions to accomplish His will. Isaac yielded to God when he realized that Jacob, not Esau, received God's blessing despite his scheming. Isaac trembled when he learned the truth and told Esau that their plot had failed. He said, "I blessed him – and indeed he will be blessed!" God demonstrates His love to His children by exposing their sin and calling them to repentance and obedience.

Esau blamed Jacob when he lost what he did not value. Pride leads people to take offense rather than recognize and confess sin. Refusing God's opportunities to repent represents a real danger. To walk away from God rather than toward Him invites further trouble and deeper sin. Esau's grudge against his brother led him to harbor anger and boast about his desire to murder Jacob. Human pride blinds us from proper humility before God and others.

Apply It

Never underestimate the impact your choices have on others. Isaac and Rebekah influenced their sons in harmful ways. We like to believe our thought life and most of our choices are our own business. Your thoughts lead to actions. Your actions inevitably influence others. "Secret" sins cause more damage than we ever imagine. Parents influence their children, for good and for bad. Friends influence friends. Your words or actions toward a stranger can have impact you never imagine. Who are you influencing? Are you leading someone else to sin deliberately or by example? Who is looking to you and where are you leading them? Everyone leads someone. Who you are and what you do matters.

Sin presents itself as a worthwhile option. "Half-truths" and small compromises can seem like good solutions. Isaac and Esau, Rebekah and Jacob and all of us sometimes pick a short-term win over long-term victory.

We try to do the right thing the wrong way. Most of the time, we severely underestimate the cost of sin. **Sin always promises more than it delivers and costs more than we imagine.** Sin escalates. Lies require more lies. Anger turns to hatred and bitterness. Sinful appetites, if indulged, blur spiritual vision. The account of this family raises the importance of constant vigilance to seek God in daily life. Growing believers maintain a healthy distrust of themselves. They recognize their own capacity to sin and mature as they learn to trust God's grace and provision. Our sins are rooted in pride, selfishness and failure to believe God. What sin in your life do you tolerate and underestimate? Where are you particularly vulnerable to sin? What do you love more than obeying God? How has God used the consequences of sin to call you back to Himself?

Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that

prevails." This passage certainly demonstrates that truth. The blessing went to Jacob no matter what the family tried to do. The concept of God's power and control over human affairs troubles some people. **For the believer, the certainty of God gives hope amid the uncertainty of life.** The perfection of God's ways and timing offer hope while we wait for Him to act. God will not allow your sin, this world's confusion or anything else to disrupt His plan. This truth provides comfort to those who trust Him. Do you find more peace thinking world history and daily life are random or by knowing God is in control? God's sovereign power incorporates His love, grace and compassion. In what specific situation do you need to trust God's loving care and surrender control? Will you trust Him, even if you cannot fully understand what He is doing? Will you surrender your own plans to the prevailing purposes of God, for your good and His glory?

Check out these footnoted references for further study of God's Word in this week's lesson.

- 1: **Feast for Isaac:** Genesis 21:8
- 2: **Prophecy regarding Jacob and Esau:** Genesis 25:23
- 3: **Prophetic blessings:** Genesis 48:17-19; Numbers 22-24
- 4: **Esau's marriages:** Genesis 26:34-35; 27:46
- 5: **Favoritism in Isaac's family:** Genesis 25:27-28
- 6: **Holy God:** Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15-16
- 7: **Christ exalted:** Philippians 2:10-11
- 8: **The sinfulness of mankind:** Romans 3:9-18
- 9: **The insufficiency of human works:** Isaiah 64:6; James 2:10
- 10: **Salvation produces God-pleasing works:** Romans 11:6; Titus 3:4-8; James 2:14-18; 2 Peter 1:5-11
- 11: **God does not change His mind:** Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 7:21
- 12: **Isaac blesses sons:** Hebrews 11:20
- 13: **Cain's rebellion:** Genesis 4
- 14: **Edomites:** 2 Samuel 8:14; 2 Kings 8:20-22; Obadiah 1:1-2, 10-15
- 15: **Bitterness:** Amos 5:7; Ephesians 4:31; Hebrews 12:15
- 16: **God knows human hearts:** Psalms 44:21; 139:1-6; Hebrews 4:12-13