

## A DECEIVER

Genesis 27:18-29

The birth of Isaac's sons was unusual. He was about 60 years old and the birth of these twins was an answer to prayer. Before they were born Rebekah received a message from God that she had two nations in her womb and that the elder would serve the younger.

- Do you think that Rebekah wanted to do God's will? Absolutely. As a consequence, Jacob was her favorite while Esau (being the first born) was Isaac's favorite.
- Do you think Rebekah told Jacob that he was chosen by God to be the leader in the family? Absolutely.
- Do you think Jacob wanted to do God's will? Absolutely. If he had been asked to write a purpose statement for his life, it would have been centered around obtaining the birthright and blessing. So, it is not surprising that Jacob was looking for any opportunity to achieve this goal. We don't know how many times he had tried to get the birthright from Esau but we have the account of his buying it for a bowl of beans.
- Do you think that the birthright was important to Esau? Not at that time. What was Esau's purpose in life? He was the type person that we see being appealed to in advertisements that say, "You only go around once in life, so grab all the gusto you can." It is a "live for the moment and forget about tomorrow" type outlook on life.

Question: Did Jacob need to buy the birthright from Esau? NO! He either did not need it or God had a way to transfer the birthright to him. How would that happen? We have no idea! However, since Jacob intervened with a "natural strength" solution, he nor we will know the way God would have brought about what He had predetermined to make happen. From Jacob's and Rebekah's viewpoint, they could check off "Obtain Birthright" on their "To Do" list. The next item on the list was "Obtain Blessing."

Rebekah knew God's will. She and Jacob were working to bring about that will by their natural strength and wit. Never do we see them ask God for His instructions about what to do about the blessing going to Esau.

The blessing and the birthright are not significant issues in our present-day culture or society. However, these were extremely important in the world in which Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived. The **birthright** was the assurance that the first-born son would receive the largest share of the inheritance. Usually, this share was a double portion. For example, if there were nine heirs, then the birthright would give the eldest son 20 percent of the estate while the others would get 10 percent each. The first-born son could not be denied this right without cause since it was protected by custom or law. If there were sufficient causes, then the right might be lost as in the case of Reuben who committed incest by sleeping with his father's concubine. The birthright could also be sold as in the case of Esau who sold his favored position to Jacob for a piece of bread and a bowl of soup. On the other hand, the **blessing** did not involve the inheritance of wealth but the conferring of power or the right of leadership in the extended family or clan. Apparently, Isaac was thinking that his effectiveness as the leader of the family was nearing an end and he was ready to pass on the mantle of leadership to Esau.

Here, as often in Genesis, this new step forward in the history of salvation is set against the backdrop of unscrupulous behavior by the patriarchs involved. Once again, it is God's mercy, not human merit, that is the ultimate hope of redemption (cf. Rom. 9:10-18).

The unscrupulous behavior in this case originated with Rebekah. Rebekah overheard the

plan of Isaac to bless Esau and she did not want that to happen. Rebekah wanted the leadership role to go to Jacob. It is my suspicion that what she really wanted was to be the one in control herself and since she was closer to Jacob than to Esau, she figured that her influence would be greater if Jacob were the designated leader. In fact, she was already in control of Jacob as indicated in the eighth verse where she instructed him to do all that she has told (commanded) him to do.

While Esau was out stalking a deer so that he could carry out the wishes of Isaac, Rebekah was home fixing goat meat to fool Isaac.

### Trap Set – 27:18-20

<sup>18</sup> So he went in to his father and said, “My father.” And he said, “Here I am. Who are you, my son?” <sup>19</sup> Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me.” <sup>20</sup> But Isaac said to his son, “How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?” He answered, “Because the LORD your God granted me success.” Genesis 27:18–20 (ESV)

Apparently, Esau and Jacob sounded enough alike that Isaac could not be sure who was speaking to him when Jacob called to him. When he responded to Isaac's question, Jacob had to lie about who he was to keep up the deception. He then lied about what he had done, he lied about the nature of the food that Isaac was to eat and finally he invoked the name to God to try to give all of the deception some credibility.

I think there are many nominal Christians who live in this kind of deception all the time. They have never been born again and yet when asked if they are saved will tell you a resounding “yes!” They brag about all that they have done for the kingdom of God and if it were examined it would be found to be work for the Boy Scouts and the Kiwanis Club – not that there is anything wrong with these fine organizations; however, they are not the kingdom of God any more than goat meat is deer meat. A lot of churches have sermons delivered in them Sunday after Sunday that are all very interesting, but the source of the message and the philosophy behind it is humanism rather than the principles and message of the word of God. All this goes on under the umbrella of the “church” and many fail to see the deception that it there since the name of God is invoked about what is being done.

### Deception Carried Out – 27:21-27

<sup>21</sup> Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not.” <sup>22</sup> So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, who felt him and said, “The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” <sup>23</sup> And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau’s hands. So he blessed him. <sup>24</sup> He said, “Are you really my son Esau?” He answered, “I am.” <sup>25</sup> Then he said, “Bring it near to me, that I may eat of my son’s game and bless you.” So he brought it near to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank. <sup>26</sup> Then his father Isaac said to him, “Come near and kiss me, my son.” <sup>27</sup> So he came near and kissed him. And Isaac smelled the smell of his garments and blessed him and said, “See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field that the LORD has blessed! Genesis 27:21–27 (ESV)

Isaac was suspicious that something was amiss. Though he could not see well, he could tell that everything did not fit together really well. He tried to check out his concerns by getting closer to Jacob and because he could not see, he had to rely on feeling. His conclusion was that he sounded like Jacob but he felt like Esau. Based on his feeling, he was going to bless Jacob.

A precaution for us in the church is that many are being deceived by what has been called the “feel-good gospel.” Don't tell anyone about sin and the consequences of it. Don't mention anything that is negative, but we just want everyone to feel good about themselves. Even though it sounds like humanism, it makes us feel good and we give our blessing to it by saying, “that was a really good message.”

What Rebekah and Jacob did was completely unnecessary! At the brothers' births God had told Rebekah that the older would serve the younger (25:23). Yet as the critical time drew closer and closer, both mother and son felt impelled to "help God out."

What was the result? Jacob did receive the blessing—which he would have received anyway. Bitterness was heightened between the brothers, and Esau's hatred became so intense that he planned to kill Jacob after their father died. Rebekah, who had plotted to help her favorite son, was forced to send him away for 20 years, and did not live to see him return. True, it worked out in the end. But the anger, the fear, the separation—all these might have been avoided had Jacob and Rebekah simply trusted God and rejected deceit.

It is interesting to see the different interests that children develop as they grow up. Obviously, Esau and Jacob were not identical twins. They did not have the same appearance and they certainly did not have the same interests. Esau enjoyed hunting and being outside. Jacob was more interested in things at home. It is not unexpected that Isaac would be closer to Esau and Rebekah would be closer to Jacob.

Esau was like so many young men today. Their whole life is sports. They have very few serious thoughts and have no extra time for career or family or community. Jacob was probably like a few children you see who behave as adults and have mature, adult interests by the time they are six years old. It is not difficult to figure out which person is really going to be successful in life. This difference in ability to recognize and see priorities and to live a disciplined life in order to accomplish what is worthwhile was dramatically illustrated in an incident that happened involving Jacob and Esau.

Though Isaac had suspicions, the deception was done so well that further checking was not able to prove anything. Isaac was relying on all the senses he had. His hearing, his feeling, and his sense of smell. These three were giving him mixed signals: hearing said "no" and feeling and sense of smell said "yes." So, Isaac took a vote and it was two to one in favor of the deception. This may be a good lesson for all of us to learn. If what we are being told causes serious questions about its validity – it doesn't sound right, or it doesn't feel right, or it doesn't smell right, then we need to be reluctant to bless it.

What Isaac was lacking was the ability to see. If he could have seen clearly, then he would have been able to tell the difference between Jacob and Esau and he would not have been deceived. Our best protection is to have spiritual insight that is provided by the Holy Spirit (one of the Gifts of the Spirit is discernment) in our lives.

### Blessing Granted – 27:28-30

<sup>28</sup> May God give you of the dew of heaven and of the fatness of the earth and plenty of grain and wine. <sup>29</sup> Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you!" <sup>30</sup> As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, Esau his brother came in from his hunting. Genesis 27:28–30 (ESV)

Think about the moral and theological problems. Does God approve of Jacob's cheating? Will he endorse a blessing gained under false pretenses? Isaac was clear that his blessing was irrevocable: that since it was pronounced over Jacob it belonged to him. Despite the underhanded way in which Jacob obtained the blessing, it was still valid.

Esau thought only of the present moment and what it would take to make him happy at that moment. It is truly a tragic way to live life and waste the opportunities in life. Jacob, on the other hand, was always looking for opportunities to get in a better position or to be more successful. He wanted to be successful more than anything. Admittedly, his definition of

success needed to be directed and refined, but he had the "fire in the gut" type drive that is a key factor in being successful. He was focused on goals in his life and he looked at every situation relative to how he might accomplish his goals.

Can we apply this same type of intensity and focus in our Christian walk? Absolutely! First of all, we need to get our main goal right and that is *to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ*. Christ is to be our very life as Paul said, "The life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God Who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Gal 2:20, Rom 8:29) Next, we are to look in every situation for ways that this goal is being accomplished in our lives. Again, as Paul said in Romans 8:28, "For we know that all things work together for good to them who love the Lord, to them who are called according to His purpose." This changes our whole outlook on life and causes us to cooperate with God as He goes about molding us and making us after His will.

All of us can look at Esau's rash act and be amazed by it. But what we need to realize is that this act of selling the birthright was an action that is in character, not out of character for Esau. It was the result of a long process of character formation, a long history of choice after choice which shaped Esau's personality and values.

Right now, we may look at Esau with wonder and say, "We'd never do that." Instead we ought to look at the action as an expression of character, and wonder: In what direction are our daily choices leading us? Do we so value our present experiences that we fail to discipline ourselves to wait when waiting is best? Is our relationship with God high enough on our priority list to cause us to spend time with Him, or do other things push Him out of our thoughts?

We can shake our heads in wonder at Esau, but we had better realize that unless we make a daily habit of rejecting Esau's values, we might someday be faced with similar choices – and make the wrong choice as he did!

There are (at least) two important lessons in the story of Jacob and Esau. First, we don't have to take Jacob's road to blessing. Instead, we can trust God and commit ourselves to do the right thing at all times. Second, truth, not lies, will serve us far better than deception. God's will still will be done, and we'll be able to live in harmony with those around us. How great it is to shrug off all sense of pressure and to commit our way to God, confident that as we daily do His will, His good purposes will be performed.