

Lesson 42

Jacob Steals the Blessing

Isaac is tricked into blessing Jacob instead of Esau.

Overview

Lesson Focus

Isaac wanted to bless Esau, but Jacob and Rebekah deceived him into blessing Jacob instead. God's will was accomplished in spite of the sinful methods used by Jacob and Rebekah. The consequences of their deception led to Esau wanting to kill Jacob and Jacob fleeing to Rebekah's brother for safety.

Key Passages

Genesis 27:18–19, 27:41

Memory Verse

Proverbs 3:5–6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

Genesis 27 picks up the account of Isaac and his family when Isaac is an old man with failing eyesight. In the previous chapter, Esau married two Canaanite women when he was 40 years old. His wives were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah. Despite Esau's ungodly wives, Isaac still favored Esau.

Although he would end up living 50 more years, in Genesis 27:2, Isaac says he is old and doesn't know when he will die. It appears that the aged Isaac wanted to get his affairs in order before his passing, and he wanted to give Esau the blessing reserved for the firstborn son. Because God said that the older son would serve the younger (Genesis 25:23), Isaac should have willingly given the blessing to Jacob, his younger son. By ignoring God's prophecy regarding his sons, Isaac was being disobedient.

Before Isaac would bless Esau, he asked him to go into the field to hunt and then prepare a tasty meal for him. Rebekah overheard her husband's conversation with Esau and quickly hatched a plot. Her motives were honorable because she wanted to see God's prophecy fulfilled on behalf of Jacob. However, her deceitful methods were not honoring to God. She called Jacob and told him her plan to take goats from the flock and prepare them into a meal that Isaac would like. Jacob would take the food to his father and receive the blessing intended for Esau. Jacob did not object to lying or deceiving his father. It seems that he was more concerned about getting caught and receiving a curse rather than a blessing (Genesis 27:11–12). Rebekah

responded by taking responsibility for any curse he might receive. Jacob obeyed his mother and brought the goats for her to prepare. She made a meal and then put the goat skins on Jacob's hands and neck to simulate Esau's hair. Jacob, dressed in his brother's clothes, brought his father the meal Rebekah had made. When Isaac asked who he was, Jacob lied and said that he was Esau. Isaac recognized Jacob's voice but was fooled by the goat skins and the smell of Esau's clothing. He ate the meal and blessed Jacob, naming him master of the household. Jacob would receive Isaac's wealth, and his descendants would rule over other nations, including the descendants of Esau.

Jacob had just left Isaac's tent when Esau entered with the meal he had prepared. Jacob's deception was discovered, and Esau cried out with bitterness and begged for his own blessing. Isaac confirmed Jacob's blessing in Genesis 27:33 when he said, "Yes, and he shall be blessed." This indicates that Isaac finally acknowledged God's will for Jacob. Esau felt wronged on two counts: losing both his birthright and his blessing. However, he was to blame for losing his birthright because he had sold it for a bowl of stew. Jacob lived up to his name by deceiving and supplanting his brother's position (Genesis 27:36).

Isaac did bless Esau also, telling him: "Behold, away from the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be, and away from the dew of heaven on high. By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; but when you grow restless you shall break his yoke from your neck" (Genesis 27:39-40). However, this "blessing" Esau received was tantamount to a curse because Isaac prophesied that Esau's descendants would live in an infertile, arid area.

Rebekah's and Jacob's sin ended with severe consequences. Esau hated Jacob and determined to kill him once Isaac died. Rebekah heard of Esau's murderous intent and warned Jacob. Her solution was to send Jacob away to her brother Laban until Esau's anger subsided. Although she obtained the blessing for Jacob, she also lost him because he was forced to flee. How might things have gone if she and Jacob had waited for God's timing? We don't know, but we do see that God fulfilled his will in spite of human sin.

Historical/Apologetics Background

Like the birthright, the Old Testament blessing of a father was esteemed. A blessing could be given regardless of birthright. However, a greater blessing was given to the one who held the birthright. A father's blessing could be encouragement, details about a son's inheritance, or prophecy concerning the future. Such blessings acted as a "last will and testament" and were highly prized as a means of revealing God's will.

Isaac's blessing to Jacob, which was intended for Esau, gave him the earth's bounty and authority over his brother. The end of the blessing, which says, "Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you!" (Genesis 27:29) is similar to God's promise to Abram in Genesis 12:3: "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse." These are powerful promises coming from God! We see an example of this prophecy's fulfillment when the Israelites left Egypt and were traveling to the land of Canaan under Moses' leadership. In Numbers 22, a frightened Balak, king of the Moabites, sent for Balaam son of Beor to curse the Israelites so he could

drive them out of the land (Numbers 22:6). However, God intervened, and Balaam blessed the Israelites three times (Numbers 23–24), causing a frustrated Balak to give up. In this case, God prevented his people from being cursed by their enemies.

One question that arises from the Genesis 27 account of Jacob's deception is whether or not God condoned his sin. After all, it appears as though God used Rebekah and Jacob's deception to give the blessing to Jacob. But the answer is no—God's perfect plan is never for us to sin. God worked to accomplish his purpose in spite of Jacob's deceit, but God never condones sin. Rebekah's plot to trick her husband stemmed from good motives: she wanted God's prophecy fulfilled regarding her son Jacob. However, it was not right for her to deceive her husband. God did not spare her from the consequences, either. She lost her favorite son because Jacob was forced to flee or face revenge at the hands of his brother.

Christian people today may be tempted to fall into the same trap—excusing sin that is committed for a “good” purpose. But sin is still sin, and God never wants his children to sin, no matter how honorable the purpose may seem. Often we just need to prayerfully bring the situation to God and patiently wait for him to act in his perfect timing.

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