

a parallel text qualifies this by adding the words **“in the Lord, for this is right”** (Eph. 6:1b). This was not the first situation the world has seen where parents have instructed children to do wrong. If Esau knew the prophecy given to Rebekah, Isaac’s command to him was wrong. Even if Jacob knew the prophecy, that did not justify lying and defiance of the authority of his father. If those with authority over us command us to do wrong, servants of God must not follow them (Acts 5:29).

5. **Don’t Try to “Help God.”** Did Rebekah imagine that if Isaac blessed Esau it would keep the prophecy from taking place? Perhaps, but we should

notice that the focus of the prophecy was on **“nations”** and **“people,”** not merely individuals (Gen. 25:23). The Hebrew writer speaks of Isaac blessing **“Jacob and Esau”** (Heb. 11:20). Even if the nature of the blessing had been different, it would not have thwarted God’s will. Israel would still have grown into a nation that would one day subdue Edom (the nation descended from Esau). Man cannot prevent what God determines will happen, nor does He need man’s help to accomplish what He declares.

This sad story didn’t have to end this way! Isaac and Rebekah could have loved each child equally. Jacob and Esau could have behaved like loving brothers. Rebekah could have shared the Lord’s prophecy with all and in submission to God’s will this family could have worked together to honor God’s will and consider the needs and best interests of one another instead of themselves. Fortunately, as time went on, this shattered family was reunited in peace and love (Gen. 32-33), but how different this story could have been if sin had not crept its way into the hearts and lives of these souls. May we learn from their mistakes and avoid the same pain and chaos in our own families.



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Faithful Sayings Issue 24.42 October 16, 2022

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Amarillo TX 79106
806-352-2809
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It Didn’t Have to Be This Way

By Kyle Pope

The Holy Spirit often preserves the facts about the behavior of men and women in the Bible without Divine comment on the sinfulness of their actions. We should not conclude from this that God was pleased with all that was done. Especially when those involved ultimately played a role in Messianic history, as in questions of authority, Divine silence does not mean approval. In some situations, when sin abounds on all sides, the Holy Spirit simply allows the chaos to speak for itself.

The Family of Isaac

A striking example of this is found in Genesis 27. It concerns the family of Isaac, the son of Abraham. Although all involved are adults, the childish behavior demonstrated by parents and children alike led to a family being torn apart, and one son ready to kill the other, because of the action motivated by the parents.

The Birth of Esau and Jacob. To set the stage we must look back two chapters to the time of the birth of two sons to Isaac and his wife Rebekah. Isaac was forty when he married Rebekah (Gen. 25:20). At first, she was unable to have children, but the Lord answered Isaac’s prayer and she conceived (Gen. 25:21). It was a hard pregnancy, leading Rebekah to pray to God about her difficulties (Gen. 25:22). The Lord answered her prayer, and revealed a prophecy about the children within her womb. He told her, **“Two nations are**

in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger” (Gen. 25:23, NKJV). Rebekah had a healthy birth to twin boys—Esau (a hairy child) and Jacob (who was born second, but holding his brother’s heel) (Gen. 25:24-26). Their condition at birth foreshadowed their lives. Esau would become an outdoorsman and a hunter and Jacob’s life would be characterized by trying to *supplant* his brother (Gen. 25:27). Esau mean “hairy” and Jacob means “heel-holder” or “supplanter” (BDB) (Gen. 25:25-26).

Parental Partiality. Unfortunately, the Holy Spirit records something their parents did long before the events of chapter 27 that undoubtedly contributed to the ill-will that would fester between these two boys. We learn that, **“Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob”** (Gen. 25:28).

The Sale of the Birthright. How this partiality

played into the first record of conflict between the boys is not clear. We are told that Esau came in weary from a hunt and begged Jacob for some lentil stew he had cooked (Gen. 25:29-30). Jacob agreed, if Esau would **“sell”** him his birthright (Gen. 25:31). Impulsively, Esau agreed (Gen. 25:32-34a). Moses described it that by doing so, **“Esau thus despised his birthright”** (Gen. 25:34b). The writer of Hebrews called Esau a, **“profane person”** in the fact that **“for one morsel of food sold his birthright”** (Heb. 12:16).

What We Are Not Told. There are many things we are not told about the circumstances that developed in the life of these boys. Did Rebekah tell Isaac, Esau, and Jacob about what the Lord said to her during her pregnancy? We don’t know. If so, this would have a bearing on the events that followed. If so, their actions reflect a desire to countermand or “assist God” by sinful methods. If not, it is selfish, conniving, and a disregard for the consequences this would have on other family members. Did the sale of this birthright (generally given to the firstborn) entitle Jacob to the best blessing also? Esau and the Hebrew writer considered them two separate things (Gen. 27:36; Heb. 12:17). Did Isaac and Rebekah know about Esau’s sale of his birthright? If so, the actions that follow may be seen as rebelling against God and the agreement Esau had made.

Deception to Receive the Blessing. Chapter 27 begins with Isaac as an old man, with poor vision. He commands Esau to hunt and prepare some wild game and bring it to him, **“that my soul may bless you before I die”** (Gen. 27:1-4). In reality it would be a long time before Isaac died (Gen. 35:28-29), but he thought the time was near. Rebekah overheard Isaac’s instructions to Esau (Gen. 27:5). She commanded Jacob to bring her two goats so she could prepare them to taste like the food Esau would make. She then commanded him to pretend to be Esau (even covering Jacob’s arms with hairy hide) and putting on some of Esau’s clothing to go in and trick Isaac so he would bless Jacob instead (Gen. 27:6-17). Jacob obeyed, hesitating only to make sure he would not be caught by his father (Gen. 27:11-12). Jacob succeeded in the deception, blatantly lying to him (Gen.

27:18-27). Thinking he was blessing Esau, Isaac prophetically declared:

. . . may God give you of the dew of heaven, of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, and let your mother’s sons bow down to you. cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be those who bless you! (Gen. 27:28-29).

Shortly after Jacob left, Esau came with food for his father, only to discover the blessing had been given to his brother (Gen. 27:30-40). In anger, Esau decided to kill Jacob after his father died (Gen. 27:41). Learning his plan, Rebekah commands Jacob to run away to Haran, where he would end up staying for the next two decades (Gen. 27:42-28:5).

Practical Lessons

Although the Holy Spirit says little about the sins committed in this encounter, it illustrates some important lessons that should teach us in our own lives.

- 1. The Damage Partiality Can Do.** Parents may naturally connect more with one child than another, but when this plays out in the form of partiality it can create competition and resentment with devastating consequences. We must imitate the example of our Father in heaven, **“For there is no partiality with God”** (Rom. 2:11).
- 2. Don’t Involve Children in Parental Disagreements.** If Isaac knew what the Lord told Rebekah, his actions were a deliberate effort to countermand the will of God. If not, the partiality of one parent over another led a mother and father to involve their children in their own conflicted preferences. When parents do this today it is the children who suffer. Siblings are pitted against sibling and sides are drawn. This is not how it ought to be! The psalmist said, **“Behold, how**

good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Ps. 133:1).

- 3. When Older Family Members Aren’t Using Good Judgment.** According to Scriptures, Isaac was old and considered himself near death. It is not uncommon when age impacts the minds of older family members that it puts others in some difficult situations. Will they make choices that harm them or others? How can we protect them with respect? Did Rebekah consider Isaac’s judgment compromised? Did she fear he was about to violate God’s will? If so, she did not make the proper choice. The answer is not to sin. Christians are not to act in **“the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,”** but are to act in ways that involve, **“speaking the truth in love”** (Eph. 4:14b-15a).
- 4. When Parents Tell Children to Do Wrong.** The Bible teaches, **“Children, obey your parents in all things”** (Col. 3:20a), but