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A STUDY OF THE WHOLE BIBLE

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

LESSONS LEARNED FROM DECEPTION (26:34-31:55)

The Place of the Passage

The story of Isaac is ultimately told in the life of his son Jacob. Jacob's grasping at birth (Gen. 25:26) and manipulating of his brother Esau (Gen. 25:29-34) foreshadow the outright deception that Jacob engages in to steal Esau's birthright in Genesis 27. This section traces the consequences of Jacob's deception in his exile to Laban's country, as Jacob the deceiver is deceived himself and the manipulator is manipulated. Sinful deception banishes Jacob into personal exile, but the punishment of sin prepares Jacob for his encounter with God at Bethel and beyond.

The Deception

Genesis 27:1 begins, "When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see . . ." In the Bible, dim eyesight can refer not only to physical eyesight but also spiritual discernment (e.g., 1 Sam. 3:1-2), while undimmed eyesight may symbolize physical and spiritual vigor (e.g., Deut. 34:7). In light of these other passages, it seems that Isaac's dim eyes may be not only physical but also spiritual. When "Abraham was old, well advanced in years" (Gen. 24:1) his concern was singularly focused on providing a proper spouse for Isaac. What evidences are there for Isaac's lack of spiritual discernment in Genesis 26:34-27:4?

Reflection and Discussion

— Read the story of Jacob and Rebekah's deception of Isaac in order for Jacob to get his blessing in Genesis 27:5-27:46. While the deception succeeds, by the end of the chapter it is clear that everybody loses. Isaac's spiritual blurriness leads to painful consequences for his entire family. List the painful consequences that are experienced by Isaac, Esau, Jacob, and Rebekah.

— What evidences do you see throughout Genesis 28 of God confirming to Jacob the same covenant promises made to his father, Isaac, and his grandfather, Abraham?

— For his deception, Jacob must go into "exile" to the land of Laban because his brother desires to kill him (Gen. 27:42-45; 28:5). Jacob's encounter with God at Bethel propels him forward in obedience in Genesis 29:1-14. Unlike the deceiving and manipulating Jacob of the past, he shows generosity (Gen. 29:10) and candor to his uncle Laban (Gen. 29:13). However, in exile in the land of Laban, Jacob the deceiver feels the pain of deception in Genesis 27:15-30. How does Jacob's declaration to Laban, "Why then have you deceived me?" (Gen. 29:25) ironically echo Isaac's declaration to Esau in Genesis 27:35? What might God be teaching Jacob through the pain of this situation?

— Jacob is not only deceived but also manipulated. While Jacob should have known the pain of favoritism because of his father's favoritism toward Esau (Gen. 25:28), he shows the same favoritism toward his wife Rachel (Gen. 29:30). As a result, Jacob is manipulated by his own wives repeatedly in Genesis 29:31-30:24. Describe some ways in which we see Jacob himself being manipulated.

— Read about Jacob's relationship with Laban in Genesis 30:1-43. Laban tries to cheat Jacob out of his wages by removing the striped and spotted goats and black lambs from the flock. However, Jacob employs an odd mating technique that works to his favor, and he prospers. How does Jacob experience God's grace in the face of Laban's manipulative techniques here?

— The Lord clearly calls Jacob to return home from his exile: "Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you" (Gen. 31:3). How are Jacob's old ways still evident as his family flees from Laban in Genesis 31:14-35?

Read Genesis 31:43-55 and note the reconciliation between Jacob and Laban. What broken relationship still needs to be reconciled for Jacob?

Gospel Glimpses

JUDAH AND LEVI — Leah was unloved, but God blessed her with many children. Her sons include Judah and Levi. Judah becomes the father of the royal tribe of David and ultimately Jesus, and Levi is the father of the priestly tribe, which also culminates in the true and final priest, Jesus (Heb. 7:23-28). It is surprising that both the royal and priestly lines are children of Leah, the unloved and neglected wife of Jacob. God shines the grace and power of His purposes in the most unlikely of places.

"EXILE" — "The Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives" (Heb. 12:6). Jacob experiences a painful exile from the land of Canaan because of his deception, and he must flee to the land of Laban. There, the deceiver is deceived and the manipulator is manipulated, but those twenty years of "exile" form Jacob's character and prepare him for a remarkable reconciliation with his brother Esau and with God Himself. What Jacob (Israel) experiences individually through repentance and restoration through exile, God prophecies would happen to Israel corporately after exile (Deut. 30:1-10). Corporate Israel experiences the pain of exile to Assyria and Babylon, but the full blessing after exile is not realized until Jesus comes. Jesus experiences temporary "exile" to Egypt (Matt. 2:13-15) and ultimate exile when he was forsaken by God on the cross (Matt. 27:46). Seeing Jesus undergo the exile from the Father that we deserve, our hearts are transformed to love him unreservedly.

EYESIGHT — Just as Isaac's eyesight was "dim so that he could not see" (Gen. 27:1), so later the priest Eli's "eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see" during a time when "the Word of the Lord was rare . . . there was no frequent vision" (I Sam. 3:1-2). For both Isaac and Eli, their lack of spiritual discernment affected their children. Isaac failed to get a proper wife for his son Esau, and Eli failed to teach his sons properly the ways of the priesthood (I Sam. 2:12-17). Later, Jesus drew an analogy between physical and spiritual sight: "The eye is the lamp of

the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" (Matt. 6:22-23).

BETHEL — A significant place in the story of Jacob. After first meeting God at Bethel, Jacob vows to return to Bethel "if God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go" (Gen. 28:20). He is testing to see if this God is real. However, as he experiences God's provision, he sees God as "the God of Bethel" (Gen. 31:13; 35:7). After his "exile" in the land of Laban for twenty years, God tells him to "return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you" (Gen. 31:3). In chapter 35, he finally returns to Bethel. Yet Bethel becomes the site of a rival cult to Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:28–13:32), and Bethel becomes synonymous later with idolatry (Amos 4:4; 5:5–6; Hos. 10:15; Jer. 48:13). Ultimately, what Jacob originally saw at Bethel with angels "ascending and descending" (Gen. 28:12) to the presence of God looked forward to Jesus' promise to Nathanael that "you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (John 1:51).

Theological Considerations

DISCIPLINE — God's disciplining hand is clearly upon Jacob. God's promises and purposes do not eradicate our responsibility. Even as God's promise and purpose so clearly rest upon Jacob, he still faces painful consequences of his actions in the land of Laban. Even though Christ has paid the price of our sin upon the cross, we still require the chastening of God's wise, fatherly hand to allure our hearts away from the world and toward Christ. In such times God is treating us with love—he is treating us as his own children (Heb. 12:7).

UNDESERVED BLESSING — Throughout this account, Jacob, the deceiver, is the recipient of incredibly undeserved blessing. He prospers greatly in the land of Laban, as he "increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkeys" (Gen. 30:43). Jacob recognizes God's gracious hand and concludes, "If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands" (Gen. 31:42).

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Reconciliation

The restoration of a positive relationship and peace between alienated or opposing parties. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus has reconciled believers to God (2 Cor. 5:18–21).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Please read the respective chapters prior to answering the following questions:

Genesis 27 Questions:

1. What request did Isaac make of Esau (27:1-4)? What did Isaac intend to do?
2. What is a “blessing” as described here?
3. What had God already revealed about Jacob and Esau’s descendants? How did Isaac’s conduct compare to God’s intentions?
4. Describe Rebekah’s plot (27:5-10).
5. What subsequent events reveal she came from a deceitful family? Was it right or wrong? Why?
6. Describe and evaluate Jacob’s objection and Rebekah’s response (27:11-13).
7. What further arrangements did Rebekah make (27:14-17)?
8. What questions did Isaac ask Jacob, and how did he respond (27:18-25)?
9. Describe the blessing Isaac gave Jacob (27:26-29).

10. Tell what happened when Esau arrived (27:30-33). Explain Heb. 12:17.

11. How did Isaac evaluate Jacob's conduct (27:34-36)?

12. Describe Isaac's blessing on Esau (27:37-40).

13. What plot did Esau then devise (27:41)? What lessons can we learn?

14. How did Rebekah respond (27:42-46)? Did things work out as she hoped?

15. What arrangements did she make with Isaac?

Genesis 28 Questions:

1. Where did Jacob go to find a wife (28:1,2)? Why? What previous event was similar?

2. What blessing did Isaac pronounce on Jacob (28:3,4)? Explain the significance.

3. What effect did this have on Esau, and what did he do about it (28:6-9)?

4. What arrangement did Jacob make for his sleep (28:11)?

5. Describe Jacob's dream (28:12-15). Explain the meaning of the dream. Who are angels, and what is their purpose? Reference John 1:51.

6. What promises did God make to Jacob? Why was this important?

7. How did this affect Jacob, and what conclusion did he reach (28:16,17)?

8. What did he do with the stone (28:18)? What was the significance?

9. What name did he give the place (28:19)? What did it mean?

10. What vow did Jacob make (28:20-22)? What is a vow?

Genesis 29 Questions:

1. Where did Jacob go when he arrived? What was happening? Why (29:1-3)?

2. About whom did Jacob inquire, and what did the people answer (29:4-6)?

3. What explanation did the men give about watering the flocks (29:7,8)?

4. Whom did Jacob meet at the well, and how did he greet her (29:9-11)?

5. What did he tell her and what did she do (29:12)?
6. How did Laban greet Jacob (29:13,14)?
7. Describe Laban's two daughters (29:16,17).
8. What agreement did Jacob make with Laban (29:15-19)? Why?
9. Describe Jacob's love for Rachel (29:20).
10. What can we learn about weddings from this story?
11. When the wedding occurred, how did Laban deceive Jacob (29:21-26)?
12. What did Jacob say to Laban about this (29:25)?
13. How did Laban explain his conduct (29:26,27)?
14. Evaluate the conduct of Laban, Rachel, and Leah in this. Who was right or wrong? Why?

15. What agreement was reached then (29:27-30)?
16. What problems did this arrangement lead to?
17. Who else practiced favoritism? What lessons can we learn?
18. What can we learn about polygamy?
19. Which of Jacob's wives had children first (29:31)? Why?
20. Name her first four sons and define their names (29:32-35).

Genesis 30 Questions:

1. How did Rachel feel about being barren (30:1)? What did she say?
2. How did Jacob respond (30:2)?
3. Why was childbearing important to these women? Are children a blessing today?
4. What solution did Rachel propose (30:3)?

5. Describe who else had earlier used a similar approach and what happened as a result.
6. Name the sons born as a result (30:4-8). What did their names mean?
7. Who also called in a “pinch-hitter” (30:9)? Whom did Jacob then marry?
8. Name the sons born and define their names (30:10-13).
9. What bargain did Leah and Rachel make (30:14,15)?
10. What irony do you see in Leah’s accusation that Rachel had taken her husband?
11. Name the son born and define the name (30:16-18).
12. In the contest of childbearing, who scored next (30:19-21)? What was the son named, and what did the name mean?
13. Who was born then (30:21)?
14. What son did Rachel finally have, and what did his name mean (30:22-24)?

15. Do these events show the dangers of polygamy?

16. What request did Jacob make (30:25,26)?

17. How did Laban respond (30:27-30)?

18. Explain the agreement they reached (30:31-34).

19. What plan did Jacob follow to make a profit under this agreement (30:35-40)?

20. What happened as a result – 30:41-43?

Genesis 31 Questions:

1. What did Jacob perceive regarding Laban and his sons (31:1,2)?

2. What did God tell him to do (31:3)?

3. With whom did Jacob discuss the situation? How did he describe Laban's treatment of him and his treatment of Laban (31:4-7)?

4. What explanation did Jacob give for why the flocks conceived as they did (31:5-9)? Who gave the animals to him?
5. How did Jacob know God was responsible for the way the animals reproduced (31:10-13)?
6. What conclusion did Rachel and Leah reach (31:14-16)? Why?
7. Describe how Jacob's family left (31:17-20).
8. In what direction did they travel (31:21)
9. What sin did Rachel commit? What does this show about her family?
10. When did Laban learn that Jacob had left? What did he do (31:22,23)?
11. What warning did God give (31:24)?
12. What questions did Laban ask Jacob when he caught him (31:25-27)?
13. What did he say he would have done had he known they were leaving (31:28)?

14. What reasons did Jacob give for leaving secretly (31:31)?
15. What did he say about Laban's gods (31:32)?
16. How did Rachel escape detection (31:33-35)?
17. Summarize Jacob's speech in 31:36-42. What does this speech show about Jacob's service to Laban? What does it show about his attitude toward deceit?
18. What proposal did Laban make, and what happened as a result (31:43,44)?
19. What was the significance of the stones? What names were they given (31:45-52)?
20. How did Jacob and Laban separate (31:53-55)?