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Genesis 25

“Jacob and Esau: Double Trouble”

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Last week’s study was about the wedding story of Isaac and Rebekah. This study focuses on Jacob and Esau, the twins God eventually blessed them with, after they struggled with infertility for approximately 20 years. ¹

Jacob, though he is the younger of the twin boys, will be God’s sovereign choice, before he is even born, to carry on the line of the covenant that God first made with Abraham, so Jesus is a descendant of Jacob.

There are no real “heroes” in this story. There are no shining examples of what it means to be a godly person or a Christian. Sometimes God puts stories like this one in the Bible as reminders of what *not* to do, and this family’s story is in that category. Even though they are a pivotal family in the covenant plan of God, they have their flaws. However, God will use them, particularly Jacob, for his glory, and the good news is that this account is another reminder to us that God uses flawed, ordinary people to do his perfect, extraordinary work.

There’s a lot to learn from in this family! All four of them, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Esau, serve as bad examples, and they are a reminder to use of what not to do. As Jacob and Esau grow up, the Bible shows us that they have many “issues.” Jacob has a problem with being deceptive and manipulative. He’s also a conniver and a schemer. He rips people off in order to benefit himself and he’s a very skilled con artist. Esau has his own set of problems, including being rash, resentful, and being oriented toward satisfying his personal desires. His appetites, his desires, and his thoughts control his actions, which means he’s always seeking to please himself

¹ [Genesis 25:21](#) - *“Isaac prayed on behalf of his wife”* and *“the Lord answered his prayer and his wife Rebekah became pregnant.”*

rather than pleasing God. There's no doubt that these boys are anything but model kids.

Isaac and Rebekah are not model parents either! They show favoritism and each one schemes to benefit the son they love. When you've got that going on, where one parent loves one child, and the other parent loves another child, there's bound to be an environment of hostility and competition between the kids, and the home will become a place of secrets and schemes that are developed to outmaneuver each other.

Don't Show Favoritism

1. [Genesis 25:28](#) - *"Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob."*
2. Favoritism in the Church.
 - a. [James 2:1-4](#) - *"My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, 'Here's a good seat for you,' but say to the poor man, 'You stand there' or 'Sit on the floor by my feet,' have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?"*
 - b. [James 2:8-9](#) - *"If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers."*
 - c. Favoritism is a sin because the Bible tells us specifically that God does not show favoritism, and if we don't live up to God's example or standard, we sin.
 - d. God does not like or love one person more than another; he loves all equally.
 - e. One example of God's love for everyone is seen in [Acts 10:34-35](#), when Peter was preaching to the Gentile, Cornelius, and his household, the result of which was that they were all saved and baptized by the Holy Spirit.
 - f. Peter said, *"I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right."*
 - g. Believers need to guard their hearts against any kind of prejudice and favoritism, because it is sin.

3. Favoritism in the family.
 - a. This often comes in the form of comparisons.
 - i. Examples include: “Why can’t you make grades like your sister or why can’t you throw like your brother?”
 - b. Comparisons create an environment of hostility and competition between siblings.
 - i. One or more kids will grow up resentful toward their mother and/or father.
 - ii. Comparisons breed isolation and division.
 - iii. The child who feels less loved will always be on a mission to prove something to their mother or father or the world in general.
 - c. It’s hard work, but it’s critical, to make sure your children feel equally loved and appreciated, and sometimes it takes open communication so that no one feels overlooked or unloved.

Don’t Allow Your Flesh To Rule Your Life

4. [Genesis 25:29–32](#) - *“Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob, ‘Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I’m famished!’ (That is why he was also called Edom.) Jacob replied, ‘First sell me your birthright.’ ‘Look, I am about to die,’ Esau said. ‘What good is the birthright to me?’ ”²*
5. Esau declares, “I’m starving and I’m about to die!”
 - a. His only interest is satisfying his appetite; he doesn’t stop to consider what’s at stake, and he has no concern for all that five minutes of satisfaction from a bowl of soup is going to cost him.
6. Esau wasn’t under the control of the Holy Spirit rather it was Esau’s own lusts, desires and appetites that controlled him.
7. Esau is a picture of the absolutely destructive nature of our flesh that will stop at nothing to be satisfied.
8. [Hebrews 12:16](#) - *“See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son.”*
9. [Romans 13:14](#) - *“But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.”* (King James Version - KJV)

² Jacob and Esau are probably teenagers when this incident occurred.

10. **Romans 13:14** - *“Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”* (New International Version 1984 - NIV)
11. Our fleshly nature must be dealt with, so Believers must be constantly involved in taming it as you would an unrelenting beast.
12. **Romans 7:18** - *“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing...”* (King James Version - KJV)
13. Sadly, many people have made life changing, drastic, and regrettable decisions all for the sake of five minutes of pleasure.
 - a. It’s important to remember that not all appetites or pleasures are wrong.
 - i. God has given us certain appetites and desires; however, they must be enjoyed within the framework of his design and will.
 1. For example, God has given the desire for sex, but sexual intimacy must be exclusively kept for married couples.
 - b. Esau basically says, “I want it **NOW!**”
 - c. He had not learned delayed gratification.

Don’t Manipulate, Deceive Or Take Advantage Of Others

14. **Genesis 25:33-34** - *“But Jacob said, ‘Swear to me first.’ So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright.”*
15. Jacob’s name means, deceiver, and he’s certainly living up to it! ³
16. He’s the one who is manipulating the situation for his own advantage and profit, and it’s clear that Jacob the con man is not dealing honestly with his brother.
17. **Leviticus 25:17** - *“Do not take advantage of each other, but fear your God. I am the Lord your God.”*
18. **1 Thessalonians 4:6** - *“No one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins.”*
19. God had already promised Jacob the birthright, so Jacob didn’t need to manipulate the situation to take advantage of his brother, because God was in

³ The Hebrew word is Yakov, which means, “heal-grasper, one who trips up another, deceiver.”

complete control and he didn't need Jacob's help to deliver on his promise.

- a. The normal practice and traditional approach was that the firstborn son would receive his father's blessing and place of privilege in the family, and this was called the birthright.
 - i. The birthright generally consisted of three things: a special paternal blessing, a double portion of the father's assets, and leadership of the family as the future patriarch.
 - ii. God's choice of Jacob over Esau, to be the heir-apparent, was simply his sovereign prerogative.

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Genesis 25:19-34](#) to provide an overview for this study.
3. Pastor Gary said this account of Isaac's sons is a classic example of the old saying: "No man is completely useless; he can always serve as a bad example."⁴
 - a. Have you experienced times in your life when you were the bad example that helped other people learn valuable lessons?
 - b. How have you seen the tragic story of someone else's life become a warning signal in your own life?
 - c. Share examples of families you've known that you would consider to be a good model of a Christian family.
 - i. How rare are these "model" families?
 - ii. What are some of the characteristics that help define these families?
4. Read and discuss [James 2:1-4, 8-9](#).
 - a. Spend time talking about examples of favoritism in the church and the family.
 - b. How have the results of favoritism impacted family members or the church in the short-term and the long-term?
 - c. How do you guard your heart against prejudice and favoritism?
5. Share examples of times in your life when you did not have the patience or the willingness to allow the Holy Spirit to control you and the circumstances/situations in your life?

⁴ Attributed to several people.

6. Read and discuss the findings of the 2008 Yale University study concerning the correlation between intelligence and the ability to delay gratification.^{5 6}
 - a. Read and discuss [Hebrews 12:16](#) and [Romans 7:18, 13:14](#).
 - b. Share examples of times in your life when you were smart enough and patient enough to wait for the Lord to work things out according to his perfect plan and his perfect will.
 - c. Spend time talking about the outcome of situations when you, like Esau, have said, “I want it now!”

7. Read and discuss [Leviticus 25:17](#) and [1 Thessalonians 4:6](#).
 - a. Share examples of situations you’ve experienced in which people have deceived or manipulated you for their gain or advantage.

8. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: remember to let God take care of them, and avoid the temptation to manipulate situations to “make it happen”; trust the Lord and wait on him to reveal and accomplish his will in their life; yield to the leadership and control of the Holy Spirit.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).

⁵ <http://www.webmd.com/brain/news/20080910/delayed-gratification-intelligence-linked>

⁶ The study found that the higher a person’s intelligence, the greater their ability to delay gratification.