

# Genesis 27: A Broken Family

By

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*“Now it came to pass, when Isaac was old and his eyes were so dim that he could not see, that he called Esau his older son and said to him, “My son.” And he answered him, “Here I am.” Then he said, “Behold now, I am old. I do not know the day of my death. “Now therefore, please take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me. “And make me savory food, such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die.”*

*Genesis 27:1-4*

One of the hardest, and most encouraging, things about studying the Bible is to see great men and women of faith display all too human errors that have lasting and tragic consequences. On one hand, these stories are disheartening since these people represent the heights of faithfulness and goodness, because of this we root for them and desire for them to have the best possible lives. But on the other hand, it is encouraging to see the same frailties displayed by the great men and women of faith so that we know that we are not alone in our errors, but in all the ups and downs of our lives, we find that we are in good company with those who have come before us.

*“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”*

*-1 Corinthians 10:13*

As I have previously said, one of the main reasons why I love the Bible so much is that it is written with an unparalleled beauty that describes the human condition better than any other writing. While Genesis 27 describes an undoubtedly tragic sequence of events, it is laid out so brilliantly that if we can approach this text with sufficient humility and grace, we can learn from the mistakes of those who came before us and hopefully address these issues within our own lives before they cause the kinds of destructive patterns that we see displayed for us. In order to help this process along, I thought it would be a good idea to give a brief overview of the story and then do an in depth analysis of each person within this story and see their motives, what they did wrong, and the consequences of their actions.

## Overview

*“And the LORD said to 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.” So when her days were fulfilled for her to give birth, indeed there were twins in her womb. And the first came out red. He was like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau. Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau’s heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them. So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.”*

*-Genesis 25:23-28*

To put Genesis 27 in perspective, we have to keep in mind that this chapter of the Bible is not an inciting incident, but rather the culmination of decades of built up conflict and family dysfunction within the household of Isaac and Rebekah. The family dynamic had been fraying since the birth of Esau and Jacob with each parent favoring one or the other of the two twins. This overarching lack of unity between Isaac and Rebekah culminates in the above tragedy. Isaac initiates the sequence of events by trying to give Esau the family blessing. In order to do this, he asks that Esau go into the field in order to kill and cook a deer for him. As he ate the food, he was going to bless Esau, which in an ancient culture that was mostly illiterate, would be closer to the modern act of signing a will for the surviving children of a family.

However, when Esau is out hunting the deer, Rebekah conspires with Jacob to take advantage of Isaac’s near blindness and have Jacob impersonate Esau in order to take the blessing of Isaac. Jacob successfully tricks his father, which leads him to receive the ultimate family blessing, and for Esau to receive a lesser blessing, as well as a prophetic word about the ultimate fate of Esau’s tribe. Esau becomes so murderously angry at his brother that, upon his mother learning about his anger, Jacob has to flee from his own home in order to avoid the wrath of his brother. The chapter ends with the tragic dissolution of this family.

## Isaac

*“Now it came to pass, when Isaac was old and his eyes were so dim that he could not see, that he called Esau his older son and said to him, “My son.” And he answered him, “Here I am.” Then he said, “Behold now, I am old. I do not know the day of my death. “Now therefore, please take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the*

*field and hunt game for me. "And make me savory food, such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die."*

*Genesis 27:1-4*

Since Isaac is the patriarch of the family, as well as the one who sets these events into motion, it only makes sense that we begin by looking at his particular failures in this catastrophe. Before we do, it is important to remember that Isaac is, overall, described as a good and decent man. He has been faithful to his wife, good to his sons, faithful to God, and a hard working and generous landowner. Also, while Isaac's behavior in this story is far from commendable, it is also not born out of malice or overt wickedness. This failure can be ascribed solely to Isaac's oversight and unjust favoritism of Esau, which is an all too human proclivity.

## Willful Blindness

Our first indication of Isaac's failure is given to us symbolically by the author of Genesis by describing Isaac's eyes as "dim". While I do believe this is an accurate description of Isaac's physical eyes, the "eye" is used throughout Scripture in a symbolic fashion describing our overall vision and understanding. For instance, in Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve partake of the forbidden fruit we are told:

*"Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings."*

*-Genesis 3:7*

Jesus also uses this symbol in His sermon on the mount:

*"The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. "But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"*

*-Matthew 6:22-23*

He is clearly not talking about someone's literal eyes, but instead the eyes of their understanding. Our eyes constitute the direction or content of our vision, or perspective. If our overall orientation in the world is off kilter, then it is very difficult to address specific problems. For instance, you can succeed in correcting a man for lying, as long as he *understands* that what he said was a lie. However, you can't correct a man for telling a lie that he believes to be true. This is especially damaging when the person who is supposed to lead has become willfully blind to the issues that he is supposed to be overseeing. To contrast Isaac's "dimness" of eyes, Moses is described this way at the end of his life:

*“Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigor diminished.”*

*-Deuteronomy 34:7*

This theme does come up throughout literature, from the famous Shakespeare play “King Lear” where the earl of Gloucester has his eyes put out as a symbol of his willful blindness to his own son’s nefarious plotting, to Sauron in “The Lord of The Rings” who exists as a massive eye on a tower, representing his singular and oppressive vision for Middle Earth, and even the modern film “Bird Box” with Sandra Bullock, where demonic entities cause people to kill themselves when they look at them. All of these stories demonstrate the overall human understanding of the importance of vision and its catastrophic consequences when that vision is corrupted or made blind. And unfortunately, this is exactly what Isaac has done.

We have to remember that God has already spoken to Isaac through Rebekah and told them that Jacob is to receive the blessing, not Esau. We also know that Rebekah continues to believe this truth and has been communicating with her husband about his responsibilities towards Jacob. We also know that Jacob and Esau have been rivals for a very long time, and yet, Isaac has become willfully blind to the overall calling of God in his home, the evil character of Esau, the desire of his wife, and the conflict between his two sons. But what caused his willful blindness?

## The Passions of the Heart

*“And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.”*

*-Genesis 25:28*

Once again, this is all too human. Isaac’s willing blindness wasn’t caused by some wicked machination, or with any malicious intent, it was born completely out of an unjust favoritism from Isaac towards Esau’s ability to hunt. Isaac not only values Esau’s raw power and skill, but on top of that, he particularly likes the wild game that Esau is able to hunt. This general tendency to be led by our desires is not particularly rare.

*“The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?”*

*-Jeremiah 17:9*

For ancient man, the heart was far more than the emotional center of man, it was instead the center of our deepest passions and desires. In this passage, and many others, we are warned that our passions are deceitful and can easily lead us astray. We want to believe that we are purely rational creatures, but the fact of the matter is that we

are far more powerfully led by our passions than we care to admit. This is why Paul describes Satan's tactics of preventing people from coming to know God this way:

*"But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them."*

*-2 Corinthians 4:3-4*

Satan isn't depicted as preventing people from seeing the truth of the gospel, but instead *"the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ..."* If Satan can prevent people from seeing the *glory* of Christ, and instead direct our passions towards a lesser glory, he can trap us in our lusts every time. This is exactly what he did to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden:

*"For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate."*

*-Genesis 3:5-6*

He didn't convince Eve that his truth was superior to God's truth, he only had to direct her eyes towards the "attractiveness" of what was forbidden to her. He even tries this same tactic with Christ Himself:

*"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."*

*-Matthew 4:1-3*

Once again, he doesn't get into a theological debate with Jesus, instead he appeals to the simple hunger of Christ in order to tempt Him to deny the will of the Father. Because this temptation is so common we are warned in Scripture to:

*"Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life."*

*-Proverbs 4:23*

Some religions and philosophies (like Buddhism and Stoicism) tell us to avoid this problem by avoiding passions altogether. The Bible on the other hand doesn't criticize the heart, only in elevating the heart above its rightful place. When Solomon declares

that out of the heart “spring the issues of life.” He is not saying that with sorrow or regret, but with sincere appreciation for the role of the heart in our life. It is a great blessing that we have passions and desires, and that these desires provide us with zeal, encouragement, blessing, joy, ecstasy, and so much more. The heart is a wonderful thing, but only in its proper place.

When Solomon tells us that we are to “keep” our heart “with all diligence”, he is not saying to deny the heart, but to make sure it maintains its proper estate. While the heart gives us joy and passion, it is not the way that we are supposed to determine truth or goodness. As such, our heart is liable to corruption and temptation. This is why we need our “head”, our rationality and cognition, to understand what is actually correct. However, the “head” is also not sufficient in itself:

*“What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, “You shall not covet.” But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead.”*

*-Romans 7:7-8*

Paul tells us that simply knowing the right thing to do, doesn’t necessarily lead us to accomplishing the right thing. In fact, even knowledge of what is right can be manipulated by Satan to be perceived as an imposition on my freedom. The truth is that neither the head nor the heart can stand against the appetites of our flesh, only a correctly ordered cooperation between the two can actually succeed in bringing us to virtue. I love how C.S. Lewis puts this in his fascinating book “The Abolition of Man”:

*“It still remains true that no justification of virtue will enable a man to be virtuous. Without the aid of trained emotions the intellect is powerless against the animal organism. I had sooner play cards against a man who was quite sceptical about ethics, but bred to believe that ‘a gentleman does not cheat’, than against an irreproachable moral philosopher who had been brought up among sharpers. In battle it is not syllogisms that will keep the reluctant nerves and muscles to their post in the third hour of the bombardment. The crudest sentimentalism... about a flag or a country or a regiment will be of more use. We were told it all long ago by Plato. As the king governs by his executive, so Reason in man must rule the mere appetites by means of the ‘spirited element’. The head rules the belly through the chest — the seat, as Alanus tells us, of Magnanimity, of emotions organized by trained habit into stable sentiments. The Chest-Magnanimity-Sentiment — these are the indispensable liaison officers between cerebral man and visceral man. it may even be said that it is by this middle element that man is man: for by his intellect he is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal.”*

-C. S. Lewis - "The Abolition of Man"

It is this correct order that we are striving to maintain throughout the course of our lives. It isn't enough to merely *understand* the virtues of the Bible, we must have the ability to practice these virtues and fight off our temptations. This is why it isn't enough to merely *submit* to God, we must love Him and desire Him above all else. While this is a difficult balance to achieve, and one that we will never fully achieve on this side of heaven, we must constantly strive upwards to avoid the calamities produced by our failure to do so.

While Isaac already knew the proper order for his family, while he had already been told that Jacob should receive the blessing, his appetites clouded his vision and moved him to make a terrible decision that destroyed his family. This is what happens when we are led by our passions, we become blind to the truth and we begin using our reason to justify our passions as opposed to submitting to what we know to be true, regardless of how that makes us feel.

*"For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things."*

-Philippians 3:18-19

Not all of us will have the same passions and fears, but by disciplining ourselves towards right behavior, the truth of our deceptive passions will become more clear to us, and we will be enabled to fight this behavior more effectively:

*"But the path of the just is like the shining sun, That shines ever brighter unto the perfect day."*

-Proverbs 4:18

The alternative is to remain unconscious, by giving into our passions and our fears we will become more blind to our behaviors and confused about why we consistently make wrong decisions.

*"The way of the wicked is like darkness; They do not know what makes them stumble."*

-Proverbs 4:19

## The Blind Leader

*"Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained, But happy is he who keeps the law."*

-Proverbs 29:18

As destructive as willing blindness can be for everyone, when a leader is guilty of this sin, the results can be catastrophic. When God gives us power, this also comes with heavy responsibility. Isaac, being the head of his family, carries a heavy responsibility to lead them well and to communicate God's vision for the family. And, regardless if someone is aware of their responsibility to lead appropriately, they are leading those beneath them whether they know it or not. Instead of shouldering this responsibility correctly, Isaac abdicates his role in order to satisfy his base appetites, and this decision leads his family into willful blindness and deception.

Although the story ends with Rebekah collaborating with Jacob in order to deceive Isaac, there are a lot of indicators that the story begins with Isaac collaborating with Esau in order to deceive Rebekah. Once again, Rebekah is well aware that the family blessing should go to Jacob. Because of this, Isaac knows that he can't actually convince his wife that his decision is correct, and therefore can only avoid conflict with her, by hiding the truth from her. This is seemingly why Isaac waits until he thinks he is about to die, and why he predicates this "ceremony" with Esau going out to get him food. Remember that Esau is a grown man at this point with wives and a family of his own; and the pronouncement of this particular blessing was a formal and efficacious event, closer to signing a contract than a simple encouraging word from a father to a son.

In order to prepare this ceremony, Isaac needed a seemingly innocuous reason to have a one on one meal with his son where he could give him the official blessing. This is why Jewish and Christian Biblical commentators alike have seen this action as one of subtle manipulation, to take one example:

*"Its secret character. The commission assigned to Esau does not appear to have been dictated by any supposed connection between the gratification of the palate, the reinvigoration of the body, or the refreshment of the spirit and the exercise of the prophetic gift, but rather by a desire to divert the attention of Rebekah from supposing that anything unusual was going on, and so to secure the necessary privacy for carrying out the scheme which he had formed. Had Isaac not been doubtful of the righteousness of what he had in contemplation, he would never have resorted to maneuvering and secrecy, but would have courted unveiled publicity. Crooked ways love the dark (John 3:20, 21)."*

*-H.D.M. Spence, Joseph S Exell - "The Pulpit Commentary-Book of Genesis"*

This means that while Rebekah and Jacob are by no means excused in their deception, they were in reality following the lead of their father. This also seems to explain Isaac's response when he learns about their deception:

*“Now it happened, as soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting. He also had made savory food, and brought it to his father, and said to his father, “Let my father arise and eat of his son’s game, that your soul may bless me.” And his father Isaac said to him, “Who are you?” So he said, “I am your son, your firstborn, Esau.” Then Isaac trembled exceedingly, and said, “Who? Where is the one who hunted game and brought it to me? I ate all of it before you came, and I have blessed him—and indeed he shall be blessed.”*

*-Genesis 27:30-33*

Isaac was acting in the place of a fool and not a Godly leader. So when his own hypocrisy was exploited by Rebekah, he couldn't even be angry with Rebekah or Jacob, knowing that he himself had acted in a deceptive manner that was against the will of God. As we are told in Ecclesiastes:

*“The words of a wise man’s mouth are gracious, But the lips of a fool shall swallow him up...”*

*-Ecclesiastes 10:12*

When leaders abdicate their responsibilities to properly lead those who are entrusted to them, when they fail to adequately fight the desires of their heart and are moved towards their fears and their appetites, their instability is guiding the instability of those who are under them; and their own schemes will end up destroying them. So while this lesson is applicable for all of us, for leaders especially, we must take this exhortation to heart and discipline ourselves to orient ourselves towards a Godly vision, lest we lead others into calamity and instability.

## Rebekah

*“Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt game and to bring it. So Rebekah spoke to Jacob her son, saying, “Indeed I heard your father speak to Esau your brother, saying, ‘Bring me game and make savory food for me, that I may eat it and bless you in the presence of the LORD before my death.’ “Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to what I command you. “Go now to the flock and bring me from there two choice kids of the goats, and I will make*

*savory food from them for your father, such as he loves. "Then you shall take it to your father, that he may eat it, and that he may bless you before his death."*

*-Genesis 27:5-10*

While Rebekah is technically correct in what she is doing, this does not excuse her behavior. In the Bible's characteristic subtlety we are told about Rebekah:

*"So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob."*

*-Genesis 25:27-28*

## Parenting Apart

This passage doesn't say that Rebekah's love for Jacob was out of her inordinate appetites, but we are also not told that her love for Jacob was necessarily because of her devotion to God. In fact, it seems that her love for Jacob was due more towards his temperament than anything else. We are told that Esau was "a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents." One of the most common temptations for mothers is to dote upon their children and coddle them, while one of the most common temptations for men is to live vicariously through their children's successes. Because of this, it makes sense that Isaac would love Esau because he identifies with his power and skill. While it makes an equal amount of sense that Rebekah would favor Jacob who was more mild and desiring to stay in the tents.

So, when we look at Jacob's interaction with his mom, it does seem like he is more passive in her scheme:

*"And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, "Look, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth-skinned man. "Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be a deceiver to him; and I shall bring a curse on myself and not a blessing." But his mother said to him, "Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, get them for me." And he went and got them and brought them to his mother, and his mother made savory food, such as his father loved. Then Rebekah took the choice clothes of her elder son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. And she put the skins of the kids of the goats on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. Then she gave the savory food and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob."*

*-Genesis 27:11-17*

While this particular event had a terrible consequence, it is also insinuated that this event is representative of the overall home dynamics. Parenting is supposed to be a cooperative effort, but all too often it becomes a competitive one. When we look back at the ideal established for us in the Garden of Eden, we see that the man in the relationship has the role of leading his wife in accordance with divine vision. This is why Adam is given the command about the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil directly from God, whereas Eve is created after this command is given and must receive the command from Adam.

Men, on average, are more oriented upward towards potential. They have the great vision to build businesses and civilizations, which is why men make up the majority of leaders in a given society, from business, to politics, to research and development, to the military and beyond, men disproportionately hold these positions. And no matter how much we try to tinker with that ratio through artificial DEI programs, this gap doesn't seem to be shrinking very much. In fact, the societies with the most gender equality, like the Netherlands, have come no closer to removing this vast gap between men and women within their leadership ranks.

However, since men are oriented up towards potential, they tend to lack a compassion or an empathetic union with things the way they are, but women excel in this ability. This is why Eve is "communicating" with the snake. Her role in the garden seems to be to attend to the creation as it is, while Adam is shaping the creation towards its potential good as a gardener. To put it another way, while men are oriented up, women are oriented down towards the more vulnerable parts of creation. As such, Eve is drawn to the snake as a creature that appears marginalized and helpless. Since we know that snakes are venomous this sounds ridiculous to us, but think for a second about the apparent vulnerability of serpents. The most vulnerable part of a creature is its neck, and yet snakes are almost entirely a "neck". Satan then plays on Eve's compassion and manipulates her compassion towards his nefarious aims.

Let's apply this concept to parenting. Since men are oriented up, this means that they have a great ability to bring out the potential of their children. Men are excited to see their children grow, to play with them, to teach them everything they know, and to make their kids more independent. However, this means that if a man is unbalanced, he can push his kids too hard, ignore their individuality as they plan out their future, and fail to provide enough support for their children to make them feel safe and cared for.

And, since women are oriented down, they are great at seeing kids as they are and loving them exactly as they are. They can "sense" the vulnerabilities of their children and attend to their needs before their kids can even give voice to them. However, since

they are sensitive to these vulnerabilities, women can coddle their children, they can “protect” them from their potential, they can fail to discipline them appropriately, and fail to cultivate bravery in their children by keeping them from all potential harm.

This is why men and women need each other. The man is supposed to listen to his wife and see the vulnerabilities of his children and be able to attend to their individual needs. While the wife is supposed to learn from her husband’s courage. To not attend to every need and vulnerability of their children, to discipline them appropriately, to let them figure things out for themselves, and experience danger and disappointment. This is a negotiation that is supposed to happen between the spouses that makes both the man and the woman more complete parents.

However, this type of negotiation is difficult. Because of this, many couples fail to negotiate their parenting at all and instead parent their kids apart from one another. Instead of the wife negotiating with her husband about effective discipline, she instead turns her head when she witnesses discipline from her husband that she finds overly harsh and coddles the children, even in a way that undermines the fathers authority in the home. Instead of husbands negotiating with their wives about the needs of the home, or the emotional desires of the kids to spend more time with their father, the husband continues in their behavior assuming that the kids only need emotional connection with their mom and not their dad.

This also leads to parents having favorites. The dad is going to prefer the more independent children who share their hobbies, and the mom is going to prefer the more sensitive children who share her hobbies. This dynamic then separates the husband and the wife as they begin to cultivate an unhealthy dependence on their children.

This seems to be what has happened between Rebekah and Isaac. Isaac is too busy appreciating Esau’s might and skill to attend to his deeper emotional needs. This is why Esau grows up to be a narcissistic, immature, warlord and polygamist. Whereas, Rebekah feeds Jacob’s victim mentality and criticism of Isaac, which is why he shows no remorse over deceiving his own father in collaboration with his own mother. Notice that Jacob’s only reservation of this particular plan is:

*“Look, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth-skinned man. “Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be a deceiver to him; and I shall bring a curse on myself and not a blessing.”*

*-Genesis 27:11-12*

He isn't concerned with the deception itself, his father, or his brother Esau, his only concern is that he might get caught. And instead of calling out this callousness Rebekah says:

*"Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, get them for me."*

*-Genesis 27:13*

Although the effect of this plot is God's will, the plot itself has no reference to God. While there are instances in the Bible in which deception becomes an allowable strategy, like (Rahab hiding the Israelite spies in the book of Joshua) this is only in extreme circumstances within an upside down order, like the oppressive structure of Jericho. Normally, deception can only bring about confusion and unjust division, even if the intent is good. It seems as though the division between Rebekah and Isaac has become so extreme that they have lost the ability to communicate honestly. They enact their desires through their children and fail to be honest with one another throughout this chapter. Even as the chapter ends and Rebekah tries to save Jacob from Esau's wrath, notice how she asks Isaac to send him away:

*"And Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth, like these who are the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?"*

*-Genesis 27:46*

Even here she can't be honest with her husband. She can't tell him the circumstances between the brothers, and instead has to invent a reasonable sounding lie to protect Jacob. This is the failure of negotiation that has happened within their marriage. They are no longer partners or helpers, they are roommates who see no reason to be honest with one another. This open disrespect towards her husband has made an already fractious situation even worse. Even if someone could say that since Rebekah has already tried to reason with her husband and so she had no choice, this doesn't seem to be the case. This was a willful act to go around Isaac's authority without an attempt to confront him about these pressing issues. This is a "cold war" between husband and wife where the children themselves become proxies in their bitter conflict.

As such, this chapter bears much resemblance to the original fall of Adam and Eve. Here, Rebekah attends to, what she perceives as the vulnerable, Jacob, whose name means usurper, and literally "feeds" her husband the fruit of her deception. The result? Just as Cain rises up to slay Abel in the aftermath of the fall, so Esau tries to kill his own brother in the aftermath of this debacle.

*“So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, “The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then I will kill my brother Jacob.” And the words of Esau her older son were told to Rebekah. So she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said to him, “Surely your brother Esau comforts himself concerning you by intending to kill you. “Now therefore, my son, obey my voice: arise, flee to my brother Laban in Haran. “And stay with him a few days, until your brother’s fury turns away, “until your brother’s anger turns away from you, and he forgets what you have done to him; then I will send and bring you from there. Why should I be bereaved also of you both in one day?”*

*-Genesis 27:41-45*

The great irony here is that Rebekah conspires against her own husband in order to help her son, but not only does she put him in mortal danger, but she also has to send him away from her in order to save his life. And tragically, when Jacob finally returns to his home, Rebekah is already dead, which means she never sees her son again.

What should we learn from this? Outcomes in marriage are not as important as the marriage itself. When we prioritize our way, (even if we happen to be right) and fight with our spouse as though they are an obstacle to our aims as opposed to a helper towards our aims, we guarantee this exact outcome. Sometimes we become frustrated with our spouse and we start to think that negotiation is useless, but this decision is a self-fulfilling prophecy. We must try our best to preserve positive communication within the marriage, no matter how frustrating these conversations might be. We must always aim at bettering our negotiation so that we are working with one another instead of working against each other. Because, even if we get our way in the short term, by doing lasting damage to our overall marriage, we are building for ourselves a house of bitterness and solitude.

*“Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, Than a fatted calf with hatred.”*

*-Proverbs 15:17*

*“The wise woman builds her house, But the foolish pulls it down with her hands.”*

*-Proverbs 14:1*

## Esau

*“Now it happened, as soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting. He also had made savory food, and brought it to his father, and said to his father, “Let my father arise and eat of his son’s game, that your soul may bless me.”*

*And his father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" So he said, "I am your son, your firstborn, Esau." Then Isaac trembled exceedingly, and said, "Who? Where is the one who hunted game and brought it to me? I ate all of it before you came, and I have blessed him—and indeed he shall be blessed." When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me—me also, O my father!" But he said, "Your brother came with deceit and has taken away your blessing." And Esau said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!" And he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?"*

*-Genesis 27:30-36*

We have already talked in depth about Esau's character and his folly and there isn't much more to say about him, but for the purposes of this paper I wanted to point out one key phrase from this chapter:

*"Now it happened, as soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting."*

*-Genesis 27:30*

Once again in this wonderful subtlety, the writer of Genesis lets us know that Esau's return from the hunt happened just after Jacob had left. Why include this detail? Esau is a man who always falls just short of blessing because his overall aim in life is wrong. Esau is an impulsive man who only sees the present and never sees the future. This is why he originally sold his birthright for a bowl of soup and why he is a slave to his wrath and his lust. The immediate has captivated his attention and long term consequences are far from his mind. It reminds me of one of the strangest parables that Jesus taught:

*"He also said to His disciples: "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. "So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.' "Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. 'I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.' "So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' "And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' "Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' "So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this*

*world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much."*

*-Luke 16:1-10*

## Future Glory

The above passage has confounded many Christians throughout the ages because it seems like Jesus is commending a dishonest businessman. However, what Jesus is actually doing is showing the value of planning for the future. Although this businessman is sinful and corrupt, at least he showed a shrewdness in using his present situation to better his long term plans. Just like Jacob. Although Jacob is deceptive and wicked by tricking Esau and his father, his behavior shows an understanding that future glory is better than present satisfaction.

Jacob "sacrifices" his present food in the form of the soup in order to receive the far more valuable family blessing. While this action shows a lack of integrity, it also shows an understanding of the future that Esau fundamentally lacks, which is why Jacob is redeemable and Esau is not. The call of God is always predicated on future glory through the sacrifice of the present. To be a follower of Christ means to submit to the King who is to return in opposition to the values of the world that is. This is why Christians have been persecuted throughout time. They have always refused to submit to the wrong mentality of the world and therefore, they have incurred the wrath of the corrupt who are in power.

*"Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said: "Blessed are you poor, For yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, For you shall be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, For you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets. "But woe to you who are rich, For you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full, For you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, For you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, For so did their fathers to the false prophets.*

*-Luke 6:20-26*

The call of God has always been, and will always be, a sacrifice of the present for the future. Even apart from persecution, to follow the will of God for our lives is a sacrifice of present pleasure for future glory. In order to enter into the blessedness of God's love, we have to learn how to sacrifice our own immediate desires for the betterment of

others, in order to enter into the joy of marriage, we have to sacrifice all other sexual partners, in order to be honest, we have to tell the truth when it will cost us, in order to be courageous, we have to face down present fears. While Jacob was severely misguided in the means that he implemented, his overall aim was correct, Jacob consistently chooses the higher reward for present risk and sacrifice. Esau on the other hand always chooses present benefit at the cost of future goodness. This is how the writer of Hebrews describes Esau:

*“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.*

*-Hebrews 12:14-17*

Esau weeps at the loss of his birthright, not because he did the wrong thing, but because he didn't get the outcome he wanted. He was more than happy to sell the responsibilities of his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of soup, but when he actually loses the benefits of the blessing, that is when he finally weeps. Esau wants the benefit, but he doesn't want to pay the requisite cost. This is the kind of person we become when we refuse to pay the appropriate price for our higher passions. Such people want the benefits of honesty, but never accept the consequences for telling the truth, they want to be courageous, but never face their fears, they want love, but they are unwilling to put others before themselves, they want repentance, but they don't want to change, they want forgiveness, but never humble themselves enough to ask for it, they want peace, but they don't want to forgive, they want positive communication, but avoid all conflict.

This attitude even shows itself in Esau's sexuality:

*“When Esau was forty years old, he took as wives Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite. And they were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah.”*

*-Genesis 26:34-35*

Esau wants sex, but refuses monogamy. Choice requires sacrifice that Esau is unwilling to make, and so he marries multiple women so that he doesn't have to restrict himself to one. And when his parents complain about the behavior of his wives, his solution isn't to work on his relationships, but to marry another woman that they might find more agreeable:

*“Also Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan did not please his father Isaac. So Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had.”*

*-Genesis 28:8-9*

When the fallout from this story happens, Esau fully embodies the spirit of Cain and instead of trying to fix things with his brother, or even to seek justice, he instead decides to murder Jacob:

*“So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, “The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then I will kill my brother Jacob.” And the words of Esau her older son were told to Rebekah. So she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said to him, “Surely your brother Esau comforts himself concerning you by intending to kill you.”*

*-Genesis 27:41-42*

Esau doesn’t think of the long term consequences to his family, only about his present rage. Esau’s story is not about God unfairly electing Jacob over Esau, but instead it is the story of a man who can’t actually be redeemed because he always sacrifices the future for the present. So, when Esau begs his father for a blessing, Isaac is instead given a prophecy that would have been just as shocking to Isaac as it was to Esau:

*“Then Isaac answered and said to Esau, “Indeed I have made him your master, and all his brethren I have given to him as servants; with grain and wine I have sustained him. What shall I do now for you, my son?” And Esau said to his father, “Have you only one blessing, my father? Bless me—me also, O my father!” And Esau lifted up his voice and wept. Then Isaac his father answered and said to him:*

*“Behold, your dwelling shall be of the fatness of the earth, And of the dew of heaven from above. By your sword you shall live, And you shall serve your brother; And it shall come to pass, when you become restless, That you shall break his yoke from your neck.”*

*-Genesis 27:37-40*

Even though Esau’s aim is wrong, he is still powerful and resourceful. This quality does provide some success for Esau, but the success is limited and doomed for failure. What we learn from Esau is that if our aim is wrong, we will always fall short of our intended blessing.

## Jacob - Striving For Love

*“So he went to his father and said, “My father.” And he said, “Here I am. Who are you, my son?” Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn; I have done just as you told me; please arise, sit and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me.” But Isaac said to his son, “How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?” And he said, “Because the LORD your God brought it to me.” Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not.” So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, “The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau’s hands; so he blessed him.”*

*Genesis 27:18-23*

Let’s end this paper with a look at Jacob. While Jacob is not the architect of the deception, he still participates in it. But why does he do this? There is insinuation in the text that Jacob is not primarily out to hurt his brother, nor is he only “led” by his mother, or moved by monetary gain, but instead he seems to be driven by a misplaced desire to be received by his father. This might sound odd, considering the fact that Jacob is deceiving his father in this chapter, but the insinuation is present throughout this chapter and the following. Remember that Jacob is a man who is denied acceptance by his father. For a narcissist like Esau, rejection by a parent seems to have not made much of a difference for him, but for a normal, and even sensitive, man like Jacob, such rejection would have burned a gaping hole into his heart.

While the deception makes sense, from a practical angle, we have to think about the psychology of someone who could carry such an action out. This is not a small lie that is told in a moment, this required Jacob putting on his own brother's clothes, disguising his voice, and wearing fur on his hands to emulate his brother's body. This also required Jacob to go along with his father as he felt his arms, smelled him, and then pronounced a blessing that was fit for his brother and not him. To go through with this would either require a complete sociopath (which Jacob does not seem to be) or a man so desperate for approval, that he would receive affection on false pretenses.

Even in his voice we see that his heart wasn’t in the disguise:

*So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, “The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau’s hands; so he blessed him.”*

*Genesis 27:22-23*

Why go through all these elaborate processes if he wasn't willing to disguise his voice? It seems as though Jacob, being so desperate for his father's approval, was willing to disguise his body, but keeps his voice the same. This all might sound like speculation, but the reality of this passage becomes abundantly clear when this same story is repeated in just a few chapters, but this time with Jacob being the one deceived. I won't get too far into this now, but Jacob ends up falling in love with a woman named Rachel who had an older sister named Leah who was apparently not very attractive. As such, her father tricks Jacob and swaps the two girls on his wedding night so that Jacob sleeps with Leah and not Rachel.

Throughout this story, it is abundantly clear that Leah's motivation was not to deceive Jacob, but to receive affection even when that affection was meant for her own sister. She disguises herself as her more attractive sister and has sex with her sister's husband in an attempt to receive Jacob's blessing and favor. Leah is depicted as Jacob's true match. She is a woman denied the love of her father, and who disguises herself as her sibling in order to receive a blessing. But once again, this is not an act of malice, but desperation.

This is an aside, but many of us can relate to this temptation. To a smaller extent, we might adopt the mannerisms or character of others in order to receive approval, but to a larger extent, we might completely hide our true nature, or create a fake profile online all in order to strive for "love" and approval. We may not be conscious of this desire, but the end of it will be that of Jacob. We can't receive genuine approval on the basis of a lie.

*"Then he said, "Are you really my son Esau?" He said, "I am." He said, "Bring it near to me, and I will eat of my son's game, so that my soul may bless you." So he brought it near to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank. Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come near now and kiss me, my son. And he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his clothing, and blessed him and said:*

*"Surely, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field Which the LORD has blessed. Therefore 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!"*

*-Genesis 27:24-29*

Although Jacob finally receives the affection and the affirmation from his father that he always wanted, these are actions and words meant for someone else. Far from making Jacob whole, this action only made him more empty. In fact, since this affection was

offered in an act of deception, Jacob is a picture of Judas here more than anything else, as he betrays the kindness of his own father with a kiss under false pretenses.

So what are we to learn from Jacob? The first is understanding that true love and affection can not be gained through a lack or a desperation:

*“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”*

*-1 John 4:10*

John tells us that the prerequisite for love is to first receive love, not to try in our desperation to become “worthy” of love by any and all means. It is Jacob’s desperation for love that makes him blind to the co-dependent relationship that he has with his mom, the pain he causes his father, and eventually, he will be blind to the deception of his uncle Laban because of his desperate love for his daughter Rachel. The Bible tells us that the love that we share with other people is a participation in the highest love in the universe, God’s love. This means that for us to practice this love without desperation or selfishness, we must first learn what it means that we are the recipients of this divine love through the work of Christ and not through our devotion towards Him. By partaking of this perfect love we can begin to heal the brokenness of our own hearts so that we can love others out of the fullness of what we have received from God and not from a lack.

## The Will of God

*“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”*

*-Hebrews 2:9-10*

Another major theme of this story that is explored throughout the Scriptures is God’s overarching sovereignty even over tragic circumstances. The cross of Christ is the ultimate example of how God can take the decisions of wicked men and produce something glorious out of their actions. Although Judas betrayed Jesus, the Jewish leaders conspired against Jesus, and the Romans executed Jesus, God used all of these people to accomplish His will in order to save us all. This does not excuse the behavior of the men who did this to Christ, only to show that God remains in control and will accomplish His will, even through the sinful behavior of those who are rebelling against Him. This is why Jesus says about Judas:

*“The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.”*

*-Matthew 26:24*

Even Judas’ betrayal was a fulfillment of God’s prophetic will for His Son, but this doesn’t mean that Judas wasn’t judged for his sin.

Even though Genesis 27 is a tragic story that is filled with sin and betrayal, God used this event to guide Jacob towards redemption. Jacob had developed a codependent relationship with his mother that presumably prevented him from marrying even though he was in his forties and his twin brother had already married. If it wasn’t for this event, Jacob may have never left his home and developed his character apart from his mom. This relationship had kept him infantile in his perspective and manipulative in his demeanor, but God led him out of the comfort of his home so that he might develop virtue outside of it. This is why Jacob first encounters God when he is fleeing from his home, not while he is still living with his parents.

God also uses this event to draw Jacob towards his uncle Laban’s house so that he might meet his future wives, Rachel and Leah. Although that circumstance was far from ideal, God used even this so that Jacob could have twelve sons who would become the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel. Once again, this doesn’t make anything described above justifiable or good, but it should bring us comfort to remember that God is active and powerful even through our worst mistakes. God desires more than anything for His work to come through our faithfulness, but there is amazing consolation knowing that even our mistakes can’t prevent the will of God from being accomplished in our lives or the lives of our children.

*“For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

*-Romans 8:38-39*