

## The Portrait of a Dysfunctional Home (Part 1)

*When the self-life reigns in the home*

**Text:** Gen. 27:1-17

### Introduction:

1. This is a sad chapter in Isaac's home. Wiersbe titles this section "A Masterpiece in Pieces". We tend to think about this account in terms of Jacob deceiving his father of the blessing. That is certainly part of the story but it is only one dimension of a home where each member of the family was out of step with God's will in some way. In this message we need to take a good look at each member of the family in order to properly diagnose the problem and thereby also identify the Biblical solutions.
2. God's Word plainly records both the mistakes and the triumphs of the heroes of the faith for our admonition and instruction. But this account is not only a testament to the mistakes of Isaac's family. It is also a testament to the grace, mercy and patience of God in working with very imperfect, even broken individuals.
3. If we were to pick a one-word summary for this chapter, it would be the word 'deception'. And it wasn't just Jacob! Isaac and Esau hatched their clandestine plan first then Rebekah and Jacob came up with their counter plan to outsmart the other two.
4. There are important lessons and challenges to learn for the Christian home in this passage. We need strong, biblical homes in our day where each member of the family is submitted to God's will. We will study this account in four segments.

### I. THE CATALYST FOR THE DECEPTION (VS. 1-4)

The account starts with Isaac which is a fitting place to start since in God's order for the home the husband is the head and therefore bears the greatest amount of responsibility before God (1 Cor. 11:3). So often, disorder in the home can be traced back to husband's headship. These verses give us a window into Isaac's physical, mental and spiritual state at this time in his life.

#### A. Isaac's Physical State (Vs. 1)

1. His body was aging (Vs. 1a)
  - a. Each phase of life has its special dangers. There are "youthful lusts" which are of a particular danger during that period of life. There are also spiritual dangers that come with old age when the body is deteriorating and weakening. This is why a close walk with the Lord and the constant strengthening of the inner man are so vital for every stage of the Christian life.
  - b. The fact you are declining physically does not mean you have to decline spiritually! 2 Cor. 4:16 "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, **yet the inward man is renewed day by day.**"

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2. His sight was abating (Vs. 1b)
  - a. This would be a major factor in the account that follows. Without the loss of his eyesight, it is hard to see how Rebekah and Jacob would have pulled off what they did. It is a sad state of affairs when a family member's physical limitation is used against them for personal gain but it happens in families. The vulnerability of old age is a very real thing.
  - b. Not only was Isaac's natural vision not good at this time, neither was his spiritual vision. "We may not be able to stop the decay in our physical body, but we certainly can prevent decay in our spiritual life as we grow older. Poor eyesight physically does not have to be accompanied by poor eyesight spiritually." (Butler)

### B. Isaac's Mental State (Vs. 2; 4b)

1. The limitations of age and poor eyesight meant Isaac had a lot of time with his own thoughts. Isaac was a deep thinker ("And Isaac went out to mediate..." 24:63) and it is clear that "the day of his death" was very much on his thoughts at this time. He seems to have reached the conclusion that he would die soon – "that my soul may bless thee before I die" (Vs. 4).
2. It is only natural that Isaac give some thought to the day of his death. The Bible says plainly that "Isaac was old" and that "he could not see" (Vs. 1). It is even right and appropriate that one make preparations for death in the sunset years of life.
3. However, the danger is that worrying and fretting about when one is going to die can lead to foolish decision making as the case was here with Isaac.
4. In reality, Isaac actually erred in his thinking that he was about to die. We know that Isaac was at least 100 years old by this time as he was 60 years of age when the twins were born and Esau was 40 years old when he married his two Canaanite wives (Gen. 26:34-35). Isaac would live to 180 (Gen. 25:38).
5. **Remember!** While we should all be thinkers, we should not trust our minds as if they were the ultimate source of truth. Our thinking can be totally wrong! "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool..." (Prov. 28:26)

### C. Isaac's Spiritual State (Vs. 3-4)

During the 23 years he was president of the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Dr. William Culbertson frequently asked at the close of his public prayers, "Lord, help us to end well." A good beginning doesn't guarantee a good ending. It is tragically confirmed in the lives of people like Lot, Gideon, Samson, King Saul, King Solomon, Demas and a host of others. Sadly, we have to add Isaac to that list. Here we get to the heart of the problem. Isaac was being dominated by the self-life. This is made manifest in:

1. His Deceitfulness – Rebekah and Jacob were not the only ones acting deceitfully in this account. Isaac attempted to orchestrate a key decision in the family in a clandestine and deceitful manner without the involvement of his helpmeet Rebekah. This is not a recipe for a happy marriage where husband and wife deliberately

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- try to deceive one another and leave one another out of big decisions they should be making together as one unit!
2. His Disobedience – Isaac was going directly against the revealed will of God for the family. God had revealed to Rebekah that “the elder shall serve the younger” (Gen. 25:23). There can be no doubt Isaac was aware of this.
    - a. There was nothing spiritual motivating Isaac in all of this. Esau was a profane man who had despised his birthright (Gen. 25:34) and married heathen wives who were a grief to Isaac and Rebekah (Gen. 26:34-35). And yet, Isaac was still mesmerised by Esau’s achievements as a hunter and the food he produced from it. **There is something wrong when a parent values secular over spiritual achievements in their children’s lives. Despite Jacob’s problems, he did have an interest in spiritual things.**
    - b. Contrast Isaac’s priorities with Abraham’s priorities when he got close to death. His concern was to get a bride for his son and maintain the covenant promise (See Gen. 24). When King David came to the end of his life, he made arrangements for the building of the temple; and Paul’s burden before his martyrdom was that Timothy be faithful to preach the Word and guard the faith. Someone has well said, **“The end of life reveals the ends of life.”**
    - c. When Dad is living in disobedience to God’s Word, it damages the home! Conversely, when Dad is obedient and submitted to God’s will, it brings great blessing to his wife and children.
    - d. Prov. 20:7 “The just *man* walketh in his integrity: **his children are blessed after him.**”
    - e. Genesis 18:19 “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.” (God’s testimony of Abraham)
  3. His Desires – At the heart of it all, Isaac was being lead by a carnal appetite rather than by spiritual principles. The account makes it very clear that the great love of Isaac’s life at this time was venison! It is not a sin to have a favourite food or to enjoy a hearty meal (1 Tim. 4:1-5) but you are in a bad state spiritually if you make it the main passion of your life or the basis of significant, life changing decisions!
    - a. Isaac made it clear this was the love of his life – “And make me savoury meat, **such as I love**” (Vs. 4).
    - b. Rebekah knew it was the love of his life – “I will make them savoury meat for thy father, **such as he loveth**” (Vs. 9) “...and his mother made savoury meat, **such as his father loved**” (Vs. 14).
    - c. Jacob and Esau knew it was the love of his life (Vs. 19, 31)
    - d. We know from Genesis 25:28 that this was the basis of Isaac’s favouritism toward Esau – **“And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison:** but Rebekah loved Jacob.” What a

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shallow, selfish reason to play favourites! “It is a sad thing for a believer to be so ruled by his appetite that he actually “loves” his food and bases important decisions on its availability. But Isaac is not the last one of whom this is true.” (Henry Morris)

- e. What a reminder that the flesh does not get better with age! You can be a carnal, fleshly believer in old age as well as in youth. Old age does not mean you are exempt from the appetites of the flesh.

## II. THE CONSPIRACY OF THE DECEPTION (VS. 5-17)

These verses primarily focus on Rebekah’s response to her overhearing her husband’s plan. Jacob was a willing accomplice to the crime! Isaac’s plan to do something contrary to God’s will was wrong but Rebekah’s response to Isaac was also wrong. Our responses to wrongs reveal just about as much about our spiritual state as our own sinful decisions.

### A. Rebekah’s Wily Plan (Vs. 5-10; 14-17)

In response to Isaac and Esau’s plot, Rebekah hatched a plot of her own in consultation with Jacob.

1. The Source of Rebekah’s Plan (Vs. 5-7)
  - a. The reason for her response (on the surface) – Rebekah was responding to the conversation she overheard between Isaac and Esau. Evidently, she was eavesdropping without their knowledge.
  - b. The root of her response (below the surface) – what is on display in Rebekah is the quick rising up of the self-life in response to a provocation. This is Rebekah’s Adamic nature in full bloom. It is a sobering reminder that if we are walking in the flesh, we can so quickly do something that dishonours the Lord. Deceit was in Rebekah and Jacob’s DNA. It came to her so naturally. Look at the ease and speed with which she came up with this clever plan! Isaac was not nearly as good at deceit as his wife Rebekah. She came from a family where she had Laban for a brother and deceit was in their blood. We all have our own brand of flesh and manifest it in different ways but it all comes from the same root stock – indwelling sin (Rom. 7:17, 20). The cross is the only instrument powerful enough to deal with indwelling sin (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20; Rom. 8:13).
2. The Specifics of Rebekah’s Plan (Vs. 8-10; 14-17)

There were two main parts to Rebekah’s plan – cooking and clothing.

  - a. Cooking (Vs. 8-10) – she would make savoury meat that would taste just like what Esau made. This indicates that Isaac’s love of his son’s venison went beyond the taste to an admiration of his hunting skills. If Rebekah knew how to make Isaac’s favourite dish, why not just ask her to make it for him if he simply wanted to enjoy a nice meal? It was because he wanted to bestow the patriarchal blessing on his favourite son.
  - b. Clothing (Vs. 14-17) – Rebekah would cloth Jacob in Esau’s raiment and then use the skin from the goats upon his hands

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and neck, thus to deceive her husband's sense of smell and touch in the absence of his sense of sight.

### 3. The Sinfulness of Rebekah's Plan

As we consider Rebekah's actions in light of the Word of God, we can see that her plan involved serious violations of Biblical principles. Her plan meant:

#### 1. Dishonouring her God

a. Rebekah had received a special, direct revelation from God concerning the future of her twin boys before they were born (See Gen. 25:21-23). Her desire to see God's will accomplished in her sons lives as revealed by God was right. Her carnal method for trying to achieve God's will in her family was totally wrong!

b. This account provides yet another warning against **trying to achieve God's will your way**. Instead of seeking God and trusting Him with the situation that was unfolding, Rebekah resorted to her own fleshly wisdom with disastrous results. The spiritual perspective would have been to recognize that if it was God's will and purpose for Jacob to be the spiritual head of the family, God would ensure it would take place without any help from her. But from the human standpoint it appeared that God's will was about to be thwarted. Abraham and Sarah made the same mistake with Hagar. It is so much more in line with the natural man to act in haste rather than waiting upon and resting in God.

c. **We need to be reminded that God will fulfill His will His Way, in His timing and according to His Divine wisdom.** On our end, we are to submit to and cooperate with God, in faith trusting Him to do what we cannot do. God blesses faith!

d. We need to remember that we cannot achieve spiritual outcomes through fleshly scheming and energy. "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." (Rom. 8:8) "...for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5)

e. "As another has suggested "they both acted on that God dishonouring proverb that "The Lord helps those who help themselves," whereas the truth is, the Lord helps those who have come to the end of themselves." (Pink)

#### 2. Usurping her Husband

a. We understand that the greater responsibility was with Isaac in this situation. In a vacuum of spiritual leadership in the home, a wife will be more tempted to rise up and try and take control. Imagine if Isaac had handled this situation in a spiritual manner, cooperating with God's plan for his two boys. How different it would have been for Rebekah and how different it would have been for the two boys!

b. However, this did not excuse Rebekah's response. Isaac's selfish plan was wrong. But Rebekah's carnal response was also wrong!

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- c. Sadly, the husband-and-wife profile in this passage is replicated all too often in Christian homes and it looks something like this:
    - i. Dad is spiritually weak, passive in his leadership and focused on the fulfilment of his selfish pursuits. You may have a laid-back personality but that does not mean you have to be laid back spiritually as a husband and father! Passive, spiritually weak men are one of the greatest problems in Christian homes today.
    - ii. Mum is manipulative, controlling and dominant in the home. A woman determined to get her way even if it means resorting to ungodly means to do so!
  - d. In relation to her husband, Rebekah had at least two godly options available to her:
    - i. Pray for her husband.
    - ii. Appeal to her husband.
    - iii. Live before her husband.
3. Manipulating her Son
- a. Rebekah's love for Jacob was tainted with the self-life in this account. Godly love "doth not behave itself unseemly...thinketh no evil...rejoiceth not in iniquity" (1 Cor. 13:5-6)
  - b. Twice Rebekah says to Jacob "obey my voice" (Vs. 8, 13). There is an assertiveness with Rebekah as she applies motherly pressure on Jacob to make sure she gets her way.
  - c. Remember that by this time, Jacob is at least 40 years old (See Gen. 26:34). What a pathetic scene! That Jacob was respectful and loving towards his mother is commendable but his was well and truly old enough to refuse to obey such a plan if he had been spiritually mature. In fact, it seems that God had to remove Jacob from his mother in order to really begin making him into the man he needed to be.
  - d. Adult children should not cooperate with carnal manipulation in a parent, especially if it is going to take them in a direction contrary to God's will for their lives!
  - e. Mothers, by virtue of the special place they occupy in their children's lives, have to be careful that they don't use that position and influence in the home to achieve their own selfish, uncrucified desires. A wife and mother who is spiritual, Spirit controlled and sweet can be such a powerful influence for good and godliness in her family. On the other hand, a wife and mother who is carnal and controlling can do so much damage. Imagine Rebekah as a pastor's wife in this state (yikes!!!).
  - f. Overly dominant mothers do their adult sons a terrible disservice as it can stunt the development of their leadership skills and set them up or problems in marriage. Jacob would later unwisely yield to his two wives demand that he marry their servant girls.

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### B. Jacob's Willing Participation (Vs. 11-14)

#### 1. Jacob's Concern (Vs. 11-12)

- a. The concern that Jacob raised with his mother in response to her plan reveals a lot of where he was at spiritually at this time. Notice that Jacob does not object to the plan being sinful. He does not counsel his mother that to deceive his own father and brother would be ungodly. His only concern was that he might get caught. We see that Jacob, as with the other members of the family, is being self-centred. "Sadly, Jacob's concern wasn't "Is it right?" but "Is it safe?" He was worried about the eleventh commandment: "Thou shalt not get caught". Isaac's wrong philosophy was "If it feels good, it is good". Rebekah's wrong philosophy was "The end justifies the means!" (Warren Wiersbe)
- a. Jacob is typical of so many who are not concerned about the seriousness of sin but who care only about the potential consequences for their sin.

#### b. Jacob's Cooperation (Vs. 13-14)

Jacob was all too willing to go along with his mother's deceptive plan. This was because her plan was in line with:

- a. Jacob's natural deceitfulness – like mother like son! Jacob was wired in a similar way to his mother. Deception was in his DNA also. After all, his name Jacob meant "heel gripper".
  - i. "The picture is that of one grabbing the heel of another to trip him up. The word supplanter describes the action. And the word "supplanted" is what Esau used of Jacob when Esau missed out on the blessing from Isaac." See Gen. 27:36. The word 'supplant' means "to trip up the heels; to remove or displace by stratagem; or to displace and take the place of" (Webster's 1828).
  - ii. This action of Jacob as he came out of the womb was indicative of his inner nature in Adam. He would be a calculating, deceiving individual who was skilled in getting the best out of a situation. God is His love and grace would work on Jacob to transform him from Jacob, a supplanter, to Israel, a prince with God.
- b. Jacob's natural desires – to get an advantage over his older brother and take the primary position of authority and influence in the family clan appealed to Jacob. He had already outsmarted Esau of the birthright for the low cost of a bowl of lentil soup. Now he would partner with mummy and pull the wool over dad's eyes by putting some wool on himself. We are always more susceptible to sinful suggestions that appeal to the bent of our sin nature. We should note that despite Jacob's fleshliness at this time of his life, underneath it all he did value spiritual things as highlighted in his desire for the birthright vs Esau's despising of it.

**Conclusion:** What's the solution for such a home? Personal revival for each member of the family, dying to self with all its selfish desires and ambitions and allowing Christ's love to reign in the heart and life.