

The Price of Duplicity



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 25:19–29:30.*

Memory Verse: “Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of” (*Genesis 28:15*).

Frenchman Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), sometimes deemed the philosopher of the French Revolution, argued that “there is no original sin in the human heart” and that human beings are all basically good. It was society, he said, that had corrupted humanity. If left to our own devices, to our own feelings and conscience, we would naturally do the right thing (all this from a man who, after fathering a number of children, dumped them all at an orphanage).

Of course, it's hard to think of a view more contrary to Scriptures or, really, to reality. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (*Jer. 17:9*). Or, as expressed in another context: “But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man” (*John 2:24, 25*).

This week, as we continue our family saga, we get more sad glimpses into the wickedness and deceitfulness of human hearts. Pride, passion, and selfishness reign, even (more frightfully) sometimes under the justification of seeking to do God's will.

The bright spot? Even amid all this, the Lord reveals His love, His patience, and His saving and forgiving grace for erring sinners.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 9.*

Esau and Jacob (*Gen. 25:19-34*)

Though a twin, Esau came out first and was, therefore, counted as the oldest. As such, to him were given the special promises and privileges that accompanied the covenant first made to Abraham. “With these promises Esau and Jacob were familiar. They were taught to regard the birthright as a matter of great importance, for it included not only an inheritance of worldly wealth but spiritual pre-eminence. He who received it was to be the priest of his family, and in the line of his posterity the Redeemer of the world would come. On the other hand, there were obligations resting upon the possessor of the birthright. He who should inherit its blessings must devote his life to the service of God. Like Abraham, he must be obedient to the divine requirements. In marriage, in his family relations, in public life, he must consult the will of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 177, 178.

Keeping in mind Ellen White’s insights, read the verses for today. How do her words help us understand why Esau acted as he did? What lessons are in here for us? See also Heb. 12:14-17.

Genesis 25:27 contrasts the two boys. It’s interesting that the Hebrew word describing Jacob is *tam*, which means “complete” or “perfect” or “morally innocent.” It’s the same word, translated in Job 1:8 as “perfect,” used to describe the character of Job. Despite this depiction, he still was willing to take advantage of his brother’s weakness in order to seek for himself the birthright. Perhaps the promise made to his mother regarding him and his brother (*vs. 23*) made him think that he had to have the birthright in order for that promise to be fulfilled. Whatever his motives, he obviously esteemed the birthright as something to be coveted.

At the same time, Esau demonstrated he was unworthy of the birthright privilege not only by bartering it away in a most flippant manner but also by reinforcing his choice through an oath (*vs. 33*) and by his unperturbed departure (*vs. 34*; see also *Gen. 26:34, 35*).

However worthy the object of his desire, Jacob tried to get it through less than honorable means. How can we protect ourselves from the same faulty reasoning that the end justifies the means?

Key Text: *Genesis 25:21-23*

Teachers Aims:

1. To examine the nature of the birthright.
2. To show how the Lord blesses and renews His covenant with Isaac.
3. To discuss Jacob's deception and flight and the promised blessings from God.

Lesson Outline:

I. Jacob and Esau (*Gen. 25:29-34*)

- A. Rebekah is barren; Isaac pleads with God for his wife to conceive (*vs. 21*).
- B. The unborn twins strive against each other while still in the womb, symbolizing the conflict that would exist between the brothers after birth.
- C. As the older twin, Esau should get the birthright.
- D. In a moment of weakness, Esau carelessly sells his birthright to his brother, Jacob, for stew.

II. The Lord Blesses Isaac (*Gen. 26:3-5, 8-14, 26-31*)

- A. The Lord renews His covenant with Isaac.
- B. Isaac makes the same mistake as his father Abraham, by calling his wife his sister.
- C. Isaac is prosperous and enters into a peace treaty with Abimelech, king of the Philistines.

III. God Blesses Amidst Human Weakness (*Gen. 28:1-5, 13-16*)

- A. Jacob obtains the birthright blessing through deceit, but Isaac acknowledges his claim.
- B. Jacob flees to his mother's brother, Laban, to seek a wife and to escape his brother's wrath.
- C. The Lord speaks to Jacob in a vision and promises him the same blessings that He gave to Abraham and Isaac.

Summary: Jacob uses trickery to obtain the birthright blessing that had been promised to him. Notwithstanding this, the Lord still blesses Jacob and makes the same covenant with him that he made with Abraham and Isaac before him.

COMMENTARY

One of the greatest temptations facing believers is the desire to make sure that God does what they think He is supposed to do—or even what He promises to do. It can be extremely hard to leave things in His hands. Last week we saw the benefits of trusting in God. This week, through the stories of Rebekah and Jacob, we see the tragic consequences that result from not trusting God.

I. Running Ahead of God

Rebekah received word from God before the birth of her twin sons that the elder, or firstborn, would serve the younger (*Gen. 25:23*). Jacob, the younger, became her favorite. So determined was

Isaac and Abimelech *(Genesis 26)*

As in the early sojourn of Abraham, there was a famine in the land that caused Isaac to move to a new location. Perhaps because of the potential for discouragement, it was at this time that the Lord renewed with him the same covenant promises that he had made with his father, Abraham (*Gen. 26:1-5*).

Read verses 7-11. Where have we seen this before? What lesson can we draw from this account?

Sometime later Isaac's wealth increased to the point that it elicited the jealousy of the Philistines. In order to preserve peace, Isaac moved to the valley of Gerar and later moved again to Beersheba (*vss. 12-23*). This illustrates the hardship and tensions to which believers are exposed in this sin-darkened world.

What patriarchal practice did Isaac follow after the second divine revelation was accorded to him? What's the importance of this practice? What is it meant to symbolize? *Vss. 24, 25; see also Eph. 5:2, Rev. 13:8.*

Nearly a century after the treaty that Abraham had entered into with Abimelech, the ruler of Gerar, a later Abimelech, accompanied by a friend and the chief captain of his army, invited Isaac to enter into another sworn peace treaty.

Notice what Abimelech says twice to Isaac (*vss. 28, 29*). How do these words in many ways reflect what it means to be a witness to the Lord? What aspects of your life could someone look at and say, "You are now blessed of the Lord"? In what ways are you blessed of the Lord? Write a prayer thanking God for all that He has done for you.

she to ensure that the prophecy took place exactly as God said it would that she was willing to use trickery and deceit, forgetting that the promise came from God and was His responsibility to fulfill.

Jacob's family line is full of tricksters, people who try to get their way by deceit and their own wits. And the men were not the only ones guilty of it. The women could practice it, too, as we see in the cases of Rebekah and the daughter-in-law that she would never meet, Rachel (*Gen. 31:33-35*). Rebekah carefully coached Jacob, telling him how to deceive his father (*Gen. 27:5-10*). When Jacob protested that her scheme might backfire on him so that he received a curse instead of a blessing, she replied, " 'Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my word' " (*vs. 13, NRSV*). Sadly, the ploy did exactly that. She suffered its consequences. When Esau became angry at what his mother and brother had done against him, he threatened to kill Jacob (*vs. 41*). Rebekah told Jacob to flee to her brother in Haran (*vs. 43*)—and she never saw her son again. She reaped the harvest of deceit she had sown. If only she had trusted in God and allowed Him to work on her son's behalf. He was especially good at making those who were not firstborn first in His sight and plans.

II. Isaac's Blessing

Despite the way Isaac's blessing is obtained, it cannot be undone. The blessing itself invites closer scrutiny to understand why Rebekah coveted it so much for Jacob. Isaac's blessing begins with an allusion to the true Source of all blessing—God Himself. He thinks that Jacob is Esau because of "the smell of a field" that Jacob and Rebekah have successfully duplicated. The father declares that it was " 'like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed' " (*Gen. 27:27, NRSV*). He recognized that the luxuriant vegetation of any field was a gift from God.

The rest of his blessing divides into two parts: fertility, the constant concern of all ancients (*vss. 27, 28*) and dominion (*vs. 29*). The patriarch calls for God to give his son the dew of heaven and the abundance of the earth. Heaven and earth would symbolize the immensity of the blessing, the two extremes representing everything that there is.

The "dew of heaven" can be a metaphor for rain, but the literal dew that formed from condensation of water vapor at night was also vital. It was especially important in Canaan during the dry season. Rain fell mainly from late fall through very early spring. The rest of the year the land experienced little or no rainfall. Vegetation survived during the dry season to a large extent because of the heavy dew that settled on the leaves and then dripped down to replenish the soil moisture. Grain and wine not only symbolized the agricultural year but were also the two major foodstuffs of the ancient Near East. The blessing promises that the land will produce abundantly.

The second part of the blessing involves both dominion over other

Faithless Schemes

In Genesis 27:1-7, Isaac permitted his taste buds to influence his heart and conscience. He determined to bestow the birthright blessing upon his older son in spite of the Lord's words at their birth (*Gen. 25:23*), Esau's deliberate disregard of the birthright (*vss. 29-34*), and his ill-disposed choice of Hittite women for wives (*Gen. 26:34, 35*).

"Rebekah divined his purpose. She was confident that it was contrary to what God had revealed as His will. Isaac was in danger of incurring the divine displeasure and of debarring his younger son from the position to which God had called him. She had in vain tried the effect of reasoning with Isaac, and she determined to resort to stratagem."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 180.

Read the rest of the story regarding this deception (*Gen. 27:8-29*). Notice carefully verse 20, particularly Jacob's answer to his father's question. Why does this show even more just how wrong this action was?

As Isaac smelled the clothes Jacob wore, his mind was carried from the present to the future. The smell of the fields suggested to him an abundance of crops and a bounty of grain and wine (*vss. 27-29, 37*). Jacob was promised ultimate dominion over the nations, a plan that was reiterated and enlarged upon by later prophets and poets of Israel. Under inspiration the prophetic eye envisaged the ultimate success and supremacy of God's people.

Read carefully the blessing bestowed by Isaac on Jacob (*vss. 28, 29*). What elements are found in the blessing? What is in there that would make him want it so badly?

There's so much in there, so much that could be used for good or for bad. Even though God bestows gifts and blessings, that doesn't automatically mean that people use them always for His glory. What kind of gifts and blessings have you received from God? How are you using them? What changes might you need to make in your use of what God has given you?

nations and within the family (including supremacy over nations born from members of the line of Abraham, such as the descendants of Ishmael). People and nations will not only bow down to the recipient of the blessing, but he will have prominence in the family of Isaac. All those who curse him will have that curse rebounded back on them, but those who bless him will be blessed in turn (*vs.* 29). How ironic that Jacob, the deceiver, steals what rightfully belongs to him, what God would have given him in His own time had he trusted Him. His theft secures him the birthright, but he pays bitterly for it. A penniless, homeless fugitive, he loses his brother and

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Genesis 25:27, 27:5-17, 27:35, Malachi 1:2, Romans 9:13*

1 Genesis 25:27 refers to Jacob as a “quiet man” (Amplified Bible). Yet, his future actions show him to be in many ways the opposite of this. In what sense is he innocent, or pure?

2 By definition, only the oldest son could have the birthright. Esau, in spite of having indisputable legal title to the birthright by virtue of being the oldest son, shows himself to be unworthy of it, especially as it applies to spiritual matters. Could the same be said about Jacob? Does it matter that Jacob appears to desire it more? Explain.

3 Genesis is not terribly clear about Rebekah’s motives in attempting to deceive Isaac into giving Jacob the birthright, making it easy enough to assume that naked ambition motivates her. Ellen White suggests that Rebekah really did have spiritual motives for this misguided course of action (see *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 180). Is there any indication in the biblical story itself that this might have been the case? Elaborate.

4 Why do Rebekah and Jacob believe that Jacob could receive the birthright by pretending to be Esau? Why do Esau and Isaac accept the validity of the transfer of birthright, from Esau to Jacob, after the fact? Do they misunderstand the nature of the birthright? Why does the author of Genesis also seem to accept their misunderstanding as given?

5 Rebekah’s and Jacob’s actions are perhaps the first recorded example of people willfully mistaking their will for God’s will. Yet, ultimately Jacob does become a great patriarch, after a long and difficult process. Why do you think that God continues to bless Jacob in spite of his shortcomings?

The Price of Duplicity *(Gen. 27:30-46)*

Twice now we've seen Jacob take advantage of the weakness of others in order to obtain what he wanted. What a sorry example. That he, though, should nevertheless be one of the founding patriarchs says a lot about God's grace, especially for those who truly repent of their sins. However, as the Bible shows numerous times, the forgiveness of sin doesn't automatically equate with the nullification of the consequences of sin.

What made this deception even all the more foolish was that it should have been obvious that it would be uncovered, that Esau and Isaac would eventually know what happened. Apparently, though, both mother and son were determined to get what they wanted, regardless of the cost. What an important lesson here for all of us: *Think through carefully what you are about to do!*

Perhaps the saddest thing, too, about these events (including chapter 25) is that there are no innocents. All four of the people here, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Esau were guilty of wrongdoing.

Next to each name, write down the wrong they did. What was at the heart of all these actions?

Isaac _____

Rebekah _____

Jacob _____

Esau _____

In the end, what we see here is pure selfishness, people wanting what they want for themselves, regardless of whether their actions are right or wrong. What's even more frightening is that, in some cases, they were actually acting according to what they believed were God's wishes. Yet, look at the results. Though in verse 45 she tells Jacob to flee and she'll call him back later, nothing in the Bible indicates that Rebekah was ever to see this son again.

Go over the list of sins you listed above. What drove each one—pride, greed, passion, whatever? Which of these does Satan use with greatest success in your own experience? Why is death to self at the foot of the Cross your only hope for victory in these areas? How can you better avail yourself of the power promised us in the Word (*1 Cor. 10:13*)?

almost his life and never sees his mother alive again.

III. Jacob's Ladder

The image of a stairway, or ladder, that Jacob saw at the place he later named Bethel (“House of God”), where he fled his brother’s wrath, would have been a familiar one to the people of his world. The Akkadian counterpart to the Hebrew word for “stairway” designates in Mesopotamia what the messengers of the gods used when they wanted to pass back and forth between this world and the realm of the gods. The Babylonians sought to make such a stairway literal and physical through the ziggurats they built in many of their cities. A ziggurat was a pyramid-like mud-brick structure that supported a stairway to a shrine on the top. Deities could use the stairway to descend to the temple and town below.

In his dream Jacob saw the divine messengers (the Hebrew word for “angel” and “messenger” is the same) going up and down the stairway on their missions for the Lord. Interestingly, God stands beside

Witnessing

“From the beginning of time human beings have searched for ways to reach heaven, to be ‘at home’ with God. . . . The mystical ladder, which is Christ Himself, is what links us to the Divine. Heaven and earth touch in two places—the horizon of the past and the horizon of the future. How, then, may we link ourselves with heaven in the present? For this we need Jacob’s ladder. Three things bring it into our possession and set it firmly down in our lives:

1. God’s daily Providence supplies the necessary connection.
2. Jesus mediates on our behalf, a firm link between us and God.
3. Our own desire for spiritual things helps us value the ladder.

One must climb a ladder single file. Other people will be above and some below, but we have no room for a companion alongside us. That is, we must follow through with our decision to ascend the ladder entirely on our own, but the ascent brings us to a glorious destination at the top!”—Dorothy Minchin-Comm, *Glimpses of God* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1998), p. 296.

Because God has revealed to us the intimate connection between heaven and earth, the blessing of this connection must be shared with others. How can we best share this good news with others? The way we live our everyday lives tells others whether there is a divine Presence always with us. Our choice of friends and associates also demonstrates to others whether our hearts and minds are focused just on earthly pleasures or are locked on to heaven’s joys and blessings. Finally, the way we relate to those around us, through loving words and compassionate actions, is a clear indication of the condition of our hearts.

Jacob's Ladder *(Genesis 28)*

Note the fatherly instruction and blessing with which Isaac sent Jacob to Mesopotamia (*Gen. 28:1-5*). Why should this point about marriage be so important?

After all this duplicity and deceit, Jacob flees his family. Yet, it's obvious that God is not through with him. In a dream the Lord appears to the young man and gives him some wonderful assurances and promises.

Read Genesis 28:10-15. Why do you think the Lord would promise so much to someone like Jacob? What does this tell us about grace?

Ellen White writes that, before he slept that night, Jacob “with weeping and deep humiliation” confessed his sin and asked the Lord for some evidence that he was not “utterly forsaken.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 183. The dream was, she wrote, the response to his repentance.

The dream of the ladder, of the angels ascending and descending, was a partial revelation of the plan of salvation. No matter how far sin had separated humanity from heaven, Jesus bridged the gap; He is the ladder between heaven and earth; His perfect righteousness was enough to reconcile a sinful world with a Holy God (*2 Cor. 5:18, 19*) and to justify before God all those who accept by faith what Christ has done for them (*Rom. 3:28-30, Rom. 4:5, Gal. 3:24*).

Thus, many years before the Cross, we are shown the close connection between heaven and earth; we are shown that we are not forsaken, that we are not alone, and that God is intimately involved in what happens here.

Without revelation, we could have cause for such despair: mortal beings living on a tiny planet in a cold, vast universe that, in and of itself, doesn't seem to care at all about us. Revelation, however, tells us differently; revelation gives us a new way of interpreting events in our world. How, in your own walk with the Lord, have you experienced the closeness of heaven to earth? How has God shown you, personally, that He is close? Be prepared to share your answers with the class on Sabbath.

the stairway instead of on it (*Gen. 28:12, 13*). He does not need such a thing to travel back and forth between heaven and our world. Nor does He require some sacred spot to reach us but can be anywhere He wills. Jacob learns a lesson that the Lord would have us know: No matter how far we've fallen, God is ever reaching out to us, calling us to repentance, yearning to restore us and heal us from our backsliding.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: You have heard the comment “a chip off the old block.” How are you like your parents? God talks about the sins of the father being repeated by the children (*Exod. 34:5-7*). How does this dynamic play into the story of Isaac and Abimelech? Compare Genesis 26:1-17 with Genesis 20. How do these stories show God bringing good out of human failure?

Thought Questions:

1 Twins intrigue us. The concept of having someone else in the world who is so genetically connected invites our investigation. Jacob and Esau did not share the bond we associate with twins. Discuss what went wrong by reviewing their story in Genesis 25:19-34. “The babies jostled each other” (*vs. 22, NIV*), even in their mother’s womb. What caused the disconnect between Jacob and Esau? How do we avoid similar negative interpersonal dynamics in our families and churches?

2 What is your favorite color? What other things do you prefer? The concept of favorites becomes negative in the realm of relationships. None of us wants to be the ignored or the unvalued family member. We see the hurt and destruction that choosing favorites caused in Isaac’s family (*Gen. 25:28*). What did God do to show that He values each individual? How do we live out God’s example? Who needs to know you value them?

Application Question:

Look up the word *duplicity* in the dictionary. Then read the story of Jacob and Rebekah’s plotting in Genesis 27. Why did they feel they had to help God fulfill His purpose for Jacob’s life? Where have we seen this same kind of human intervention in God’s purposes before in the book of Genesis? See Genesis 16. How do we keep from running ahead of God, using negative means in order to fulfill His divine purposes? Spend some time with God committing your life and impatience to Him. Write a covenant entrusting your life to His direction. Reread it whenever you are tempted to rush ahead of His timing.

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 177–189; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, comments on Genesis 25:19–29:30.

“Jacob and Rebekah succeeded in their purpose, but they gained only trouble and sorrow by their deception. God had declared that Jacob should receive the birthright, and His word would have been fulfilled in His own time had they waited in faith for Him to work for them. But like many who now profess to be children of God, they were unwilling to leave the matter in His hands.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 180.

“In this vision the plan of redemption was presented to Jacob, not fully, but in such parts as were essential to him at that time. The mystic ladder revealed to him in his dream was the same to which Christ referred in His conversation with Nathanael. Said He, ‘Ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.’ John 1:51. Up to the time of man’s rebellion against the government of God, there had been free communion between God and man. But the sin of Adam and Eve separated earth from heaven, so that man could not have communion with his Maker. Yet the world was not left in solitary hopelessness. The ladder represents Jesus, the appointed medium of communication. Had He not with His own merits bridged the gulf that sin had made, the ministering angels could have held no communion with fallen man. Christ connects man in his weakness and helplessness with the source of infinite power.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 184.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, discuss your answers to the question at the end of Thursday’s lesson.
- ❷ What makes us think that in order to do God’s will, we can use means that go against what God teaches? Why is it so easy to fall into that trap? What other examples do we have, either from the Bible or elsewhere, of this happening? How might we, either as individuals or as a church, be tempted to do the same thing?