

Hebrews 11:20

"One of the most intriguing questions associated with Genesis and with the establishment of God's chosen people, the children of Israel, is how God could bless and use such a person as Jacob for the accomplishment of His divine purposes for mankind. Jacob seems so obviously to be a sly schemer, a liar and a deceiver, a 'supplanter,' a man intent only on acquiring money by whatever means he can devise. He is shrewd, crafty, covetous, with no ethical scruples except those dictated by his own self-interest. Even granting His covenant obligations to Abraham and Isaac, why would God choose Jacob instead of Esau? Esau seems a much more admirable character - a strong, virile, outdoor man, surely much more suited to be the founding father and head of a new nation than a man like Jacob."

This quote is from a very well known Christian author. It typifies the majority of thought Christians have about Jacob.

Steven Cole: Clearly, Jacob is not a spiritually-minded man. He does not fear God or His moral law; he only fears that the scheme might not work and he might get cursed instead of blessed. He wanted the wealth and advantage which went along with the blessing. Like Rebekah, Jacob was seeking his own way under the guise of seeking God's way.

David Felker: And the story of Jacob's life, in many ways, is the story of how God untwisted the twisted. And that's what we find here in our passage. Jacob is a twister. He is a scoundrel. He is a mess. His heart character is very unattractive, and yet it should be a great encouragement to you this morning that Jacob is in the Bible.

F.B. Meyer: THIS TEMPTATION WAS GREEDILY RESPONDED TO BY THE WEAK AND CRAFTY NATURE OF JACOB

If, in fact, this is how we are to understand the biblical character named Jacob, how could he possibly be included in the 11th chapter of Hebrews and commended by none-the-less than God, Himself. Perhaps, we need to take another look at Jacob - from God's perspective and not mans.

20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

Both Jacob and Esau are blessed by Isaac, by faith. Is this statement an enigma? How can Isaac bless Jacob, who we are told by many is a liar, a deceiver, a conniver? Let alone bless Esau who scripture tells us is a "fornicator and profane person," Hebrews 12:16? And, Isaac blesses both of them "by faith." Remember, biblically faith is, first, ALWAYS based on the word of God and is, second, EVIDENCED by what one does with what the word of God says.

Jacob and Esau: **Genesis 25:23**

"And the LORD said unto her [Rebecca], **Two nations are in thy womb**, and **two manner of people** shall be separated from thy bowels; and the **one people shall be stronger than the other people**; and **the elder shall serve the younger.**" (Emphasis added)

The blessing of Esau: **Genesis 27:**

39 And Isaac his father answered and said unto him, Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above;

40 And by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck.

1) They would be blessed with material goods in their midst but not live among them.

"Barnhouse (and others) indicate the blessing Isaac bestowed on Esau actually said, "your dwelling shall be from the fatness of the earth"; that is, Esau and his descendants would be live as nomads in mostly wilderness lands." This seems to be the intent when contrasted with the blessing given to Jacob.

2) They would live by the sword (the Arab world has always been at war, even among themselves)

3) They would serve the Jewish people (fulfilled in Christ and the Millennium)

4) When they have power they will war against the Jewish people (power of the nation).

The blessing of Jacob: **Genesis 27:**

28 Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine:

29 Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed *be* every one that curseth thee, and blessed *be* he that blesseth thee.

- 1) They would be blessed with material goods - "plenty of corn and wine"
- 2) Other people and nations will serve thee (fulfilled in Christ and the Millennium).
- 3) The Abrahamic blessing continued.

The story is found in Genesis 27:1-46.

Vs. 1-4 Isaac tells Esau to go hunting to get him some food before he blesses him.

4 And make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die.

Vs. 5-10 Rebekah, who overheard the conversation between Esau and Isaac, tells Jacob to get a lamb which she will prepare for Isaac so Jacob can get the blessing.

8 Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee.

9 Go now to the flock, and fetch me from thence two good kids of the goats; and I will make them savoury meat for thy father, such as he loveth:

10 And thou shalt bring it to thy father, that he may eat, and that he may bless thee before his death.

Vs. 11-12 Jacob questions his mother about doing this and bringing a curse upon himself.

11 And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man:

12 My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing.

Vs. 13-17 Rebekah tells Jacob to obey and do what she has said.

13 And his mother said unto him, Upon me be thy curse, my son: only obey my voice, and go fetch me them.

Vs. 18-29 Jacob goes before Isaac and gets the blessing.

18 And he came unto his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I; who art thou, my son?

19 And Jacob said unto his father, I am Esau thy firstborn; I have done according as thou badest me: arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me.

22 And Jacob went near unto Isaac his father; and he felt him, and said, The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.

23 And he discerned him not, because his hands were hairy, as his brother Esau's hands: so he blessed him.

24 And he said, Art thou my very son Esau? And he said, I am.

27 And he came near, and kissed him: and he smelled the smell of his raiment, and blessed him, and said, See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the LORD hath blessed:

Vs. 30-41 Esau comes before Isaac with the food.

32 And Isaac his father said unto him, Who art thou? And he said, I am thy son, thy firstborn Esau.

33 And Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, Who? where is he that hath taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed.

35 And he said, Thy brother came with subtilty, and hath taken away thy blessing.

36 And he said, Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. And he said, Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?

41 And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob.

Vs. 42-46 Rebekah tells Jacob to flee from Esau.

Is Jacob the scoundrel he is often made out to be?

- 1) Not one verse in the entire Word of God condemns Jacob. In fact, God says "Jacob have I loved..." This silence from Scripture about any negative actions or attitudes by Jacob is totally different from the usual portrayal of Jacob from too many pulpits and pens.
- 2) In Genesis 25:27 Jacob is referred to as a "plain man." Aaron Pick's *Dictionary of Old Testament Words for English Readers* translates this word as "perfect." The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* likewise translates this as "perfect," and adds that it also means "undefiled, upright." It seems God's understanding of Jacob's character is quite different from many others.
- 3) Esau was a profane man. We are warned "lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright," Hebrews 12:16. Profane speaks of someone not interested in religious things.
- 4) Jacob entered into a legal transaction when he bought the birthright. It was Esau who despised the birthright and the promises of God, not Jacob. An effective argument has been made that Jacob (and certainly, Rebekah) was seeking the spiritual blessings of God and the Messianic succession of the birthright so the promise would not stay with an ungodly, selfish individual. Based on this transaction; the birthright now legally belonged to Jacob.
- 5) It was Rebekah who told Jacob to do the things he did. It seems that Jacob did not believe he was doing something wrong since the birthright now belonged to him. Hear his response to his mother's request to obey her. "My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing." Jacob says "I will **seem to him** to be a deceiver." Since Isaac knew nothing about what had transpired between Jacob and Esau he could possibly think of Jacob as a deceiver. But from Jacob's statement it seems that he did not look on his actions as deceptive, but rather the receiving of what was now rightfully his.
- 6) It would seem that Esau was the deceiver in this case. Despising the birthright, he sold it to his brother and then tried to get it back by misleading his father.
- 7) When Isaac asked Jacob to identify himself, his response has seemed to many to be an outright lie. The *Artscroll Tenach* commentary suggests an interesting understanding of the Hebrew **אָנֹכִי עֵשָׂו בְּכֹרֶךָ**, "I am Esau your firstborn." The comment is made that, "the commentators agree that technically Jacob did not lie. He chose his words deliberately, the intent of his response being as *Rashi* explains: **אָנֹכִי**, It is I who bring this to you; **עֵשָׂו בְּכֹרֶךָ**, Esau, (however) is your first born. Thus, by adding **בְּכֹרֶךָ**, *your first born*, Jacob was presenting an ambiguity and intimating what was, in fact the truth.;
- 8) The blessing given to Jacob by Isaac was never rescinded. One would think if Isaac thought he had been duped, he would have removed the blessing. But he didn't. He actually confirmed it. The Scripture records that "... Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, Who? where is he that hath taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed." Isaac somehow knew (possibly by the Holy Spirit's leading), that the blessing should reside with Jacob, not Esau, and perhaps he trembled realizing how close he came to giving the blessing to the "wrong" son. The inspired writer to the Hebrews confirms this understanding, "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come." How can we miss the understanding of Hebrews 11:20, that Isaac blessed Jacob through his faith in the God of his father. He was doing exactly what God wanted and, again, there is no hint of condemnation of wrong actions on the part of Jacob recorded in the entire Word of God. No wonder Isaac would say "and he shall be blessed."
- 9) The unfortunate label of "supplanter" on Jacob has largely come about because of a statement by Esau. This ungodly, bitter individual's testimony has become the standard character description of Jacob. How tragic, especially since this verse as translated does not express the meaning of the verse. Let me quote Dr. Joseph Cohn from his book *I Have Loved Jacob*.

"We have mentioned before in this volume the fact that nowhere can it be shown that the word Jacob in the Bible means "supplanter." This is purely an imagination of certain Bible translators or interpreters; whether such imagination was deliberate or accidental we cannot of course assert. But the word Jacob means only 'heel,' and nothing else. And so the original Hebrew passage of Genesis 27:36 has been grossly misinterpreted and mistranslated in the English. The English rendering in the St. James version reads: 'Is not he rightly named Jacob? For he hath *supplanted* me these two times.' But if we take the Hebrew just as it is written, the passage will read as follows: 'Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he hath *Jacobed* (heeled) me these two times.' In other words Esau simply made a play on the word Jacob, which means heel, and not supplanter."

Even if one were to accept *supplanter* as the meaning of Jacob, the word *supplant(er)* basically means to supersede or replace another. Although Webster's Dictionary does say it is especially done by force or treachery, it does not need to have that inference. I would suggest that the negative connotation of the phrase *supplanter* has been read into Jacob's actions, based on a statement by Esau, and is not based on a consideration of the entire context.

- 10) Jacob would go to Padan-aram to get a wife as he was told to do by his mother and father. Before leaving, Isaac again gave him his unqualified blessing, Genesis 28:1-4. Would this have been done to an unrepentant fraud and deceiver? I think not.

Rabbi Riskin, a regular contributor to the *Jerusalem Post* in years past, comments on the possible motives of Rebecca and the deception of Esau in this episode which are helpful.

"...Rebecca sees the world - and Esau - with different eyes. First of all, God Himself (as it were) had told her that two nations were in her womb, and that the elder would serve the younger. And even more to the point, she grew up with Laban, the Aramean - a word linguistically connected with *rama'i*, deceiver, and its repetition three times in our portion suggests that Rebecca knew only too well the sounds of a person speaking with forked tongue.

"Perhaps Rebecca sees such a machination as an opportunity to demonstrate Esau's true character. Rebecca cannot criticize Esau outright, the apple of his father's eye. The Matriarch must demonstrate to her naive husband that he is capable of being deceived, he would also understand that the same deception had been practiced by Esau all these years.

"And this is precisely what happens. Esau's arrival with the venison produces a great trembling in Isaac, possibly evoking the trembling he felt on the altar. He realizes that just as his father once nearly sacrificed him, he has unconsciously been sacrificing Jacob, overlooking the son given over to study and morality in favor of the son who craves animal blood.

"Rebecca, sister of Laban the Aramean deceiver, saw it all along. Isaac realizes at last that he is capable of being fooled. Hence, anger directed at Jacob is not appropriate. On the contrary, Jacob is the true heir to the blessing, which is why the key phrase is, 'Moreover, and he shall be blessed.'

"Jacob is not the deceiver. Esau is, and has been all along."

Upon leaving Beersheba and heading for Haran, Jacob bedded down for the night in a place he would eventually call Bethel. In the midst of his sleep, through a dream, God reestablished the blessing to him: "... I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, 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."

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, *A Lesson in Deceit*, *Shabat Shalom Column*, The Jerusalem Post International Edition, week ending November 16, 1996, page 31

Dr. Henry Morris wrote the paragraph at the beginning of this lesson. It is helpful to read the rest of what he wrote.

"Sad to say, it is just such caricatures of Jacob and Esau, and the Jews in general, as sketched in the above paragraph, that have caused tremendous waves of anti-Semitism and persecution to be visited against the Jews down through the centuries. Somehow even Christians have been caught up in the fever of anti-Semitic feeling on many occasions for reasons like this. Many pastors and Bible teachers who outwardly would deny strongly that they are anti-Jewish, nevertheless seem to let their hidden feelings on the subject come out when dealing with Jacob.

It should not be thought that, when we defend Jacob, we thereby are condoning lying and deception. However, one paramount consideration must be kept in mind in trying to understand and apply these passages in the book of Genesis. There is never a single instance *in the Bible* of criticism of Jacob (except on the lips of Esau and Laban, both of whom are unworthy witnesses). Every time God spoke to Jacob, it was in a message of blessing and promise, never one of rebuke or chastisement. If we would be faithful Bible expositors, therefore, we must be guided by what God has actually said, not what we think He should have said. 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord' (Isaiah 55:8).

We suggest, therefore, that such an attitude as commonly expressed by Bible expositors relative to Jacob is entirely out of line. When, for example, Dr. Schofield, in his reference Bible, heads certain passages in Genesis by titles such as 'The stolen blessing' and 'Jacob reaps the harvest of his evil years,' he is pronouncing moral judgments of his own which are not at all founded on the actual Biblical statements concerning Jacob.

God's judgment concerning Jacob is given in Gen. 32:28: 'As a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.' 'Was not Esau Jacob's brother? Saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob and I hated Esau' (Mal. 1:2-3).

We have already discussed at some length, in chapter 15, God's decision to establish the Messianic line and promises through Jacob, rather than Esau, even before the two boys were born. This decision was clearly conveyed to Rebekah and Isaac; but the latter nevertheless favored Esau, resolving to give him both the birthright benefits and the patriarchal responsibilities and blessings associated with God's promise to Abraham. As the boys grew, their characters soon proved that God's decision had been eminently wise. 'Jacob was a plain [literally 'perfect,' or 'complete'] man' (Gen. 25:27). Esau, on the other hand, 'despised his birthright' (Gen. 25:34)."

Dr. Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record*, "The Mystery of Jacob and Esau," page 427-428

What can we learn from this?

- 1) Our perception of things, apart from understanding the issue from the word of God, can lead us to faulty understanding.
- 2) "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." 2 Timothy 2:15
- 3) Believe what God says before the beliefs of man.
- 4) A cursory look at a subject can be misleading.