



Jacob Steals a Blessing

God Provides Blessings

About the Story

Abraham's son Isaac had twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Genesis 25 tells us that Esau was Isaac's favorite, but Jacob was the favorite of his mother Rebekah, and that they fought with each other even when they were in the womb. When they were born, Esau was born first, but Jacob came right behind him, "gripping Esau's heel." That is why he was named Jacob, which means "he cheats," and he lives up to his name through the first half of his life.

The Point:

God can turn even deceptions into occasions to provide blessings. In today's story, Jacob and Rebekah act in a truly despicable way. They hurt both Isaac and Esau and break their family apart in a way that seems permanent. And yet God seeks Jacob at his lowest point and reiterates for him the promises God gave to Abraham, giving hope where there was none.

In the early part of their story, Esau is made to look like an oaf, while Jacob is shown to be quite clever, in an underhanded way. When they were young men, Jacob was cooking a stew. Esau came in from hunting, famished from his work, and asked for a serving. Jacob withheld the stew until Esau agreed to sell him his birthright (as the firstborn) in exchange. This sets the tone for today's story, where Esau is cheated yet again, this time out of his father's deathbed blessing.

The birthright and the blessing (words that are almost the same in Hebrew, and therefore include a clever wordplay in the original passage) are important cultural and religious traditions. For the Israelites and others in the ancient world, a father's blessing on a son would bestow, even guarantee, good fortune. Both the birthright (inheritance) and the blessing (good fortune) would rightfully belong to the eldest son in a family, in this case Esau. However, the Israelites who received the story are descended from Jacob. Thus this story is passed down to explain how it came to be that the younger son would have inherited both the birthright and the blessing.

Jacob's mother Rebekah appears to have been as cunning as her favorite son, because she is right in the middle of the story today. Not only does she help Jacob with his disguise, but the entire plan seems to be her idea in the first place. Both she and Jacob are intent on fooling Isaac and cheating Esau. However, while Rebekah's plot succeeds, it also robs her of her favorite son, as Jacob flees from his brother's wrath. The second half of today's passage takes place while Jacob is on the run, homeless and friendless in the middle of the desert. It is there that God comes to him and conveys God's promise to Jacob and his descendants.

Last Week/Next Week

Last week, God blessed Abraham and Isaac, providing them with a ram for sacrifice. This week, Isaac's son Jacob is blessed, in spite of his trickery, so that all the world might be blessed through him. Next week, Jacob's descendant Moses will be chosen by God to bring blessing and release to all Jacob's children.

Opening Prayer

God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, you have promised to be with us and to guide us through desert places. Be with us now as we gather to study your Word. Guide our conversation and our hearts, and draw us ever closer to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Into the Story

As your group continues to get acquainted, play a deception icebreaker game: each person share four things about yourself, but one must be a lie. The rest of the group must try to guess which one is false. Go around the entire group until everyone has a turn. Who was the best liar? Who was the worst?

Learning the Story

Jacob and Rebekah conspire to steal Esau's blessing. Jacob flees to the desert, where God gives him a promise.

Read Genesis 27:1-4 – Esau's Promise

- ❓ What seems most important or surprising about this exchange between Isaac and Esau?
- ❓ What kind of blessing do you expect this will be?
- ❓ What are the standard pieces of deathbed scenes? How does this setup fit?
- ❓ What emotions does this exchange evoke for you?

Read Genesis 27:15-19 – Rebekah's Cheat

- ❓ Why do you think Rebekah is helping Jacob disguise himself?
- ❓ Why do you think Jacob is going along with Rebekah's plan?

Bible Nuts & Bolts: What Is Genre?

All writing falls into one genre or another. While each individual work is unique, works within the same genre all share certain characteristics. Style, plot, setting, characters, and other details let the reader know what to expect as they read, and clue them in on how to read. The Bible is made up of a wide variety of genres, including narratives, poetry, letters, speeches and others. Within these broad genres we also find more specific sub-genres. For example, poetry might be a praise song or a warning prophecy. Narrative might give an historical account or explain why things are the way they are. When reading the Bible, it helps to know the genre so that we can understand how to read. We would not read a newspaper the same way we read a love poem. So with the Bible, we do not want to confuse our genres, or we will miss the point that the original authors were trying to convey.

- ❓ In 27:11, Esau is described as a “hairy man.” How does Rebekah’s disguise account for this?
- ❓ What modern stories, movies, or television shows does this story most resemble? Is there a formula for such scenes?
- ❓ Is it going to work? Why or why not?

Bible Connections

- ✚ Jacob’s sons deceive him as he deceived his own father (Genesis 37:18-36).
- ✚ In spite of Moses’ shady history, he is chosen to carry out God’s work (Exodus 3).
- ✚ Jesus evokes the image of Jacob’s ladder to explain his ministry (John 1:51).

Read Genesis 27:20-23 – Jacob’s Cheat

- ❓ Isaac seems suspicious and yet he gives Jacob the blessing. Why, do you think?
- ❓ What do you imagine Esau’s reaction will be when he learns that Jacob has stolen his blessing?
- ❓ How do you imagine Isaac will feel when he learns what he has done?
- ❓ What has brought these two brothers to this state of affairs? How do you think God will work in this family?

Read Genesis 28:10-17 – Jacob’s Promise

- ❓ After all that Jacob has done, does he deserve this promise? Why do you think God gives it?
- ❓ What exactly is promised? Make a list of the promises.
- ❓ What does the vision of the ladder mean? How does it relate to the promises made?
- ❓ What does God require of Jacob?
- ❓ What is the most important of the promises, in your opinion? Which of these promises would you most want to receive?
- ❓ What has God promised you? What has God asked of you?

Supplies

- ✚ Optional: stepladder, butcher or construction paper, tape, basket, stones, paper, pens or pencils, candles

Living the Story: Worship

Build (or plan) a prayer station using Jacob’s ladder as the central theme. If possible, use an old stepladder, or use butcher or construction paper to make a paper ladder on the wall. Come up with a way to invite those who visit the prayer station to leave a prayer. Perhaps provide a basket of stones, and each person is asked to set one on the ladder; sheets of paper that they can write on and stick to the ladder; candles that they can place on the rungs on the ladder; or other creative ideas. Try to think of details that will make the prayer station inviting and comforting, yet also gently challenging. Involve as many of the senses as you can.

Closing Prayer

Close by breaking into pairs and blessing one another. Make a sign of a cross on your partner's forehead or lay your hands on their head (if you are both comfortable with it), and offer the following blessing (from Psalm 121):

“The Lord keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.”

The one receiving the blessing may respond: “Amen.”

At Home

- ✚ Invite someone to dine with you. Talk together about the blessings you have received.
- ✚ Reach out to a member of the family that you have not spoken to in a long time.
- ✚ Write a prayer to use when you are cut off from your connections and alone in a kind of exile.

Daily Readings

Sunday—Read Genesis 27:1-4, 15-23; 28:10-17

Jacob and Rebekah cheat Isaac and Esau, and yet Jacob is blessed by God. When have you felt least deserving of God's blessing? .

Monday—Read Genesis 29:1-30

Jacob lives with his uncle Laban, and marries both of his daughters. Write a short story about Jacob's wedding to Leah from the perspective of Laban's younger daughter Rachel.

Tuesday—Read Genesis 29:31–30:24

Leah and Rachel compete for Jacob's love, and Jacob has 11 sons and 1 daughter. Draw a family tree for Jacob's family, starting with Abraham, Sarah, and Haggai, and ending with Jacob's wives and children.

Wednesday—Read Genesis 37:2-36; 39:20-23

Jacob's favorite son Joseph is a dreamer whose brothers plot against him. Keep a dream journal for a week.

Thursday—Read Genesis 40:2-3, 5, 9-23; 41:14-45

Joseph's dreams lead him to favor with Pharaoh in Egypt. Using your dream journal, write a story about how your dreams might be used to help you in daily life.

Friday—Read Genesis 47:1-12; 50:22-26

Joseph's favor with Pharaoh brings good fortune to his family. Make a plan for how the positive in your life could be used to help those in your family or community.

Saturday—Read Exodus 1:8-14; 2:1-25

Jacob's descendant Moses is born a slave in Egypt, raised by Pharaoh's daughter, and flees punishment for murder. How has God used the mistakes and misfortunes in your life toward God's purposes?