

“... so he blessed him.”

In this study I ask what might appear to be strange questions, but please bear with them, for they are asked in all seriousness. When is a lie a lie? Can it ever be ‘craftiness’? Christians are very good at accepting the idea of holiness, etc., but they seem to forget that there are times when we must act craftily and with subtlety. Try as we might, we cannot get rid of this fact.

In another study I have asked how this command by God differs from, say, the ‘disinformation’ spread at times of war. Is this a ‘lie’ or is it mere craftiness? This chapter presents us with what appear to be blatant lies on the part of Rebekah and Jacob. Yet, what would have happened if Esau had received both his birthright and the final blessing from his father? Would the line of holiness from Abraham be broken? (*Of course these are rhetorical queries, for God cannot allow His plans to be diverted or thwarted by the plots or actions of mere men*).

No, this would be impossible, for God’s will must be done. He predestined the line to remain unbroken, so that it was safe. But, it was unbroken by way of subterfuge! Was this legitimate? Or, was it a lie?

We think of other similar instances of subterfuge that brought about God’s plan. For example, when Jael drove a six inch tent peg through Sisera’s brain, was it murder, or was it a legitimate action of war? Interpretation can sometimes be hard and might even offend our cherished views. That is how it must be.

If, say, we believe that all killing is wrong, then we will view any killing in *scripture* as wrong. But, in many instances it was God Himself Who ordered the deaths of people, sometimes in their thousands. The same critics would similarly reject the death penalty. But, their beliefs are false, for God clearly says in the Decalogue that it is

murder

that is condemned, not ‘killing’

per se

. Was Sisera’s death ‘murder’, or was it obedience to God, even if such obedience is unwitting?

When David told an untruth to Saul to save his life, was it a subterfuge or was it a lie? When Rebekah and Jacob did what they did – was it a lie, or was it something else? To me, it seems

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like a lie. But, is it? If it was within God's plan how could it be called wrong? Or, *was* it within God's plan? We have no way of knowing the final answer, so we must consider the facts and interpret accordingly. It is not as easy as some might have us believe.

There are times when Christians act in a way that seems uncharitable to onlookers. But, they may well have received an inner conviction that the course of action was required and was legitimate, no matter how wrong it looked to others. Would your church have cast out Jacob and his mother, if he had lived today? Would he simply have been called a liar and a thief, and condemned? He did what he did, and yet he was directly in line with Christ, part of God's plan of salvation. I do not have any answers to this conundrum, but the questions raised are very interesting indeed!

Verses 1-4

1.

"And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him, My son: and he said unto him, Behold, here am I.

2.

And he said, Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death:

3.

Now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison;

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."

In our church meetings we have had discussions about what constitutes a lie. In previous studies, for example, we have looked at the way David apparently lied when he asked Jonathan to tell king Saul something that was 'obviously' not true... but was this a 'lie', given that God did

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not appear to punish him for it, or even mention it?

The question is not so stupid as at first seems the case, for Abraham appeared to tell a lie, when he told others that Sarah was his sister. Technically, she was indeed his sister, but was it also a lie? Now we come to an even more mysterious chapter, in which Jacob and his mother told what were, to us, blatant lies. Yet, God blessed Jacob and his line.

I cannot pretend to understand, but can only suggest that God looks at the inward being of a man, rather than at his outward sins. That is, we all sin, sometimes deliberately, and yet we remain saved and continue to receive many blessings. For me this emphasises the Biblical fact of predestination, rather than the way men can sin, or at least 'bend the truth'.

Isaac was now very old and his eyesight was poor, making him almost blind. Another interesting point arises in this text – that although Esau married outside of Abraham's strict requirements, Isaac still called upon him to give him a blessing. To me, this shows that Isaac made an error of judgement, for he knew that his family line had to remain untainted by foreign and pagan blood. Was this ordinary failure and sin on the part of Isaac, or was it Satan's hand, attempting to manipulate global activities in an attempt to remove the line that would produce the Messiah? I would tend to believe it was both.

It was time for Isaac to die, and he called Esau as his eldest son. This was strange, as Jacob already had his birthright. Yet, Isaac wished to bless* his eldest son, Esau. Before he did this, he asked Esau, a mighty hunter, to go into the desert to kill a deer, so that he could eat venison for the last time. It was always Isaac's delight to eat venison that Esau had brought and cooked in a 'savoury' way – meaning 'tasty'. This was to be a prelude to Isaac blessing Esau with his 'soul', *nephesh*. In this text, 'soul' means 'inner being' or heart. (*There are times when one has to take strong action against a family member, but this does not mean the one applying the action hates his relative. It can be very hard to perform).

Verses 5-14

1.

"And Rebekah heard when Isaac spake to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt for venison, and to bring it.

2.

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And Rebekah spake unto Jacob her son, saying, Behold, I heard thy father speak unto Esau thy brother, saying,

3.

Bring me venison, and make me savoury meat, that I may eat, and bless thee before the LORD before my death.

4.

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

5.

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:

6.

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

7.

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

8.

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.

9.

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

10.

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And he went, and fetched, and brought them to his mother: and his mother made savoury meat, such as his father loved.”

Rebekah overheard what Isaac said to Esau. No doubt, though she preferred Jacob, she also loved Esau. She also loved her husband. But, something within her drove her to subterfuge. Was it God, moving her to thwart what could be a misplaced blessing? We cannot say, for the text is silent, but we do know that in parts of scripture men called by God have similarly entered into subterfuge to bring about certain ends. Does this mean that at times Christians may resort to subterfuge?

Rebekah went to speak to Jacob, repeating what Isaac had said. She then commanded Jacob to listen to her and to obey her wishes. She told him to kill two young goats; she would then dress and cook them so that they were tasty. Jacob was then to enter Isaac’s tent and offer him the meaty broth, pretending to be Esau. This was a breathtaking plan, as Jacob quickly realised...’but my brother is hairy...if my father touches me he will know I am not Esau!’

Jacob knew that if he was found out in this deception, Isaac might cast him out forever and curse him rather than bless him. His word ‘deceiver’ does not necessarily mean ‘liar’, which is also interesting. It means to misuse, to mock, or to ridicule. Jacob did not want his father to think he was doing anything like this to him.

Rebekah told him that if anyone was to be cursed, it was her, so he was not to worry about it. Feeling distinctly uneasy, Jacob went to get the young goats for his mother to cook. The deception had begun. Or, was it craftiness?

Verses 15-19

1.

“And Rebekah took goodly raiment of her eldest son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them upon Jacob her younger son:

2.

And she put the skins of the kids of the goats upon his hands, and upon the smooth of his neck:

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3.

And she gave the savoury meat and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob.

4.

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

5.

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.”

Rebekah was thorough, and she took clothing belonging to Esau and gave them to Jacob to wear. She skinned the goats and placed the skins over Jacob’s lower arms and across the back of his neck. The preparations were now complete. She gave the meat broth to Jacob and sent him to Isaac, in great trepidation.

Jacob entered the tent and spoke to his father, who asked who was there. Jacob said “I am Esau thy firstborn.” This was a direct lie. Jacob continued... ‘I have done what you wanted, so please sit up and eat my venison before you bless me.’

Verses 20-24

1.

“And Isaac said unto his son, How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son? And he said, Because the LORD thy God brought it to me.

2.

And Isaac said unto Jacob, Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not.

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3.

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.

4.

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

5.

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

Isaac was not so much suspicious as perplexed, for he did not expect Esau to return from hunting so quickly. This is when Jacob uttered another lie, possibly a worse one, for he used the name of God: 'I was quick because God brought the animal to me.'

Isaac accepted this explanation but asked him to come closer so he could touch him, because he was unsure that it was Esau. Jacob obeyed, probably with a pounding heart, as Isaac touched him... Isaac said it was strange, for his son had the skin of Esau but the voice of Jacob. Being brothers both probably had similar voices, but with sufficient difference to make Isaac think twice. Before he blessed him, Isaac asked a direct question: 'Are you my son, Esau?' And Jacob lied again: 'Yes, I am.' Isaac was finally convinced and blessed Jacob.

Verses 25-29

1.

“And he said, Bring it near to me, and I will eat of my son's venison, that my soul may bless thee. And he brought it near to him, and he did eat: and he brought him wine, and he drank.

2.

And his father Isaac said unto him, Come near now, and kiss me, my son.

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3.

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:

4.

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

5.

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."

Convinced he was Esau, Isaac asked Jacob to bring the venison stew to him. As he ate Jacob also brought some wine. When Isaac finished his meal he asked Jacob (thinking it was Esau) to come closer: "kiss me, my son." The word *nashaq* can also mean to touch gently, but in this case it appears to mean an actual kiss. As Jacob came close to kiss his father, Isaac smelled his clothing, which was that of a hunter, and so he was fully convinced.

Isaac thus blessed his son, thinking he was blessing his eldest. The blessing combined both spiritual and earthly favours: the 'dew of heaven', *tal*, which can mean both water to refresh the crops, as well as what is fresh from God; and the 'fatness of the earth', *mashman*, meaning fertility of crops. Both would bring wealth and food, with "plenty of corn and wine."

"Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee; be lord over thy brethren..." The second part of the blessing invoked God's hand upon Isaac's son, so that everyone would be subject to him, including his own kin. God would also curse anyone who dared to curse Isaac's son, and he would bless anyone who supported him. And so the plot had come to fruition, and Jacob received the blessing Isaac thought he was giving to Esau.

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If we remember the promises given to Abraham, and repeated to Isaac, the blessing would have been misplaced if it had been given to Esau. But, how could God allow Jacob to lie blatantly to ensure that he received His blessing? Again, we cannot answer this deep question.

Verses 30-34

1.

“And it came to pass, as soon as Isaac had made an end of blessing Jacob, and Jacob was yet scarce gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting.

2.

And he also had made savoury meat, and brought it unto his father, and said unto his father, Let my father arise, and eat of his son's venison, that thy soul may bless me.

3.

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

4.

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.

5.

And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father.”

So, Isaac blessed Jacob, and no sooner had Jacob left his father's tent than his brother, Esau, returned from hunting. Straight away, he began to dress and cook the meat. He took the bowl of soup to Isaac and said “Sit up, father, to eat my venison before you bless me.” Isaac asked “Who are you?” When Esau told him, Isaac shook violently, *charad* – with great anxiety after such an emotional shock. Again, to be sure, he said “Who?”

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“Who, then, brought me the meat I ate before you arrived, and whom I blessed? And because I have blessed him God shall indeed bless him.” Esau knew that someone had tricked Isaac, and he shouted out in intense anger. He turned to Isaac and begged to be blessed.

Verses 35-40

1.

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

2.

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?

3.

And Isaac answered and said unto Esau, Behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants; and with corn and wine have I sustained him: and what shall I do now unto thee, my son?

4.

And Esau said unto his father, Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept.

5.

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;

6.

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.”

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Hearing the cry, Isaac said: your brother, Jacob, came to me with deceit (*mirmah* can also mean 'treachery') and stole your blessing. This shows us that what God has promised (in this instance, through Isaac) will come to pass, without fail. This is yet another proof of predestination. Esau cried out – 'is not my brother rightly named 'Jacob' (the supplanter or 'heel holder')?' 'He has now taken my place twice: first he took my birthright and now he has taken my blessing!' He pleaded with his father, 'surely you have kept back a blessing for me also?'

Isaac answered, 'I have made Jacob your master and lord; all his brethren are now his servants, and he has inherited all that I have... so what else can I give you, my son?' Esau was now desperate – 'please give me just one blessing' – and he cried hot tears.

Isaac, in sorrow, gave him a blessing: 'You shall be blessed by heaven and will reap wealth and crops. You will be at war, but will serve Jacob. But, after a time you shall become strong though you will wander restlessly (*ruwd*). It is at that time that you shall no longer serve him, but will break free from your servitude.'

Verses 41-46

1.

"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.

2.

And these words of Esau her elder son were told to Rebekah: and she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said unto him, Behold, thy brother Esau, as touching thee, doth comfort himself, purposing to kill thee.

3.

Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; and arise, flee thou to Laban my brother to Haran;

4.

And tarry with him a few days, until thy brother's fury turn away;

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5.

Until thy brother's anger turn away from thee, and he forget that which thou hast done to him: then I will send, and fetch thee from thence: why should I be deprived also of you both in one day?

6.

And Rebekah said to Isaac, I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth: if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these which are of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?"

From that very moment, Esau 'hated' Jacob, *satam*, bore a grudge, was angry against him. He swore inwardly to kill Jacob for his treachery as soon as the 'days of mourning' were completed for Isaac. Jacob, then, had a stay of execution for a short while.

Esau must have revealed his intentions to someone, for that person went and told Rebekah. She immediately called for Jacob, and told him Esau was harbouring dark thoughts of murder. She ordered him to flee to her brother, Laban, in Haran, and to stay there for a while, until Esau's fury was diminished. She would send for him again when it was safe. In this way she might keep both sons safe from harm.

Rebekah told Isaac that she was sick with dread "because of the daughters of Heth". What she was saying was legitimate – she feared that when Isaac died, the wives of Esau would find a way of removing her, or even killing her. By marrying outside of Abraham's command, Esau had introduced an unstable element into the family, the Hittites' influence.

This instability would remain and get worse as history progressed. Did Rebekah, then, somehow have an idea as to the outcome of having unholy influences in the family? Indeed, were her activities prompted by God Himself? Had Esau instigated his own downfall by disobeying his father in the matter of marriage?

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God's ways are a mystery unless He reveals them to us. In this text He has chosen not to tell us why He did this or that. Nor are we told of God's response to Rebekah's and Jacob's subterfuge. The interesting thing is that both acted out a plot of treachery as far as onlookers are concerned – and yet by doing so the holy line of Abraham was maintained! I do not pretend to understand it, but I do know that Jacob was blessed by God, despite his lies. This is not an excuse for us to lie in our own lives, but it certainly begs the question... what constitutes a lie? And when is a thing not a lie, but craftiness?

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