

THE GOSPEL PROJECT  
THE STORY BEGINS  
GOD THE COVENANT MAKER  
*God's Dysfunctional Covenant Family*

We hear much about “dysfunctional” families in our day. Critics of the Bible will complain that biblical characters are often liars, cheats, murderers, etc. The truth is: biblical characters are just people like you and me and frequently they lived in dysfunctional families. God’s “covenant family” – the people who were destined to bring God’s Messiah into the world often functioned as dysfunctional family units. God used imperfect people then and He is still using imperfect people today. He loves to work ‘through’ us but He will bring His plans to completion even despite our disobedience and defiant ways!

Today’s text takes us to a family of four – a father – a mother – and two sons. It is easy to assume that single parent households and blended households may turn out dysfunctional; however, the Bible reveals that a two-parent household can just as easily be dysfunctional. In this family, the parents played favorites between their sons. They also chose to try to manipulate God’s plans instead of leaving the children in the Lord’s hands. **Proverbs 22:6 (ESV)**<sup>6</sup> *Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.*

**Isaac – the dysfunctional father** – If ever a man was blessed with a great beginning, it was Isaac. He was born into a family who loved him and he returned that love. He was the obedient son to the point of willingly laying on the altar as a sacrifice in order to obey the command of his father Abraham. He gladly married the wife of his father’s choosing and he beseeched the LORD on her behalf for children. However, he made a mistake when he became a father. He gave into the desire to favor one son over the other. **Genesis 25:28 (ESV)**<sup>28</sup> *Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game...* In fact, he loved his ‘favorite’ so much that he was willing to resist God’s Word to Rebekah. **Genesis 25:23 (ESV)**<sup>23</sup> *And the LORD said to her “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger.”* It was Jacob, the younger son, whom the LORD had determined would receive the blessing. This is why I say that Isaac was resisting the Lord’s will when he made the choice to give his blessing to Esau.

**Rebekah – the dysfunctional mother** – Rebekah made the same mistake of favoritism as Isaac did. **Genesis 25:28 (ESV)**<sup>28</sup> *... but Rebekah loved Jacob.* Rebekah allowed her love for Jacob and her desire to see “God’s plan” fulfilled in his life to the point that she was willing to be deceitful and to involve her favorite son in a deceitful game that would have lasting repercussions on the entire family. She made a conscious choice to do this even though the LORD had already promised *the older shall serve the younger*.

During this time in history, the son who received the birthright became the designated family priest as well as being the recipient of a double portion of the father’s inheritance.

In **Genesis 26** we are told that Esau sold his birthright for a tasty dish of food – probably beans – to his twin, Jacob. Jacob was at home cooking a tasty meal when Esau who was focused strictly on the

physical came in from the field and said he was ‘starving.’ Jacob, the conniver, saw this as a prime opportunity to say ‘let’s make a deal.’

Since at that moment all that was on Esau’s mind was filling his belly, he casually gave away his birthright. We get another glimpse into the heart of Esau when he rebelliously went outside of God’s family and married two Hittite women when he was 40. Esau’s lack of regard for spiritual things is confirmed in **Hebrews 12:16 (ESV)** <sup>16</sup> *that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal.* Esau lived a life that ignored God’s will and did exactly as he pleased in the flesh.

Although Jacob was at this point already interested in the promise of God, his heart was focused on scheming to obtain God’s promises rather than to live by faith and wait on the LORD. I have said this before, but it bears repeating, faith can be defined as living without scheming. Jacob who was still in his “scheming phase,” saw his chance, and knowing his brother well, bartered with Esau for his birthright in return for a meal. What a picture! Esau weighed the promise of God’s continual presence and blessing against a bowl of beans—and the beans won!

When the LORD made the promise to Rebekah that her elder son would serve the younger, it was easy to wonder ‘why?’ As we see more and more of the life choices that Esau made, we begin to understand the LORD’s choice of the younger son before his birth came from His foreknowledge that Jacob would become the man with a heart for God – not Esau. God’s plan will go forward even through a dysfunctional family.

**Read Genesis 27:1-4 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called Esau his older son and said to him, “My son”; and he answered, “Here I am.”* <sup>2</sup> *He said, “Behold, I am old; I do not know the day of my death.”* <sup>3</sup> *Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me,* <sup>4</sup> *and prepare for me delicious food, such as I love, and bring it to me so that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die.”*

We can't be certain how old Isaac was at the time he decided to give his blessing to his favorite son. Shortly after Jacob’s trickery of his father, he left for Haran and according to **Genesis 31:41**, Jacob was in Haran for 20 years. When he returned his father was still alive. Isaac died when he was 180 years old. Isaac was not anywhere near being on his deathbed when he made the choice to give his blessing to Esau. Isaac was just determined to do things his way. And another thing, if Isaac was really on his deathbed why was he thinking about food? It is more likely he was just using his illness to speed up the blessing process even though Esau had married outside God’s will and he had displayed a casual attitude toward his birthright and continually chose to live in the flesh. Now, let’s see the result of his mother’s eavesdropping.

**Read Genesis 27:5-14 (ESV)** <sup>5</sup> *Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it,* <sup>6</sup> *Rebekah said to her son Jacob, “I heard your father speak to your brother Esau,”* <sup>7</sup> *‘Bring me game and prepare for me delicious food, that I may eat it*

*and bless you before the LORD before I die.’<sup>8</sup> Now therefore, my son, obey my voice as I command you.<sup>9</sup> Go to the flock and bring me two good young goats, so that I may prepare from them delicious food for your father, such as he loves.<sup>10</sup> And you shall bring it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies.”<sup>11</sup> But Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, “Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him and bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing.”<sup>13</sup> His mother said to him, “Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, bring them to me.”<sup>14</sup> So he went and took them and brought them to his mother, and his mother prepared delicious food, such as his father loved.*

Rebekah who had personally received the promise that Jacob would have God’s blessing, chose scheming over trusting. In the “perfect family,” the mother would always do the “right thing,” but this family was human and dysfunctional and like our families still today – not perfect! Rebekah was about to make a whopper of a mistake. Instead of waiting on the LORD in faith and allowing God to control and set the course of her children’s lives, she chose manipulating with the thought of benefiting her favorite son. It is never wise to choose scheming over faith walking. Her choices helped turn her favorite son into a liar and deceiver.

God’s plan goes forward through a deceitful son.

**Read Genesis 27:18-29 (ESV)**<sup>18</sup> *So he went in to his father and said, “My father.” And he said, “Here I am. Who are you, my son?”<sup>19</sup> Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me.”<sup>20</sup> But Isaac said to his son, “How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?” He answered, “Because the LORD your God granted me success.”<sup>21</sup> Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not.”<sup>22</sup> ... “The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.”<sup>23</sup> ... So he blessed him.<sup>24</sup> He said, “Are you really my son Esau?” He answered, “I am.”<sup>25</sup> Then he said, “Bring it near to me, that I may eat of my son’s game and bless you... May God give you of the dew of heaven and of the fatness of the earth and plenty of grain and wine.<sup>29</sup> Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother’s sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you!”*

Jacob connived to get the blessing that God had already promised! Although his mother instigated the plan, Jacob was a grown man – most likely over 40 years old and he made his own choice to deceive his blind father. His deception cost him dearly. He was exiled from his family for years and never saw his mother again. His deception caused his brother to want to kill him. **Galatians 6:7 (ESV)**<sup>7</sup> *Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.* Although Jacob eventually got his relationship with the LORD straightened out he would still reap the consequences of his sin. His Uncle Laban would trick him into working for him 14 years instead of 7 to receive the wife he loved. And, later, his own sons would band together to deceive him regarding his “favorite son” Joseph. Jacob did not learn from the mistakes of his parents since he too chose to play favorites.

God’s plan goes forward through a despondent son.

**Read Genesis 27:30-40 (ESV)** <sup>30</sup> As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone ... Esau his brother came in from his hunting. <sup>31</sup> He also prepared delicious food...And he said to his father, "Let my father arise and eat... that you may bless me." <sup>32</sup> His father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" He answered, "I am your son, your firstborn, Esau." <sup>33</sup> Then Isaac trembled very violently and said, "Who was it then that hunted game ... and I ate it all before you came, and I have blessed him? Yes, and he shall be blessed." <sup>34</sup> As soon as Esau heard the words..., he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry and said..., "Bless me, even me also, O my father!" <sup>35</sup> But he said, "Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing." <sup>36</sup> Esau said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has cheated me these two times. He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing." Then he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" <sup>37</sup> Isaac answered and said to Esau, "Behold, I have made him lord over you...What then can I do for you, my son?" <sup>38</sup> Esau said to his father, "Have you but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father." And Esau lifted up his voice and wept. <sup>39</sup> Then Isaac his father answered and said to him: "Behold, away from the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be, and away from the dew of heaven on high. <sup>40</sup> By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; but when you grow restless you shall break his yoke from your neck."

According to the Life Application Bible, in ancient times, a person's word was binding (much like a written contract today), especially when it was a formal oath. This is why Isaac's blessing was irrevocable. Before the father died, he would perform a ceremony of blessing, in which he officially handed over the birthright to the rightful heir. Although the firstborn son was entitled to the birthright, it was not actually his until the blessing was pronounced. Before the blessing was given, the father could take the birthright away from the oldest son and give it to a more deserving son. But after the blessing was given, the birthright could no longer be taken away. This is why fathers usually waited until the end of their days to pronounce the blessing. Although Jacob had already been given the birthright by Esau, he still needed his father's blessing to make it binding.

It is easy to 'feel sorry' for Esau as he stands crying before his father. However, we always need to keep in mind the difference between regret and repentance. Esau's tears were not tears of repentance for being an ungodly man; they were tears of regret because he had lost the covenant blessing. Esau wanted the blessing but he didn't want to be the kind of man whom God could bless! Esau was not repenting because he wanted to turn to God and receive His spiritual blessing. He was regretful because he had missed out on something material.

In the Old Testament, we see the LORD often rearranging the birth order of children. Ishmael was Abraham's firstborn son, but God bypassed him for Isaac. Manasseh was Joseph's firstborn, but God gave the blessing to Ephraim. Although Solomon was not the oldest living son of David, he was crowned king. This reminds us that with our first birth comes only death, but when we experience the second birth we receive the blessing of new life in Christ. Jesus said to Nicodemus in **John 3:3 (ESV)** <sup>3</sup> ... "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."