

The Deceiver
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Allen Power

Genesis 27:18-29

There is an old saying: *“God can draw a straight line with a crooked stick.”* **What does it mean? How does it apply to believers today as much as it did to Old Testament characters? Why is it encouraging?**

Scripture is not a polished “P.R. piece” showing only the “good side” of the men and women God has used. It shows the players in God’s plan, as they were, flawed people who God changed and used despite their sinful nature.

In today’s passage we see a chapter in the life of Jacob, a man God used in spite of his tendency to scheme and deceive others to get his own way. Jacob got it naturally because we might say Jacob came from the *“crooked stick family.”* Though Jacob was a “con man” by nature, God would change both his nature and his name (Israel) and use him as the patriarch of God’s chosen people.

Big Idea: It’s true God can “draw a straight line with a crooked stick.” That’s good news for you and me because the fact that we were born with a sinful nature doesn’t prevent God from using us for His purpose. He can change us and use us just as He did the men and women we read about in scripture.

- First, some context before we jump into the middle of this account.
- Jacob and Esau were twins born to Isaac and Rebekah. **Do you remember anything interesting about this pregnancy and birth?**
- Jacob’s very name described who he was by nature. One interpretation: **Ya`ăqôb**, *yah-ak-obe`*; from 6117; *heel-catcher* (i.e. supplanter)ⁱ
- Jacob and Esau were very different: Gen. 25:27 tells us (NLT)
²⁷ *As the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter. He was*

an outdoorsman, but Jacob had a quiet temperament, preferring to stay at home.

- Isaac and Rebekah's family was divided by favoritism: Gen. 25:28 (NLT) ²⁸ *Isaac loved Esau because he enjoyed eating the wild game Esau brought home, but Rebekah loved Jacob.*
- In this episode Jacob and his mother were scheming to trick his blind father Isaac into giving him the blessing that normally went to the first-born son (Esau.) The blessing and the "birthright" are two different things.
- *"As the firstborn son, Esau automatically held the "birthright." A birthright was an honor given to the firstborn, bestowing "head of household" status and the right to inherit his father's estate. The son with the birthright would receive a double portion of whatever was passed down."ⁱⁱ*
- *"A blessing could be given regardless of birthright. However, a greater blessing was given to the one who held the birthright... While a birthright belonged to the firstborn son, anyone could receive a blessing. In the time of the patriarchs, such blessings acted as a "last will and testament" and were highly prized as a means of revealing God's will."ⁱⁱⁱ*
- Jacob's cunning and Esau's foolishness had already shifted the birthright to from Esau to Jacob. **Do you remember the "deal" Esau made?**
- Though Jacob had "supplanted" Esau and secured the birthright, their dad Isaac still had the prerogative to distribute the possessions as he wished.
- Chapter 27 begins with Isaac (thinking he was soon to die) calling in Esau to put in motion the blessing ceremony. "Go kill some of that venison I love and after I eat it I'll bless you." So, Esau went hunting.
- Rebekah overheard this and put a deceptive scheme into motion. She told Jacob to get two goats from the flock for her to prepare, and they would convince Isaac that Jacob was Esau. Jacob should have said, *"that would be dishonest!"* That wasn't his concern. **What was it?** (Gen. 27:11-12)
- Rebekah had a plan for dealing with Jacob's concerns. A clever costume and some aroma "therapy" would do the trick nicely.

Let's begin by reading Genesis 27:18–29 (NLT.)

¹⁸ So Jacob took the food to his father. “My father?” he said.
“Yes, my son,” Isaac answered. “Who are you—Esau or Jacob?”
¹⁹ Jacob replied, “It’s Esau, your firstborn son. I’ve done as you told me. Here is the wild game. Now sit up and eat it so you can give me your blessing.”
²⁰ Isaac asked, “How did you find it so quickly, my son?”
“The Lord your God put it in my path!” Jacob replied.
²¹ Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Come closer so I can touch you and make sure that you really are Esau.” ²² So Jacob went closer to his father, and Isaac touched him. “The voice is Jacob’s, but the hands are Esau’s,” Isaac said. ²³ But he did not recognize Jacob, because Jacob’s hands felt hairy just like Esau’s. So Isaac prepared to bless Jacob. ²⁴ “But are you really my son Esau?” he asked.
“Yes, I am,” Jacob replied.
²⁵ Then Isaac said, “Now, my son, bring me the wild game. Let me eat it, and then I will give you my blessing.” So Jacob took the food to his father, and Isaac ate it. He also drank the wine that Jacob served him. ²⁶ Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Please come a little closer and kiss me, my son.”
²⁷ So Jacob went over and kissed him. And when Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he was finally convinced, and he blessed his son. He said, “Ah! The smell of my son is like the smell of the outdoors, which the Lord has blessed!”
²⁸ “From the dew of heaven
and the richness of the earth,
may God always give you abundant harvests of grain
and bountiful new wine.
²⁹ May many nations become your servants,
and may they bow down to you.
May you be the master over your brothers,
and may your mother’s sons bow down to you.
All who curse you will be cursed,
and all who bless you will be blessed.”

- We said, God can “draw a straight line with a crooked stick” and there is a lot of “crookedness” and favoritism going on in the Isaac family!
- There’s an interesting fact if we go back in time in this story.

Genesis 25:22–23 (NLT) describes Rebekah’s pregnancy:

²² But the two children struggled with each other in her womb. So she went to ask the Lord about it. “Why is this happening to me?” she asked.

²³ And the Lord told her, “The sons in your womb will become two nations. From the very beginning, the two nations will be rivals. One nation will be stronger than the other; and your older son will serve your younger son.” [Jacob would be the father of the 12 tribes of Israel; Esau the father of the Edomites, a people who plagued Israel for years until God finally judged them.^{iv}

- Rebekah was scheming with Jacob to orchestrate something God had already told her would happen. **What does that say about her? Does it remind you of a similar situation with Jacob’s grandparents Abram and Sarai? What is the lesson for all of us in both cases?**
- **Knowing these facts, though he was blind and being deceived, why should we not feel too sorry for the father Isaac? How was he also trying to force things?**
- Rebekah would pay a price for her plan and so would Jacob.
- When Esau returned he was enraged and vowed to kill Jacob as soon as Isaac died. Rebekah engages in some more deception to send Jacob away to save his life. She would never see her son again.
- Jacob had run from his brother but God would resolve that one day.
- In the meantime, Jacob would be the victim of double-dealing at the hands of his uncle Laban (clearly deception ran rampant in the family.)
- God can “draw a straight line with a crooked stick” and that’s good news for you and me because our sinful nature doesn’t prevent God from using us for His purpose. That was also true of Jacob.
- Despite all this, Jacob was a key player in God’s plan. Scripture doesn’t portray him as a mighty hero, but his role was so significant to God’s plan that about 25% of Genesis is given to the biography of him and his family.
- God revealed his plans for Jacob in a dramatic way as Jacob dreamed.

Genesis 28:12–15 (NLT)

¹² As he slept, he dreamed of a stairway that reached from the earth up to heaven. And he saw the angels of God going up and down the stairway.

¹³ At the top of the stairway stood the Lord, and he said, “I am the Lord, the God of your grandfather Abraham, and the God of your father, Isaac. The ground you are lying on belongs to you. I am giving it to you and your descendants. ¹⁴ Your descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth! They will spread out in all directions—to the west and the east, to the north and the south. And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants. ¹⁵ What’s more, I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go. One day I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have finished giving you everything I have promised you.”

- As “crooked” as Jacob was, God changed his name and his nature in order to draw a genealogical straight line to a baby born in Bethlehem.

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- Let’s discuss what you and I can learn from this story of deception.
- **How did Isaac and Rebekah fail as spouses and parents? Assuming Isaac knew of God’s revelation to Rebekah (25:23) that the elder would serve the younger, how was he in the wrong? How was Jacob wrong in going along with the plan? Was Esau an innocent victim in the family (think about selling his birthright?)**
- Every one of these family members were playing the angles and working some kind of manipulation to get what they wanted. **What was missing in their relationship with God? What is the lesson for us?**
- We may be encouraged that God can “*draw a straight line with crooked sticks*” like these Bible characters and like us. **Why is that fact NOT a “free pass?”**
- God can and does draw the “straight lines” of His plans using the “crooked sticks” of flawed humans.

- If we have followed Christ as Savior and Lord, though the sinful nature is still there, we no longer have to be slaves to sin.
- God's will for every believer is to grow more like Christ and less like the person we were before Christ. That only comes through dying daily to self and surrendering daily to His Holy Spirit's guidance.

ⁱ Strong, J. (2009). *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament*

ⁱⁱ <https://www.gotquestions.org/blessing-birthright.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid*

^{iv} <https://www.gotquestions.org/Jacob-and-Esau.html>