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Jacob's Legacy: Scheming or Trusting?

The biblical account of the twins, Esau and Jacob, is often troubling to those of us who desire fairness. Why would God choose Jacob over Esau (Mal. 1:2-3 cf. Rom. 9:10-16)? Esau was an outdoorsman, a hunter and a man's man. Jacob was a schemer and a momma's boy. Webster's describes a 'schemer' as an underhanded plotter. Other adjectives used are: sly, crafty, and cunning. Jacob met all of these conditions.

God told the parents, before the twins were born, that He preferred Esau to Jacob and that Esau would serve Jacob, the younger, when culturally the first-born would be the primary heir and leader. This was played out when Esau came in from hunting, famished, and Jacob took advantage and traded a pot of stew for Esau's birthright (Gen. 25:27-34).

Jacob's True Nature - Fleshly

Years later Jacob and his mother Rebekah devised a plan to deceive his father Isaac into thinking that Jacob was his brother Esau in order to steal Esau's blessing. The scheme

worked. Isaac gave Esau's blessing to Jacob (Gen. 27:22-29). Nursing a grudge, Esau determined that He would kill Jacob after their father Isaac died.

To protect Jacob from the wrath of Esau, Rebekah talked Isaac into sending Jacob to Paddan-aram to take a wife from the daughters of her brother Laban (Gen. 28:1-2).

Jacob's Dream and God's Promise to Bless Him.

On the way to Paddan-aram, Jacob had a dream, "a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants... Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you" (Gen. 28:12-15).

Jacob's Faithless Bargain

Jacob responded, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this

journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God... And of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You" (Gen. 28:20-22).

God's promise to bless Jacob was of grace and unconditional, requiring nothing from Jacob in return. However, Jacob's response was self-serving and conditioned upon God's continued protection and provision for all his needs.

Jacob's Plotting Thickens

Jacob was welcomed into his uncle Laban's household. He worked for him seven years in order to have his daughter Rachel as his wife. However, Laban tricked Jacob and gave him his oldest daughter Leah instead.

When Jacob saw that he was tricked, he complained. Laban then gave Rachel to be Jacob's wife a week later, requiring Jacob to work for another seven years to pay for her (Gen. 29:13-30).

Jacob Agrees to Shepherd Laban's Sheep for Wages

Jacob then tricked Laban. He offered to take, as his wage, all

of the sheep that were striped, spotted and black. Laban would keep all of the ones that were not. In this way Jacob said Laban would know his honesty. Jacob tried to use divination to multiply his flocks not knowing, as we do, that multi-colored animals usually produce multi-colored offspring.

Jacob became very prosperous with large flocks and herds, including many servants after shepherding for Laban for six years (Gen. 30:25-43).

Jacob Flees Laban

Hearing that Laban was jealous and angry at his success, Jacob took his family and possessions and decided to return home to Canaan. Unknown to him, Rachel stole her father's idols.

When Laban heard that Jacob had gone and that his idols were missing, he gathered his kinsmen and caught up with Jacob in seven days. After the initial confrontation and not finding the family idols (hidden by Rachel), Jacob and Laban made a covenant of peace. Laban returned home and Jacob continued on to Canaan (Gen. 31:1-55).

The angels of God came and camped with Jacob [for his protection?] so that there were two camps – the angels and Jacob's (Gen. 32:1-2).

Jacob's Scheme to Pacify Esau

Jacob, ignoring the angels' camp, feared what his brother might do to him when he returned. He divided up his possessions in waves of gifts hoping to satisfy Esau's desire for revenge by the time Esau and he would finally meet face to face.

Jacob, alone and fearful, prays to God acknowledging His prospering while pleading for His protection from Esau. (Gen. 32:3-23).

Jacob's Second Dream

That night a man (an angel of God) wrestled with Jacob all night until he gained the advantage. The man asked Jacob his name and he confessed honestly, Jacob. Twenty years before he lied to his father and said he was Esau. God, as a reminder, touched the socket of Jacob's thigh so that he walked from then on with a limp.

God changed Jacob's name from 'schemer' [Jacob rules] to Israel 'God commands or rules.' This marked his transformation from the natural or fleshly man to a spiritual and God-controlled man (Gen. 24--32).

Jacob and Esau Reconciled

Esau was excited to meet his brother Jacob and they returned home in peace. **Scheming has been replaced by trusting God and not self.** Jacob said to Esau... *for I see your face as one sees the face of God, and you have received me favorably*" (Gen. 33:10).

Jacob Passed Shepherd Test

The Book of Proverbs gives a test for a faithful shepherd, "**Know well the condition of your flocks. And pay attention to your herds**" (Prov. 27:23). When Esau made the plan for the journey, he said to Jacob, "*Let us take our journey and go, and I will go before you.*" But he said to him, "*My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds which are nursing are a care to me. And if they are driven hard one day, all the flocks will die. Please let my lord pass on before his servant, and I will proceed at my leisure, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord at Seir*" (Gen. 33:13-14).

This was a huge change in Jacob. He now showed his genuine concern for the welfare of others, not only of *self*.

Jacob's Legacy

The patriarch Jacob used the shepherd metaphor as he lay dying by summing up his life with these words: ". . . *The God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day*" (Gen. 48:15). He acknowledged God as His faithful shepherd and was inducted into the "Hall of Faith," "*By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff*" (Heb. 11:21).

Christians Today Trust – Not Scheme

Many Christians today live much like Jacob did before God changed his name. However, faith in Jesus Christ produces in us a change of nature – from the natural or fleshly to the spiritual--just as God changed Jacob to Israel. Spiritual believers trust Jesus to shepherd them throughout life to be and do, as He is their "all-and-in-all".

God has already promised, "*I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU... Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever*" (Heb. 13:6, 8).

How good it is for Christians to enjoy Jesus' shepherding care now. "*Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen*" (Heb. 13:20-21).