Jacob Gets Isaac’s Blessing

Who shot J.R.? That was a question hotly debated in 1980. I am sure that many of you remember the television series “Dallas” which aired on CBS from 1978 to 1991. The final scene of the last episode of season 3 ended with the character J.R. played by Larry Hagman being shot by an unknown assailant. The faithful viewing audience had to wait on pins and needles for 8 months for the shooter to be identified. Many speculated about who shot J.R. and the list expanded until virtually each character in the show was under suspicion. It seems that J.R. had garnered many enemies, several of whom were family members including his sister in law who proved to be the guilty party. The episode of the shooting was appropriately entitled “A Family Divided”. For those intrigued by the salacious, “Dallas” offered a full menu including marital infidelity, sibling rivalry, crime, deceitful business practices and above all, family drama. “Dallas” pioneered a migration of daytime soap operas to prime time spawning more shows that attempted to one up each other with family dysfunction at the root of conflict. Followers of this genre will be pleased to learn that the reboot of “Dynasty” was recently renewed for a 4th season. Yay! Our study of Genesis chapter 27 reveals that family dynamics played a significant role in the events that are recorded.

The chapter begins with Isaac calling Esau to his side to bestow the blessing reserved for the eldest son. While Isaac was old and seemingly resigned to dying, it is not known how much longer he lived after this incident. Martin Luther estimated that Isaac was 137 years old at this time and lived another 43 years. The story is very familiar and can be summarized as follows: Isaac asked Esau to hunt for wild game and prepare a meal for him to eat at which time he would give his blessing to Esau. Rebekah overheard the conversation and quickly devised a plan whereby she would prepare a meal and Jacob would impersonate his brother in order to steal the blessing from him. The plan worked then Esau returned from hunting with the meal he prepared only to discover to his and Isaac’s horror that Jacob had come earlier and stolen the blessing.

At the core of this debacle was an unhealthy family relationship as evidenced by:

Choosing favorites. Isaac’s favorite son was Esau while Rebekah preferred Jacob and they probably made no attempt to hide their feelings which led to hostility between the 2 sons. I have a friend who comes from a family of 7 siblings. He bragged that he was the favorite of his mother then admitted that each of the children felt they were the favorite. What a testament to parenting skills!

Poor communication. Matthew Henry wrote that if Rebekah had gone to Isaac and reasoned with him that it was God’s will that Jacob would have the blessing of the eldest son, it is probable that he would have agreed. There is also no evidence that they had explained God’s plan to their 2 sons which could have defused their conflict.

Lack of prayer. There is no record that any of these 4 people sought guidance from God on how to deal with this situation. This is one of the few chapters in Genesis which has no record of communication from God. Steve has shared the anecdote about a deacon trying to resolve a problem saying “Well, we’ve tried everything else I guess we’ll have to pray about it”. Prayer should be our first option, not our last.

Learned behavior. At the core of the core is that they learned dishonesty and distrust from their parents. Abraham and Sarah, while both righteous people, passed along some poor character traits to Isaac who in turn passed them on to his sons. Jacob’s actions in this chapter reveal a man who is quite adept at crooked dealing. When Rebekah presented the scheme to him, he was able to point out the potential flaws so they could perfect the plan before executing it. He was also quick with lies as Isaac sensed something was amiss. While little is known about Rebekah’s father, the actions of Laban we will see in chapter 29 would suggest that Rebekah came from a family of questionable ethics.

To borrow the theme from Steve’s message on Sunday, there were no givers in this chapter. Rebekah, Jacob and Esau were all takers while Isaac was at best a spectator. Still, God’s plan prevailed as Jacob became the patriarch of the 12 tribes of Israel. The mistake Rebekah and Jacob made was trying to “help” God achieve his plan with devious measures. The saddest commentary on this family is contained in Hebrews chapter 12 where Esau is described as godless (verses 16-17). It is a picture of someone coming to repentance too late (see Matt. 25:1-13, Luke 13:25). The chapter ends with Esau bitterly vowing to kill his brother causing Rebekah to send Jacob away. Earlier in the chapter Rebekah told Jacob that she would bear any curse arising from their deception. There is no mention of Rebekah ever seeing her favorite son again.