

There are many ways to begin to understand this passage. When I was much younger, I sympathized with Jacob who was at home doing the work (aka cooking dinner). I imagined Esau out having fun. I was just sure that Jacob was getting back at all the awful things his big brother had done that we just didn't know about. But this comes from being a younger sibling. I remember one time when my older brother and I were told to share the can of Pepsi Free, he grabbed it and opened it. So, I waited patiently until it was half gone. I spoke up that it was my turn and my big brother smiled and said he had to drink my half to get to his and it was all gone. My childhood experience certainly colored how I read this text. Perhaps yours does as well.

In the last couple of weeks, we have had an increase in the laments from our children. They are deprived by being stuck with other only their siblings at home for these last 5 months. I can already hear rumblings about whose had to work harder and who had it easier. I've already begun reminding each of us that it only works when we do it all together. Maybe it's the mom in me, but I wonder why Rebekah would pit her children against each other. Why not build them up to work together?

It's easy to see who we want to be the hero and villains. The tendency in this story is to define Isaac, Rebekah, Esau & Jacob in extremes. Isaac an old man, Rebekah manipulative, Esau an idiot and Jacob a trickster. The truth of who these people are is that they are more than simply one trait. They are human and more complex. Any of us could share stories from our pasts that could paint us as either fabulous or awful.

As we now look at the next generations a few things stand out. We again begin with genealogy and learn that Isaac & Rebekah have been married 20 years with no children. Imagine life as they knew it being turned upside down. We also see the family history of infertility showing up in this next generation.

This time around, however Isaac & Rebekah both pray. And God shows up. God answers Isaac's prayer for children and responds to Rebekah's questions of why. God does not answer in straightforward manner instead giving an oracle. Before we look at what God said to oracle what is the difference between an oracle & prophecy?

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks teaches that : "Oracles are a familiar form of supernatural communication in the ancient world—[they] were normally obscure and cryptic, unlike the normal form of Israelite prophecy." We don't know exactly what will happen in the future but get an outline. A prophecy is what we usually encounter in scripture, such as from the book of Isaiah, "for unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given...and his name shall be wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."

It stands to reason that the continuation of this passage is a coming to pass of the oracle, that the older would serve the younger. However, just because we think we understand what the oracle means, it does not mean that it is predestined. We know God is working. God gave Rebekah knowledge about her children before they are born. What God speaks about these children is not based on their actions. The text says nothing about if Isaac knows what God has said.. As the children grow we get their next story when Esau comes in starving and Jacob gets the birthright in exchange for stew.

This part of the story is where it's easy to pick a team but both Jacob & Esau are equally guilty of violating family relationships. Jacob takes advantage of a person in need. Esau is not the victim, he in fact is being careless with the family interest. Regardless of what either twin did is not the point of this story. We remember that Genesis' purpose is to tell us about God! Why would God choose either of these squabbling boys? Why does

God continue to use us ordinary humans? Sometimes knowing the rest of the story is helpful as we examine what a text teaches us. Here, however, knowing that Jacob grows beyond his cheating ways may make us more sympathetic to Jacob. We may even be rooting for Jacob. We may even excuse his actions because we know that God has chosen him and good things come from him. This, however, is dangerous. Really, really dangerous. It's a slippery slope. Does this mean we automatically give everyone a pass as long as it works out in the end? Does this mean that we, as God's chosen children, can really do anything we want, with no consequences? No. That's not how it works.

God didn't choose Jacob because of anything Jacob had done. We don't know why. Perhaps God uses the flawed Jacob to show us what God can do in a messy situation. This family conflict has consequences that go beyond Isaac, Rebekah, Esau & Jacob. What does it mean that God's chosen is in conflict? It means what we do in conflict matters. How we behave will have consequences beyond ourselves. God can redeem no matter the situation. God's promises can be trusted. But can God's promises be trusted in us?

In this time everything has been politicized. Period. People, in the middle of a public health crises encourages us to pick sides instead of working together. As disciples of Jesus and children of God it is not about our wants and desires. The call in our lives is to show our love for God and each other. Keeping each other alive and as healthy as possible should be our minimum standard. I would hope that as the people of God, no matter symbol is on our jerseys, that we can work together to show and share that God loves the world. It may seem that we are limited in what we do BUT we are truly limited only by our imaginations. If we know that there are people among us who are struggling with loneliness- we can do something about it. We can safely make phone calls, send emails or drop a care package off on a doorstep. If we know our teachers do not have enough supplies in their

classrooms so students don't have to share, we can donate, offer to make items, what ever the need is. If we know our public leaders are feeling frustrated because no matter what decision they make people will be upset - let's encourage them to make the best decision in any given situation. We as disciples have the opportunity to show those who do not know our God, Creator of the universe and Lover of our souls what real, unconditional love looks like. The blessings and birthrights we have to share have nothing to do with stew and are not filled with oracles & prophecies, division & deceit but are filled with self-sacrifice and love. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.