

# Deception

Genesis 25-33

**Central Idea:** Deception is a dangerous desire to control what God controls.

## Introduction

As we get back into our Genesis series, I want to focus on a character trait that is lacking in our world today, that of being truthful. Deception runs rampant in our culture, and it was no different in the days of Genesis. Deception is the inaccurate accounting of total truth on a subject or thought. One of the greatest deceivers of all time in the Bible is Jacob. Today, I want to look at Jacob's life and show how deception ends when we allow it to be part of our character.

## Text – Genesis 25:19-28

<sup>19</sup> These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham fathered Isaac, <sup>20</sup> and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife. <sup>21</sup> And Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren. And the LORD granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived. <sup>22</sup> The children struggled together within her, and she said, "If it is thus, why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. <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." <sup>24</sup> When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb. <sup>25</sup> The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak, so they called his name Esau. <sup>26</sup> Afterward his brother came out with his hand holding Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them. <sup>27</sup> When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. <sup>28</sup> Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

### I. An Attempt to Control

#### A. Deceit at its core deals with control.

- i. From the very beginning of Jacob's story, we learn about his biggest character flaw. Even in the womb, he fights with his brother, Esau. At the birth, he's still grabbing Esau's heel!
- ii. This was the first fight, the fight for significance. Jacob, like many of us before we knew Christ, was seeking to be in first place coming out of the womb.
- iii. This is a fight for significance in his culture because the first son is the one who receives the biggest blessing and the most inheritance. The firstborn son was a very important person in his family.

- iv. Jacob's own name is given for this very purpose. His name means "deceiver," or "heel grabber." In the Jewish culture, many of the children were named according to their birth circumstances or their parents' hopes for them.
- v. Even from the very beginning of our existence, we begin to scratch out our purpose and goals in life. We try to put our mark on the world around us. We try to be somebody.
- vi. There are good ways to build a legacy, and there are ways that build a different kind of legacy. The question is what we want our legacy to be. How will people remember each of us? The method we use to build that legacy becomes part of our identity in our legacy.
- vii. If I build a legacy through deceit and dishonesty, I am remembered for those features of my personality. Even the other things I do will be forgotten in favor of those characteristics.
- viii. **Illustration:** When I say the name Babe Ruth, what does everyone think of? They think of the home run hitter, the Bronx Bomber. But did you know that Babe struck out way more often than he hit those homers? No one remembers Babe Ruth for his strike outs and failures. Babe Ruth built his name off of the explosive crack of his bat. People were so ready to hear that sound that they ignored the silence of each strikeout. The way we build our legacy is just as important as the type of legacy we want to build!

B. Deceit can be used to "get ahead" in life.

- i. As much as I would love to tell you that the Bible teaches that wicked approaches to life fail, it does not tell us this. It condemns such approaches, but it does not tell us they won't get you anywhere.
- ii. The fact of the matter is that cheaters and deceivers have succeeded in this fallen world, since evil has its reign now. When you act deceptively, it may help you out in the short run.
- iii. Indeed, even the long con game can work for quite a while. The Bible doesn't tell us that the deceiver will finally be found out, but that God will be just.
- iv. Even in the worst case scenario of a deceiver getting away with their cons, they will be judged by God in the end. God decides in the end which ones are living life the way He has designed it to be lived.
- v. So deceit can benefit you, at least for a short time, as Jacob learns. It comes time in his life for the blessing to be given by his father Isaac. But Jacob is second-born, so the blessing and birthright will be given to Esau.

- vi. But Jacob works with his mother to con his brother out of his birthright, and then steals the blessing of his father through deception. The first step involves a moment of weakness by Esau.
- vii. Esau is a man of the field, and Jacob is a great cook. One day, Esau is so exhausted when he comes in from the field that he needs food, and Jacob makes him soup, but with a catch. He must trade his birthright for the soup.
- viii. Esau gives in and gives up such a prized right because of his great hunger and physical weakness. We've all been there when we're exhausted and in need of refueling, but Esau will regret his decision in his moment of weakness.
- ix. The first con works out for Jacob. So he moves on to a larger con. With his mother's help, Jacob dresses up like Esau so his old and blind dad can't tell it's not him.
- x. While Esau is out hunting for game to make a meal for his dad, Jacob sneaks in with the meal already prepared and takes the blessing. When Esau gets back, he finds out that the blessing has already been given to his younger brother, and there is nothing that can be done. The larger con works as well.
- xi. **Application:** We may think that our little shortcuts and corner cutting works for us. And it might in the short term. The problem is that all the little lies and deceptions catch up with you, and its usually you who makes the mistake. You see, it's hard to live a life where you have to double-think everything and maintain so many lies at once. Unfortunately, most people begin to believe the lies they tell! But we are called to truth and clarity in our life with Christ! Living in truth is easier than living with lies.

## II. Usurping God's Place

### A. Deceit gives us a false sense of control.

- i. When Jacob was hitting the small time back at home, he found himself the king of deception, but he also created a world of problems through deception.
- ii. His theft and con of the blessing and the birthright left him estranged to his brother, Esau. Esau was greatly angry and for good reason at Jacob and his deception when he conned the blessing out of Isaac.
- iii. There was such an issue that Jacob had to skip town and head somewhere else. So he went where his forefathers had gone, to the land of Laban. Laban was a relative of the family.
- iv. That's one of the problems with deception. It always separates the deceiver from their victims. They can't stay in a place too long because everyone knows what kind of person they are.

- v. No one can trust them, and eventually to survive, they have to move to a new place where they can continue the con. Jacob leaves because he has worn out his welcome in his family.
  - vi. That chasm he builds between his brother and him will last most of his life. Then he meets Laban. For the first time in his life, he has an honest approach.
  - vii. He's got a thing for Laban's youngest daughter, Rachel. He makes an honest attempt to marry her by offering his muscle and services to Laban for seven years.
  - viii. There's just one problem. After seven years, Jacob marries and wakes up the next morning with Leah, the older daughter! The fox has been outfoxed.
  - ix. That's another problem with deception. Eventually, you meet a better con artist than yourself and you get to experience the pain that others have felt. The tables get turned and you find out just how unjust deception really is!
  - x. **Application:** Deception can always be used against the deceiver. A life of lies leads to being lied to. You'll always find others who are better at deception than you are, and when they come into contact with you, you'll feel like the victim, not the victor. In a way, these situations are partly their own judgment on the deceptive lifestyle.
- B. Deceit demands our world our way instead of God's way.
- i. At the heart of the issue of deception is our mistrust of God for our destiny. We seek to use our cunning, our resources, our way, to get what we want.
  - ii. Deception is a self-centered attempt at preservation. The problem is that it lulls us into a false sense of security in our own ability to control the universe and our lives.
  - iii. We will quickly find that there are things we cannot control no matter how cunning we really are. Aside from these points of control, deceit is not the method of God's Kingdom servants.
  - iv. Jacob tries one more con on Laban, even though he got burned by a better conman. This time, he uses some fuzzy animal breeding procedures to make wealth for himself in his departure from Laban.
  - v. He's going to take his wives, his kids and get out of Dodge. But, before he does, he works to make a fortune in cattle and sheep for himself. He sets up this system where he agrees to terms to take the "weaker" animals for himself.
  - vi. But when he breeds them, he attempts to make them breed a certain way so that he gets more animals than Laban, and it works beautifully. Laban's

not happy about that. But he's even less happy about Jacob's method of leaving.

- vii. Without warning or goodbyes, Jacob takes off with all his earthly possessions so Laban will not hurt him or deal with him falsely anymore. But Laban chases him down to say goodbye and, of course, to accuse him of stealing property.
- viii. **Application:** When you use deceit on a regular basis, you'll find yourself more and more on the short list of the trouble makers and people that can't be trusted. Jesus wants to make each of us a legit, trustworthy individual who represents Him, who is Truth incarnate! Don't let deceit be your method of operation! You are better than that. Jesus is making you honest!

### III. Surrendering Our Agenda

#### A. God calls us to trust in Him alone for our life.

- i. Jacob continues on this reckless trail back toward the family and history he left behind when things got heated between him and his brother, Esau. Heading back, Jacob figured that his brother was still angry, and would hurt him and his family.
- ii. So Jacob settled on a plan to make sure that if he got out of the encounter alive, he at least would have half of his stuff. He's actually quite a genius. He splits his possessions and then puts his family and most prized possessions in a safe place, and then he crosses the river to go toward Esau.
- iii. The plan involves finding out what Esau's reaction to him is. If it's bad, and Esau attacks out of anger, his most prized possessions are safe. But if Esau is not angry, he can reunite his wealth and family together.
- iv. By doing this, Jacob is ensuring that Esau's wrath won't change his destiny or his happiness. The problem is that God has other plans. While Jacob is scheming, God is preparing to teach him how to live for Him.
- v. So there is this showdown in the night as Jacob is alone. He meets an angel of the Lord in the night. And the meeting does not go well for him. Jacob realizes that it is the angel of the Lord, and he ends up in the fight of his life.
- vi. All his life Jacob has fought for every little blessing and pleasurable thing. Sometimes he has attempted to be honest, but most of the time, he just lived up to his name of Deceiver.
- vii. So the angel and him are in this tiff that lasts until dawn. Now that's quite a fight. He wrestles and wrestles, trying every tactic that usually worked, every bit of intelligence and cunning, but still, he was in the fight instead of victor.

viii. Every move he made, the angel countered. For the first time, Jacob's cons weren't even giving him any advantage at all! Jacob was running out of his own resources, and then, the angel shockingly asked him something he was totally unready for.

ix. **Application:** When we are so used to using our own resources and intelligence and cunning, we have no idea what to do when we reach the end of our abilities. That is a deep-sinking feeling of loss. We know we've met our match when we meet Jesus. He takes us to the end of ourselves so that we can be set free from a lifetime of deception, half-truths, and false ideas. Jesus wants to set you free today!

B. God calls us to give Him our whole being.

- i. At a crucial moment in the fight at dawn, the angel commands Jacob to let him go, but Jacob does not until he blesses him.. Then the angel shockingly asks, "What is your name?"
- ii. Jacob's name has dictated his whole life. All his life he's been grabbing at people's heels, trying to get ahead, using deception to make his mark. He's been leaving the wrong kind of legacy.
- iii. So when the angel asks him his name, the angel is challenging his character as a deceiver. Jacob will not even admit his name! He asks why the angel would ask this.
- iv. The angel blesses him when he recognizes that his life has been one of deceit. Finally, after a night-long battle with an angel of the Lord, Jacob experiences a change in his character.
- v. The reason we know this is that Jacob is renamed "Israel," for he struggles with God. No longer is he known as a deceiver, but his character is now wrapped up in his relationship with God.
- vi. There's a moment in our lives when we also met Jesus, and He did the same thing. He changed us from the inside out, our character and our approach. He made us children of the Kingdom of God.
- vii. Now we are different. We are no longer living in the bondage to our own resources. We now live for Jesus and He determines our destiny and out of His resources, He blesses us.
- viii. Those things we sought for are rubbish compared to what He has provided. He's making us better just by us being connected to Him and communing with Him.
- ix. **Application:** Jesus wants to take you from what you used to be to what you will be in Him. He wants to save you, not so you can go to heaven, although that will happen. He wants to save you, not so you can be better than others, or so that you can think highly of yourself, but so that you can be with Him and in His presence. Despite your former life, Jesus has a

better plan and destiny for you than you could have ever schemed on your own.

## **Conclusion**

Deceit can take you places. But it comes at great cost and you will find yourself paying for it in relationships and character development. It's not that deceit doesn't work at all, but that it makes us slaves to lies and half-truths. Jesus is the author of Truth, and He wants you to know Him today. He wants you to trust in Him rather than your own cunning and resources. He calls you today to join Him in His Kingdom for a higher purpose that you could not find on your own.

He loves you so much that He died for you, and He offers His life-changing and life-saving blessing to you today. Come to Jesus, and you will find that you can walk in honesty and truth all your days. No more trying to remember which lie you told to whom. Jesus will take the burden of living a lie away!

## **Action Points**

- Deceit may get you to your goals quickly in the short term, but there's always a terrible price to pay for using deception. It usually cuts your relationships as you wield it.
- Although deception can work for a while in your life to get what you want, eventually, you'll meet someone who's better at the con game than you, and you'll become a victim rather than a victor.
- When we surrender to Christ, we are trusting that He will work all things for our good, not in our own cunning or resources. Rather than use deceit, allow Christ to fashion your future and destiny!