

The Price of Duplicity



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 25:19–29:30.*

Memory Verse: “Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of” (*Genesis 28:15*).

Frenchman Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), sometimes deemed the philosopher of the French Revolution, argued that “there is no original sin in the human heart” and that human beings are all basically good. It was society, he said, that had corrupted humanity. If left to our own devices, to our own feelings and conscience, we would naturally do the right thing (all this from a man who, after fathering a number of children, dumped them all at an orphanage).

Of course, it's hard to think of a view more contrary to Scriptures or, really, to reality. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (*Jer. 17:9*). Or, as expressed in another context: “But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man” (*John 2:24, 25*).

This week, as we continue our family saga, we get more sad glimpses into the wickedness and deceitfulness of human hearts. Pride, passion, and selfishness reign, even (more frightfully) sometimes under the justification of seeking to do God's will.

The bright spot? Even amid all this, the Lord reveals His love, His patience, and His saving and forgiving grace for erring sinners.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 9.*

Esau and Jacob (*Gen. 25:19-34*)

Though a twin, Esau came out first and was, therefore, counted as the oldest. As such, to him were given the special promises and privileges that accompanied the covenant first made to Abraham. “With these promises Esau and Jacob were familiar. They were taught to regard the birthright as a matter of great importance, for it included not only an inheritance of worldly wealth but spiritual pre-eminence. He who received it was to be the priest of his family, and in the line of his posterity the Redeemer of the world would come. On the other hand, there were obligations resting upon the possessor of the birthright. He who should inherit its blessings must devote his life to the service of God. Like Abraham, he must be obedient to the divine requirements. In marriage, in his family relations, in public life, he must consult the will of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 177, 178.

Keeping in mind Ellen White’s insights, read the verses for today. How do her words help us understand why Esau acted as he did? What lessons are in here for us? See also *Heb. 12:14-17*.

Genesis 25:27 contrasts the two boys. It’s interesting that the Hebrew word describing Jacob is *tam*, which means “complete” or “perfect” or “morally innocent.” It’s the same word, translated in Job 1:8 as “perfect,” used to describe the character of Job. Despite this depiction, he still was willing to take advantage of his brother’s weakness in order to seek for himself the birthright. Perhaps the promise made to his mother regarding him and his brother (*vs. 23*) made him think that he had to have the birthright in order for that promise to be fulfilled. Whatever his motives, he obviously esteemed the birthright as something to be coveted.

At the same time, Esau demonstrated he was unworthy of the birthright privilege not only by bartering it away in a most flippant manner but also by reinforcing his choice through an oath (*vs. 33*) and by his unperturbed departure (*vs. 34*; see also *Gen. 26:34, 35*).

However worthy the object of his desire, Jacob tried to get it through less than honorable means. How can we protect ourselves from the same faulty reasoning that the end justifies the means?

Isaac and Abimelech (*Genesis 26*)

As in the early sojourn of Abraham, there was a famine in the land that caused Isaac to move to a new location. Perhaps because of the potential for discouragement, it was at this time that the Lord renewed with him the same covenant promises that he had made with his father, Abraham (*Gen. 26:1-5*).

Read verses 7-11. Where have we seen this before? What lesson can we draw from this account?

Sometime later Isaac's wealth increased to the point that it elicited the jealousy of the Philistines. In order to preserve peace, Isaac moved to the valley of Gerar and later moved again to Beersheba (*vss. 12-23*). This illustrates the hardship and tensions to which believers are exposed in this sin-darkened world.

What patriarchal practice did Isaac follow after the second divine revelation was accorded to him? What's the importance of this practice? What is it meant to symbolize? *Vss. 24, 25; see also Eph. 5:2, Rev. 13:8.*

Nearly a century after the treaty that Abraham had entered into with Abimelech, the ruler of Gerar, a later Abimelech, accompanied by a friend and the chief captain of his army, invited Isaac to enter into another sworn peace treaty.

Notice what Abimelech says twice to Isaac (*vss. 28, 29*). How do these words in many ways reflect what it means to be a witness to the Lord? What aspects of your life could someone look at and say, "You are now blessed of the Lord"? In what ways are you blessed of the Lord? Write a prayer thanking God for all that He has done for you.

Faithless Schemes

In Genesis 27:1-7, Isaac permitted his tastebuds to influence his heart and conscience. He determined to bestow the birthright blessing upon his older son in spite of the Lord's words at their birth (*Gen. 25:23*), Esau's deliberate disregard of the birthright (*vss. 29-34*), and his ill-disposed choice of Hittite women for wives (*Gen. 26:34, 35*).

“Rebekah divined his purpose. She was confident that it was contrary to what God had revealed as His will. Isaac was in danger of incurring the divine displeasure and of debarring his younger son from the position to which God had called him. She had in vain tried the effect of reasoning with Isaac, and she determined to resort to stratagem.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 180.

Read the rest of the story regarding this deception (*Gen. 27:8-29*). Notice carefully verse 20, particularly Jacob's answer to his father's question. Why does this show even more just how wrong this action was?

As Isaac smelled the clothes Jacob wore, his mind was carried from the present to the future. The smell of the fields suggested to him an abundance of crops and a bounty of grain and wine (*vss. 27-29, 37*). Jacob was promised ultimate dominion over the nations, a plan that was reiterated and enlarged upon by later prophets and poets of Israel. Under inspiration the prophetic eye envisaged the ultimate success and supremacy of God's people.

Read carefully the blessing bestowed by Isaac on Jacob (*vss. 28, 29*). What elements are found in the blessing? What is in there that would make him want it so badly?

There's so much in there, so much that could be used for good or for bad. Even though God bestows gifts and blessings, that doesn't automatically mean that people use them always for His glory. What kind of gifts and blessings have you received from God? How are you using them? What changes might you need to make in your use of what God has given you?

The Price of Duplicity *(Gen. 27:30-46)*

Twice now we've seen Jacob take advantage of the weakness of others in order to obtain what he wanted. What a sorry example. That he, though, should nevertheless be one of the founding patriarchs says a lot about God's grace, especially for those who truly repent of their sins. However, as the Bible shows numerous times, the forgiveness of sin doesn't automatically equate with the nullification of the consequences of sin.

What made this deception even all the more foolish was that it should have been obvious that it would be uncovered, that Esau and Isaac would eventually know what happened. Apparently, though, both mother and son were determined to get what they wanted, regardless of the cost. What an important lesson here for all of us: *Think through carefully what you are about to do!*

Perhaps the saddest thing, too, about these events (including chapter 25) is that there are no innocents. All four of the people here, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Esau were guilty of wrongdoing.

Next to each name, write down the wrong they did. What was at the heart of all these actions?

Isaac _____

Rebekah _____

Jacob _____

Esau _____

In the end, what we see here is pure selfishness, people wanting what they want for themselves, regardless of whether their actions are right or wrong. What's even more frightening is that, in some cases, they were actually acting according to what they believed were God's wishes. Yet, look at the results. Though in verse 45 she tells Jacob to flee and she'll call him back later, nothing in the Bible indicates that Rebekah was ever to see this son again.

Go over the list of sins you listed above. What drove each one—pride, greed, passion, whatever? Which of these does Satan use with greatest success in your own experience? Why is death to self at the foot of the Cross your only hope for victory in these areas? How can you better avail yourself of the power promised us in the Word (1 Cor. 10:13)?

Jacob's Ladder *(Genesis 28)*

Note the fatherly instruction and blessing with which Isaac sent Jacob to Mesopotamia (*Gen. 28:1-5*). Why should this point about marriage be so important?

After all this duplicity and deceit, Jacob flees his family. Yet, it's obvious that God is not through with him. In a dream the Lord appears to the young man and gives him some wonderful assurances and promises.

Read Genesis 28:10-15. Why do you think the Lord would promise so much to someone like Jacob? What does this tell us about grace?

Ellen White writes that, before he slept that night, Jacob “with weeping and deep humiliation” confessed his sin and asked the Lord for some evidence that he was not “utterly forsaken.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 183. The dream was, she wrote, the response to his repentance.

The dream of the ladder, of the angels ascending and descending, was a partial revelation of the plan of salvation. No matter how far sin had separated humanity from heaven, Jesus bridged the gap; He is the ladder between heaven and earth; His perfect righteousness was enough to reconcile a sinful world with a Holy God (*2 Cor. 5:18, 19*) and to justify before God all those who accept by faith what Christ has done for them (*Rom. 3:28-30, Rom. 4:5, Gal. 3:24*).

Thus, many years before the Cross, we are shown the close connection between heaven and earth; we are shown that we are not forsaken, that we are not alone, and that God is intimately involved in what happens here.

Without revelation, we could have cause for such despair: mortal beings living on a tiny planet in a cold, vast universe that, in and of itself, doesn't seem to care at all about us. Revelation, however, tells us differently; revelation gives us a new way of interpreting events in our world. How, in your own walk with the Lord, have you experienced the closeness of heaven to earth? How has God shown you, personally, that He is close? Be prepared to share your answers with the class on Sabbath.

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 177–189; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, comments on Genesis 25:19–29:30.

“Jacob and Rebekah succeeded in their purpose, but they gained only trouble and sorrow by their deception. God had declared that Jacob should receive the birthright, and His word would have been fulfilled in His own time had they waited in faith for Him to work for them. But like many who now profess to be children of God, they were unwilling to leave the matter in His hands.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 180.

“In this vision the plan of redemption was presented to Jacob, not fully, but in such parts as were essential to him at that time. The mystic ladder revealed to him in his dream was the same to which Christ referred in His conversation with Nathanael. Said He, ‘Ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.’ John 1:51. Up to the time of man’s rebellion against the government of God, there had been free communion between God and man. But the sin of Adam and Eve separated earth from heaven, so that man could not have communion with his Maker. Yet the world was not left in solitary hopelessness. The ladder represents Jesus, the appointed medium of communication. Had He not with His own merits bridged the gulf that sin had made, the ministering angels could have held no communion with fallen man. Christ connects man in his weakness and helplessness with the source of infinite power.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 184.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, discuss your answers to the question at the end of Thursday’s lesson.
- ❷ What makes us think that in order to do God’s will, we can use means that go against what God teaches? Why is it so easy to fall into that trap? What other examples do we have, either from the Bible or elsewhere, of this happening? How might we, either as individuals or as a church, be tempted to do the same thing?

The Disobedient Son

by JOSEPH AMULE JOHN

I grew up in a nominal Christian family in southern Sudan. Then when I was a teenager, my brother and I met a neighbor who was an Adventist. He invited us to study the Bible with him. When I told our mother what we planned to do, she warned us to stay away from him and not to listen to his religious heresy. She refused to talk about anything this man said, and she told us not to talk to this neighbor again.

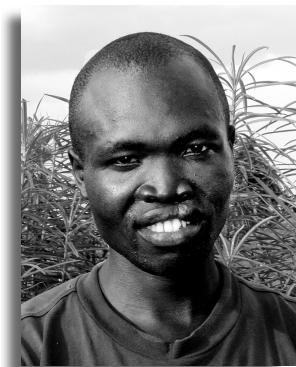
But I still had questions. So I sneaked to the pastor's house to learn more about God's Word. He gave me a Bible, and we talked for a long time about what the Bible teaches. I decided to follow Christ and become an Adventist.

There was no Adventist church where we live, and the pastor did not live in our area all the time. So when he was gone, I kept the Sabbath as much as I knew how on Saturday, and I worshiped with other Christians on Sunday. Then a lay pastor came to work in our area, and I started studying with him. When the pastor returned and held evangelistic meetings, I attended.

During the meetings I had a dream that a man tossed away a new cigarette. I picked it up to smoke it, but it turned into a snake. I smoked at this time, and I understood that I had to stop smoking or it would bite me and kill me, even as a snake would. I threw away my cigarettes and never smoked again.

I continued studying with the pastor, and after several months I decided to be baptized. I was old enough at this time to make this decision, even if my mother objected. I just wish that there had been a church in my village sooner. If there had been one, I would have become an Adventist far earlier. But we had no one to teach us and no church to attend until last year.

I am grateful for everyone who gave mission offerings to send us a pastor and a lay pastor. Without them, I still would be in spiritual darkness.



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