

A house divided...

Lessons for our mothers from the life of Rebekah *Genesis 27:1-13*

The Bible does not record much about Rebekah's life; Genesis chapters twenty-four and twenty-seven are the only two places where Rebekah has any significant presence in the narrative. But the narrative in Genesis chapter twenty-seven proves to be even more curious than the relatively little presence Rebekah has within the Bible because it presents her as a deceptive and manipulative mother. Let's therefore consider Rebekah's story in Genesis chapter twenty-seven and use it to offer some lessons for our mothers today.

Rebekah's divided house

Genesis chapter twenty-seven begins near the end of Isaac's life when, sensing his impending death, he summoned his oldest son Esau to receive his blessing (*Genesis 27:1-4*). Because he was Isaac's first-born son, Esau had the right to two special privileges - a double portion of his father's estate and a special blessing (cf. *Deuteronomy 21:17*). While both items indicated the significance of the first-born's role and the responsibilities that attend it, the blessing held special importance because it worked to ensure the material success of the family, the growth of the family, and the control of the family (*Genesis 27:27-29, 37*).

Isaac's wife Rebekah overheard Isaac's conversation with Esau and ordered their other son Jacob to deceive his father in an effort to receive his brother's blessing for himself (*Genesis 27:5-10*). A couple of factors doubtlessly motivated her deception. First, while her twin sons were still in her womb, God had promised Rebekah that the younger son would rule the older son (*Genesis 25:21-26*). Although that promise most likely played a factor in Rebekah's deception, the narrative clearly notes a second motivating factor - she played favorites with her sons, loving Jacob more than Esau (*Genesis 25:28*).

Rebekah motivated Jacob by exploitation a flaw in his character and offers a more troubling feature in the story than her deception of Isaac. Jacob showed himself to be an opportunistic individual willing to take advantage of others for his personal gain when he took advantage of his brother's hunger to take his birthright (*Genesis 25:27-34; 27:36*). But rather than work to correct Jacob's failing, Rebekah encouraged it by seducing him to deceive Isaac (*Genesis 27:5-17*).

Rebekah's actions resulted in the division of her family. Esau, who had earlier foolishly traded his right to the double portion of the inheritance to Jacob for a bowl of stew (*Genesis 25:29-34; 27:30-38*), now lost his second right as first-

born. While he lost his inheritance because of own selfish shortsightedness, he lost his blessing through the deception of his mother and brother. Esau, enraged over the fraud, vowed to kill Jacob, forcing him to flee from his home and producing a rift that would not be healed for more than forty years (*Genesis 27:41-45; 33:1-11*). Rebekah's favoritism, and the plot it produced, also aggravated Esau's flaws, motivating him to intentionally aggravate his parents (*Genesis 26:34; 27:46; 28:6-9*).

Applications to our mothers

- Even though this point seems so obvious that we need to mention it, it is important for mothers to remember that they have tremendous impact on their families.
- Consider the following illustrations about that influence drawn from Rebekah's story.
 - Rebekah's favoritism between her sons contributed significantly to the deterioration of Jacob and Esau's relationship (*Genesis 25:28; 27:30-41*), reminding us that a mother must never play favorites with her children.
 - Rebekah's actions echoed in Jacob's life and reinforces two important truths for mothers:
 - Children largely learn how to act by observing their parents.
 - The favoritism that Jacob received from Rebekah manifested itself in his relationship with his own children (*Genesis 27:5-17; 31:22-32; 33:12-17*).
 - By directing Jacob to deceive his father, Rebekah encouraged Jacob's character flaws (*Genesis 27:5-17; 25:27-34; 31:25-28; 33:12-17*).
 - Rebekah's role in Jacob's deception also contributed to Esau's corruption (*Genesis 27:41; 28:6-9*).
 - A mother's character holds an invaluable place.
 - They should be known as godly women whose good life motivates their families to praise her (*1 Peter 3:1-4*).
 - Proverbs chapter thirty-one pictures that character in action and offers a strong contrast to Rebekah's example by emphasizing things like:
 - Hard-work for the benefit of the family (*31:13-19, 27*)
 - Concern for the needy (*Proverbs 31:20*).
 - Kind and wise teaching (*Proverbs 31:26*).

Mothers obviously hold very important places within our lives. Rebekah's story in Genesis twenty-seven reminds us that their legacy will only be positive when they prove to be people of godly character. Let me therefore encourage our mothers to examine the character you demonstrate within your families and let me motivate the families of our mothers to think about what you do to support and encourage the godly character of our mothers.