

Moshe Reiss

Esau, Son of Isaac and Grandson of Abraham: The Model of a Faithful Son

Abstract

The story of Esau and Jacob, the two powerful sons of Isaac and Rebekah is one of the several conflicting families noted in the book of Genesis. Jacob, whose other name is Israel, is the father of the twelve tribes and thus the founder of the Jewish people. Rebekah may be the most powerful of the matriarchs; the one God talks to directly about her role in the covenant. The reconciliation of the brothers is one of the more powerful descriptions in the Bible.

Key Words: Esau, Jacob, Rebekah, Isaac, reconciliation, scripture interpretation

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Introduction

After twenty years of barrenness, suddenly Rebekah becomes pregnant. It was a difficult pregnancy. She seeks after God for an explanation of what she considered her excessive suffering. She asks in Hebrew “*lamah zeb anochi*” “Why me?” or “Who am I?” or perhaps “Why am I?” (Gen. 25:22).¹ This is a surprising question in view of the assumed happiness of finally conceiving after twenty years of barrenness.

God informs Rebekah “two nations are in your womb, two separate peoples shall issue from your body. One people shall be mightier than the other, and the older shall serve the younger” (Gen. 25:23). The younger will subdue the older. This is a prediction of two forms of nations, comparable perhaps to Abraham’s two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. It is not explicitly stated whether Rebekah shared this revelation with her husband Isaac, however from the remainder of the story it is apparent that she did not.

Rebekah had already received Abraham’s blessing (from her own family) to have descendants by the “thousands and tens of thousands . . . to gain possession of the gates of their enemies” (24:60). That is a repetition of the blessing given by God to Abraham at the end of the *akeda*. “Your descendants will gain possession of the gates of their enemies” (22:17). Thus, Rebekah is called a “*na’ar*” (a masculine form) four times when she is introduced (24:16,28,55,57) and not called using the feminine form “*na’ar’ah*,” and she is asked her opinion about the marriage (24:58). She gets the mission to carry the blessing, not her husband Isaac. That is particularly surprising in a patriarchal society.

The Twins

The children were fraternal twins and we quickly learn that Esau appears to have his mother’s aggressive personality, whereas Jacob tends to be like his father. Isaac, the passive patriarch (who literally did little more in his lifetime than follow in his father’s footsteps), prefers his aggressive outgoing son Esau, the son he was unable to be. Rebekah prefers her passive son, perhaps one she can mold from a tabula rasa into *her* image of a son. Jacob stays at home, in Rebekah’s tent. He would be different from his father, part-blinded and traumatized from his *akedab* (binding – his near sacrifice). Jacob learns from her to deal with the world by means of guile and manipulation, while she may be over-protecting her weaker child.

Esau, the first of the twins was born impressively mature and fully developed with a red hairy body - hence they called him Esau (from *se'ar* -hairy). His body was so distinguished that 'they' - Rebekah and Isaac - called him Esau. The second born was called by "him" - presumably Isaac - 'Ya'acov' - Jacob, because Isaac noticed that the younger child held onto his older brother's heel (from *akev* - heel), struggling to be the first born. Jacob, we are told is smooth skinned (27:11), and less developed than his brother.² He is the weaker of the two children and perhaps for that reason, among others, his mother protects and loves him. We are also told he was '*tam*', which means in Hebrew both "complete" or "simple" or perhaps "mild." Jacob is actively attempting to supplant his brother. He is smooth skinned and perhaps slippery like one attempting to slip past his brother.

Did Rebekah believe that Esau was the cause of her difficult birth? Perhaps she believed that it was the stronger more robust and developed child who kicked in the womb causing her pain. Jacob was a more passive child, easier to handle and perhaps to nurse. Both parents realized the stark contrast between the children at birth. Did Esau's more developed body make it difficult for Rebekah to bond with him, while at the same time making it easier for passive Isaac to bond with him? Did Esau suffer a fate similar to Ishmael, the son rejected by Sarah but not by Abraham? Did Jacob appear to his mother to bear a resemblance to Isaac, the near sacrificed son? Did Esau remind Isaac of Ishmael, the non-traumatized son, the older brother exiled for incomprehensible reasons (perhaps to both Ishmael and Isaac). Did his mother reject Esau, as Sarah rejected Ishmael? Rebekah also believed staunchly in her vision, which gave her the mission to choose the son who was entitled to get the blessing.

As Esau grew into an outdoorsman - a skilled hunter, not unlike his Uncle Ishmael, (and his nephew Joseph blessed by his father to be a warrior - 49:24) he was the embodiment of a masculine man - one who goes out to dominate nature, to be in control. Esau was born with an aggressive personality. Jacob was as a "mild man of the tents," however by grasping on to his brother's heel he invested much of his life striving to be like his aggressive brother. Esau, on the other hand, with his personality was content to be as he was created.

Isaac, the passive patriarch thus gravitates naturally toward Esau and openly displays his preference for him. He finds his aggressive masculine value system attractive and comforting. Isaac can be viewed as the embodiment of passivity, even at critical moments, such as when his

father Abraham was about to sacrifice him. Isaac had a powerful father and eventually two powerful sons. He recognized Esau's masculine personality and perhaps preferred a value system different from his own. Esau is a man's man. How can one imagine life for Esau, the outgoing aggressive personality growing up with a quasi-autistic father? Esau may have been a highly active, in all likelihood a "troublemaker" as a child, but somehow restrained when with his father. How did Isaac's demeanor affect both his children? Was he able to inspire them, to discipline them, to command their respect?

Jacob, although passive in temperament, thrives on his mother's active disposition. Did Rebekah favor Jacob for his passivity? Did Rebekah "adopt" Jacob by choice and leave Esau for Isaac? Conversely, did Isaac "adopt" Esau and leave Jacob for Rebekah? Did Esau seem like a "*iikkun*" - to Isaac - an opportunity for a corrective experience to rewrite his own history - the passivity he exhibited at the *akedah*? We have no reason to believe that Isaac did not love Jacob, nor that Rebekah did not love Esau. Each simply preferred the one personality most in contrast to their own personality. How did Esau react to his mother's personality and her preference for Jacob? How did Jacob react to his father's personality and his preference for Esau? Rebekah was shrewd, manipulative, and convinced of her mission from God. Nothing could restrain her.

Esau, a classic parental child in a dysfunctional family protects his passive father, recognizes his father's limitations and devotes his life to care-taking of both his physical and emotional needs. One can imagine Esau, an outdoorsman having to overcome his natural proclivities in order to tend for his father. Jacob lives in his mother's tent; Isaac appears to no longer live in the same tent as his wife. Esau being separated from his mother lives with his father and is more available to meet his needs. It seems plausible that Esau reminds his father of his own lost older brother - Ishmael. Isaac loves fresh wild meat, so Esau hunts and brings it home, and even cooks it for his father. His brother Jacob, whose role is to cook for the family, prefers vegetarian dishes - not what his father desires. One day, Esau had a particularly frustrating day hunting - it is perhaps during a very hot *khamisin* (hot desert wind). He comes home famished and thirsty, nearly dehydrated, to the kitchen and sees Jacob cooking a red lentil dish - hardly to Esau's liking - but he is on the verge of expiration and asks, does not demand, food from his brother. Jacob, the articulate man of culture makes a trade with his more boorish brother who has called the lentil soup

“this red stuff.” Jacob unabashedly formulates a deal. The text is clear, Jacob demanded an oath from his brother to sell him the birthright. “First give me your birthright in exchange” (25:31). Jacob takes advantage of his weakened brother. Esau, oblivious to anything but his hunger and possible dehydration says, “Here I am at death’s door, what use is a birthright to me?” (25:32). Esau “ate, drank, got up and went away” (25:34), no doubt totally disgusted with his brother. Jacob, presumably unaware of his mother’s divine mission, is fearful of his brother but wants to best him. Where has Jacob learned this competitive behavior? This issue will come up again when Jacob obtains his father’s blessing through stealth. Jacob had obviously been trained by his mother.

The Deception

When Isaac “had grown old,” (27:1) he called Esau and said to him “take your weapons, your quiver and bow; go out into the country and hunt me some game. Make me the kind of appetizing dish I like and bring it to me to eat and I shall bless you from my soul before I die” (27:3-4). Rebekah overhears Isaac’s conversation. She convinces Jacob to deceive his father, her husband the almost blind patriarch, and to steal the blessing from him. Jacob is fearful of engaging in deceit towards his father, but his mother allays his fears by assuming total responsibility for the theft and deception “On me be the curse, my son, just listen to me” (27:13). Perhaps Jacob pondered whether a blessing stolen remains a valid blessing.³ Do we support “situational ethics”, the idea that under certain conditions we may justifiably lie? That lying is a sin is clear from the Bible, (Ex, 20:12, 23:7, Lev. 19:11).⁴

Rebekah devised a plan to ensure Jacob’s receipt of the blessing. She dressed Jacob in Esau’s clothing and in the skin of a lamb. Isaac caught the scent and uttered “come closer, my son, so I might feel you” (27:22), which is precisely what Jacob feared (27:12). Did Isaac suspect his wife and younger son might attempt to deceive him? When the blind Isaac asked Jacob to identify himself, Jacob responded deceitfully “I am Esau your first born . . . [Isaac responds] are you really Esau?” (27:19). Jacob arrived too quickly for hunting and cooking and Isaac asked, “How did you succeed so quickly? He said ‘YHVH made things go well for me’” (27:20). Jacob blatantly lied to his father using God’s name as a witness. His mother engineered the entire plan, slaughtered, and cooked the goat. It was not God. Isaac senses something is amiss and utters his suspicion “the voice

is Jacob's voice but the arms are the arms of Esau" (27:23). Isaac did not trust his ears when he heard the voice of Jacob, nor his intuition. He could never trust himself after the deception brought on him by his father.

The deception is executed, the crime pays, and the theft is successful. The blessing is not addressed by name to either son, yet it is clearly meant for Esau. However, the blessing intended for Esau goes to Jacob. "[T]he smell of my son is like the smell of a fertile field" (27:27). Who smells like a "fertile field," Jacob or Esau? Jacob is concerned that his father will smell him and recognize Jacob's smell. Esau clearly meets this description. "May God give you dew from heaven, and the richness of the earth, abundance of grain and wine" (27:28). Who lives under the heaven and subdued the "richness of the earth" - Jacob or Esau? "Let people serve you and the nations bow low before you" (27:29). Who is the hunter who subdued the "richness of the earth"? Moreover, who subdued other people, but a hunter? In addition, who is the hunter? - Esau. And whom "will people serve ... and nations bow low" to? The crux of the blessing is "be master of your brothers; let your mother's other sons bow low before you" (27:29). This blessing is, almost precisely, what Rebekah had been told, "One nation will have the mastery over the other, and the elder will serve the younger" (25:23). "Curse be those that curse you and blessed be those that bless you" (27:29). Given the history of Jacob and his family and Esau and his family, one can ask who in fact received the curse and who received the blessing?

Esau dutifully returns with the meal he prepared at his father request. Isaac realized that "your brother came with guile, and has taken away your blessing" (27:35). "Have you but one blessing, my father" Esau wept. He instantaneously changed from the son of who it is sometimes claimed needed immediate gratification to one with a need for a future. However, it was too late, his brother and his mother had stolen the blessing. It is hard not to sympathize with Esau and Isaac for the harm inflicted on them. Isaac nevertheless proceeds to bless Esau.

The first part of the blessing is almost the same "Behold of the fatness of the earth shall you dwell and with the dew of heaven" (27:39). Jacob received the "dew of heaven" first and then the "fatness of the earth," for Esau the order is reversed; Esau receives first the "fatness of earth" and then "the dew of heaven." Presumably, Jacob is blessed first with the spirituality of heaven and then the materialism of the earth, for Esau it is the reverse. However, both receive both blessings. Even the

blessing Rebekah received that “One nation will have mastery of the other” is only short term. Isaac blessed Esau “to live the life of the sword but to serve his brother. But when you win your freedom, you will break his yoke from off your neck” (27:40). Thus, whatever the original plan envisioned in Rebekah’s vision, the blessing was divided. In Jewish tradition, Jacob prefigured the conflict between the Jewish people and Rome, as the expulsion of Ishmael prefigured the conflict between the Jewish people and Islam.

However, the Hebrew text is not as clear as usually assumed. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the recently retired Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth states as follows,

The words *ve-rav yaavod tsair* seem simple: “the older will serve the younger.” Returning to them in the light of subsequent events, though, we discover that they are anything but clear. They contain multiple ambiguities. The first (noted by Radak [David Kaspi – 1160-1235, Provence, France] and R. Yosef ibn Kaspi [1279-1340, Provence, France]) is that the word “*et*,” signaling the object of the verb, is missing. Normally in biblical Hebrew the subject precedes, and the object follows, the verb, but not always... Thus the phrase might mean “the older shall serve the younger” but it might also mean “the younger shall serve the older.” To be sure, the latter would be poetic Hebrew rather than conventional prose style, but that is what this utterance is: a poem.

The second is that *rav* and *tsa’ir* are not opposites, a fact disguised by the English translation of *rav* as “older.” The opposite of *tsa’ir* (“younger”) is *bechir* (“older” or “firstborn”). *Rav* does not mean “older.” It means “great” or possibly “chief.” This linking together of two terms as if they were polar opposites, which they are not – the opposites would have been *bechir/tsa’ir* or *rav/me’at* – further destabilises the meaning. Who was the *rav*? The elder? The leader? The chief? The more numerous? The word might mean any of these things.

The third – not part of the text but of later tradition – is the musical notation. The normal way of notating these three words would be *mercha-tipcha-sof pasuk*. This would support the reading, “the older shall serve the younger.” In fact, however, they are notated *tipcha-mercha-sof pasuk* – suggesting, “the older, shall the younger serve”; in other words, “the younger shall serve the older.” (C&C Toldot 2007).⁵

Jacob was rather easily convinced by his mother to participate in this fraud. He accepts her response in advance of the deed; that she will assume responsibility for the deception. His mild personality allows him to accept the rules of the world, at least his mother's rules. At this point in his life, he lacks the assertiveness and the ego strength of his mother, his brother, or his grandfather Abraham. He does not rebel nor display any anger. Is he programmed by his mother to acquiesce? Does he also seek his father's approbation? Every son needs his father's love (and his mother's). By saying, "I am Esau your firstborn" and feeding his father could he believe his father loved him?

Esau plots to kill Jacob for this deception and said to himself after my father dies I will kill him. It is noteworthy that respecting his father precedes even his acting out on his rage. Even in his rightful anger, he will not disturb his father's peace, a remarkable sense of honor. However, Rebekah understands, despite Esau's comment being an interior monologue, what an aggressive personality would do, and perhaps she would do the same. She sends Jacob away, to her brother from whom he will further learn guile, manipulation, and deceit. She tells Jacob to stay for a while (27:44). How long did she expect this forced separation to last? Did she really think Jacob would be back in a few days or weeks? Can she foresee that she would never see him again? Does Jacob wonder about his mother's claim to take responsibility for the consequences of the deceit? Does he really believe that in a few days or weeks Esau will relent in his thought of killing Jacob? Esau hears his father telling Jacob "do not choose a wife from the Canaanite women." Despite all of the pain his parents caused him, he goes to Uncle Ishmael and marries one of his daughters, a granddaughter of Abraham. What an extraordinary loving son to his father.

Reconciliation After More Than Twenty Years

Longing to return home after two decades, Jacob dispatches Esau a message offering to meet, informing him of his riches and sending servants to offer a large gift, perhaps to appease for the theft. Esau decides to meet his brother and travels a great distance. Jacob offered his brother "200 she-goats, 20 he-goats, 200 ewes, 20 rams, 20 camels rich in milk and their calves, 40 cows, 10 bulls, 20 female donkeys and 10 male donkeys" - a veritable fortune - a gift begging forgiveness - an admission of guilt. "I will

atone in his face, with the presents going before my face, and afterwards I will see his face, perhaps he will raise my face” (32:21).⁶

Jacob crossed the River Jabbok, a word play on his name Jacob, with his family. Jacob then returned across the river to be alone. On the banks of the river Jabbok – his Rubicon - he wrestles with a “man/angel” all night (32:25). The man/angel cannot break away and escape from Jacob. Where does Jacob get the power and strength to fight all night? Does he have Esau’s power? However, the man/angel damaged the sinew of his hip and Jacob limped for the remainder of his life. As dawn breaks the “man/angel said ‘let me go, for dawn is breaking’, but Jacob answered ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me’”(32:25-27); he understood that the man had special authority. What does it mean that the man/angel needs to go “for the dawn is breaking”? Jacob stole the blessing of Power from his blind father who was in the darkness all the time. Does he now wish to get a blessing honestly? Can the man/angel be fearful of light?

One set of Jewish Midrashim (plural for Midrash)⁷ tells us the “man/angel” represents Esau. The idea of personal combat with a divine being is a very unusual event in the Bible. The only other event is when God seems to want to kill Moses right after giving him his life-long mission (Ex. 4:24-26). This entire conflict between Jacob and his brother Esau can only take place at night. Jacob needs a blessing of forgiveness from Esau. The Hebrew word *‘vayeyaveyk’* is usually translated as “wrestling,” but also means in traditional commentaries “to embrace, an intimate conflict.” Another set of Midrashim claim it was Jacob’s own angel confronting him. As a youth, he was dominated by his mother and the last twenty years by his father-in-law, who was his mother’s brother. His grandfather Abraham, whose blessing he carries, was a monumental man of faith. His father is the equivalent of a holocaust survivor, who preferred his brother Esau. Where does that leave Jacob? Who is he? Am I worthy of this blessing I deceived my father to receive? Did it indeed rightfully belong to my brother? The struggle with the angel seems to indicate a struggle for self-identification.

The “man/angel” demands of Jacob, “what is your name?” Since he knows whom he is fighting, is he really asking Jacob who do you think you are? He does not allow Jacob to answer but continues “Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel since you have striven with god and men and have prevailed” (32:29). His name Jacob represents his living in the tent of his mother. Israel can be translated as “God-fighter.” Is his name comparable to his brother? Another version is that Jacob means “crooked”

as he has acted most of his life; while Israel from “*sarita*” (in Hebrew) can mean “straight”; only if he is straight can he reconcile with Esau. Jacob is thus informed that he has achieved his life-long objective. He has attained the power he had always sought. Jacob, in turn inquires of the man/angel his name, a reversal of the “man/angel’s” question. The “man/angel” offers a blessing (32:29-30) as Jacob had earlier requested. However, the blessing is not stated. Is it Esau’s forgiveness of his stealing their father’s blessing? Alternatively, is it the blessing of Abraham, deceptively stolen from Isaac? Does Jacob now get a blessing that he may be entitled to as opposed to the one he stole from his father?

Jacob then calls the place “*Peniel*” “because I have seen the face of God face to face” (32:31). Jacob later tells us he saw God’s face in Esau (33:10). The next verse says, “as the new day dawned Jacob left ‘*Penuel*’ and limped on his thigh.” What is the difference between “*Peniel*” and “*Penuel*”? (The correct term for “the face of God” would be “*Pna-el*’.) “*peni*” is the singular (feminine) of face, and “*peni*” is the plural – faces. The plural may be that Jacob/Israel recognizes that he and Esau are intricately connected and are the shadows of each other. Moreover, his double name represents that he recognized and joined his shadow.⁸

As Jacob approaches his brother, he bows seven times to the ground, until he reached his brother. When Esau saw Jacob, he ran “to meet him, took him in his arms, threw himself on his neck and wept as he kissed him” (33:4). Esau was overcome with emotions at seeing his brother Jacob. The servants and their children bowed low and then Leah and her children bowed low, and finally Rachel and Joseph bowed low before Esau. Esau was baffled by all the gifts and asked what they were? Jacob responded, “To win my Lords favor.” Esau responds to his brother “I have more than enough, my brother. Let what you have remain yours” (33:8-9). Jacob bows down to Esau seven times. Seven times Jacob calls Esau “my lord.” Five times Jacob refers to himself as “your servant.” The roles seem to have been reversed. Esau does not become the servant of Jacob. Instead, Jacob speaks of himself as the servant of Esau.

Esau responded by forgiving his brother. Jacob, whose emotions included the expectation of violence at his brother’s hand, is amazed that his brother can forgive him. He views this forgiveness as almost god-like, “forasmuch as I have seen your face, as one sees the face of God, and you were pleased with me” (Gen. 33:10). Esau who had “more than enough” (33:9) forgave Jacob who now had “everything” (33:11). Jacob who had

previously described the numerous animals he had intended to give his brother as a “*minkhati*” (33:10) a gift, now offers his brother his “*birkehati*”, (33:11) a word that means both “birthright” and “blessing”.

Both Esau and Jacob lives can now begin anew. We know much about Jacob’s life but almost nothing about Esau’s from the time of the stolen blessing. Esau’s personal growth and development must have been extraordinary. What was it that enabled Esau to gracefully forgive Jacob? What has effected this transformation from a man earlier described as a boor to becoming such a gentleman? One wishes one could understand how this man, loving and caring for his ill father, hating his brother for stealing his birthright and his blessing, managed to achieve that extraordinary psychological growth. It seems from the text that Esau has forgotten about Jacob and gotten on with his life. Jacob, however, never forgot his desire to be Esau. Esau is the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham, whose God is image-less, but Jacob can see him at Jabbok and in his brother’s face.

The brothers understand that they both have achieved their goals; both have been blessed by God and no longer need to resent each other. They are reconciled to each other. Jacob has been motivated predominately by quiet careful thought throughout this entire episode out of the guilt he felt. His actions are consistent with his life of calculation and manipulation. Esau’s actions are consistent with his prior behavior. He is open, emotional, nonjudgmental, and short sighted. He sells his birthright, cries at the lost blessing, vows to kill his brother, and ends up kissing him. He acted chivalrously, generously, and with forgiveness toward his brother.

Conclusion

Had Rebekah shared with Isaac her vision from God, that the blessing was to go to Jacob, their relationship might have been totally different. The vision did not require a single process to accomplish the end objective. Rebekah chose the process and it was a process of aggressive manipulation, of deceiving her husband and one of her sons at the expense of the other. Abraham was still alive during the twins early childhood and he was the origin of the blessing. It was him to whom God gave the promise. Why did she not go to Abraham and consult with him as to how to raise the twins? He had two children, only one of whom could get the covenantal blessing, but both received a blessing. Isaac and Rebekah could have developed a strategy to teach their children the different roles each

was to play. One (Esau) was the man of physical strength and one (Jacob) was destined to be the man of faith. Why not go to the original man of faith, Abraham, and discuss how to develop a strategy for both children?

In the Book of Jubilees⁹ Rebekah is the model matriarch.¹⁰ Rebekah does go to Abraham and he confirms that Jacob is the righteous son (Jub. 19:17-21). John Endres considered that “in Jubilees Rebekah’s status was highly elevated, far beyond any reasonable expectations.” One of the reasons he suggests was “the possibility of re-defining spousal relationships and responsibilities.”¹¹ Halpern-Amaru believes that Rebekah “provides the biblical portrait of . . . a skeletal archetype for the facilitator role of all the matriarchs.” The Genesis version hints this in less obvious, but clear ways. Her revelation suggests the younger will be stronger, but she understands this strength is spiritual not material. Isaac seems unaware of Jacob’s future. She is so convinced as to deceive her husband as to who will receive the blessing. Nothing in Genesis explicitly explains her knowledge, motivation, or actions as they enhance covenantal history.¹²

Two nineteenth century commentators have recognized the deception of Rebekah. They suggest that Isaac and Rebekah did indeed discuss the situation, but disagreed on the appropriate strategy. Rabbi Meir Lebusch Malbim (1809-1880)¹³ and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1800-1900)¹⁴ both suggest that Isaac wanted to separate the blessing. He felt that Jacob had the ability to lead spiritually, while Esau had the ability to lead the material/warrior world and both could have formed a partnership. Rebekah disagreed. She was convinced that the blessing had to be bestowed to one son and Jacob was the sole choice.

Esau eventually forgave Jacob for his deception, yet the use of family rivalry and enmity that he learned from his mother continued with Jacob’s own children. They would have conflict and the older brothers would consider killing Joseph. Jacob then adopted his father’s original plan and divided the blessing. Jacob later gave the spiritual blessing to Judah and the material/warrior blessing to Joseph and various parts of the blessing to his other children.

One can argue that Rebekah, who suggested Jacob go away for a “few days” (Gen. 27:44) never sees Jacob again, nor is she ever mentioned in the text again. Her death is not noted perhaps because she deceived her husband and older son. Jacob is punished by marrying the wrong wife – Leah - before he marries his beloved Rachel. The Midrash “justified” it by his deceiving his father.¹⁵ Others have seen Jacob being in exile from his

parents for twenty years as being comparable with his losing his son Joseph for twenty-two years.

Rabbi Shimon ben Gamaliel (a prominent first century Talmudic Rabbi) said no one ever honored his father as did Esau.¹⁶ Esau honored his father (Ex. 20:12), while Jacob feared his father (Lev. 19:3). The alleged author of the Zohar (the most important book of Jewish mysticism, written in the thirteenth century), states that redemption can only come if Esau's tears are dried.¹⁷ The Rabbis of the Zohar recognize Jacob's deception and the Jewish tradition, which continues to see Esau as evil, may have been wrong. Both Rabbis were reading the literal meaning of the tale rather than commenting on the text. Some of these transposed Esau as Rome/Christianity and thus a Jewish enemy; of course, that was not true of the original son of Isaac.¹⁸ Of the patriarchs, Jacob has the most troubled and difficult life (47:9). His greatness comes when he faces his fears straight on. It is at those times he rises to become Jacob, who struggles with man and God – and reconciled with Esau. Whether his sons ever reconciled with each other is also problematic.

Endnotes

¹ Avivah Gottlieb Zorenberg, lecture on November 24, 1997; author of *Genesis, The Beginning of Desire*, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1995 and *The Particulars of Rapture, Reflections on Exodus*, Doubleday, N.Y., 2001) among others.

² Who was the elder? Moreover, what does this imply in the case of Esau and Jacob? Rashi (Rabbi Solomon Isaac – 1040-1105, is the classical commentator of the Hebrew Bible and Talmud, northern France) see Rashi on Gen. 25: 26 suggesting that Jacob was in fact the elder.

³ P. Barnes, "Was Rahab's Lie a Sin?" *RTR* 54 (1995), and B. Thompson and S. Estabrook, "Rahab's Lie and Situation Ethics" *Reason and Revelation*, 19 (1999), pp. 81-84.

⁴ The debate also involves Rahab lying about the spies (Josh. 2:3-23) see also Heb.11:31 and James 2:25. Many Jewish commentators including Rashi deny that Jacob lied directly, but Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089-1167, Cordoba, Spain, a man of letters and writer of philosophy, astronomy, poetry and linguistics; his knowledge of Arabic allowed him to read the Greek and Latin commentaries translated into Arabic) and Maimonides (1135-1204, similarly a man of letters and physician, of Cordoba, Spain

and Cairo Egypt, who wrote the first book of Jewish law *Mishna Torah* and a book of philosophy commenting on Aristotle, in Arabic *The Guide for the Perplexed*) accept that prophets can lie. Many exegetes recognize that Jacob was punished by marrying Leah whom he hated. Some Jewish commentators also believe his sons' lying to him about Joseph dying was another punishment he suffered. That lying is a sin is clear (Ex. 20:12, 23:7 and Lev.19:11), although all these seem to be in a court of law. (In addition to 'bearing false witness' – verse 12 above –, lying in God's name is mentioned separately in the Ten commandments in Ex. 20:6). Thus, one could argue lying is noted twice in the Ten Commandments.

Marc Shapiro, Weinberg Professor of Judaic Studies - the University of Scranton, stated that lying for a greater good is an old Talmudic tradition (Babylonian Talmud Yehamoth 65b, Ketuboth 16b-17a, Baba Metzia 23b-24a and Nedarim 27b – the Babylonian Talmud was written in the third – fifth century in the common era) continuing into almost modern times; in a talk at Yarnton's Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies on April 29, 2013. He noted that preserving peace, where more harm would be come from the truth than lying, and in intimate matters and modesty are acceptable reasons. Less acceptable he noted is false attribution, noted in the Talmud as well as in medieval texts and up to modern times. Others have noted the business and ethical aspect of the problem; Shapiro's talk noted the theological aspects of the problem.

⁵ Jonathan Sacks, "Toldot (Genesis 25:19-28:9) Between Prophecy and Oracle," November 11, 2012, retrieved online from: <http://www.aish.com/tp/i/sacks/178620051.html>.

⁶ Author's translation. As we shall see, the face 'פנאי' keeps repeating itself in this short text. Perhaps he comes 'face to face' with himself. Years later, after years of mourning for his lost son - Joseph, Jacob is again revived by a face. He sees Joseph and says, 'I will die now, after I have seen your face for you are still alive' (Genesis 36:30).

⁷ H. Freedman and M. Simon, eds. *Midrash Rabbah*, 10 vols. (London: Soncino, 1939-1951), Vol. II, 68:17. There are many Midrash collections. The best known may be *Midrash Rabbah*, which is a commentary on the Torah and the five scrolls (Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther). There are, however, many other collections, such as *Pesikta Rabbati*, *Pesikta de Rab Kabanah*, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, and so forth. Midrash is a product of the rabbis who flourished from c. 200-500 CE, but collections may have been added to and compiled centuries after that time ("Midrash is a type of literature, oral or written, which has its starting point in a fixed canonical text, considered the revealed word of God by the midrashist and his audience, and in which this original verse is explicitly cited or clearly alluded to." Gary G. Porton, "Midrash," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, David Noel Freedman, Ed., New York: Doubleday, 1992, IV.819. Midrash means "to study, to search, to investigate, to go in quest of and to give account for what is written" (Gerald Bruns, "The Hermeneutics of Midrash," in Regina Schwartz, Ed., *The Book and the Text* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 190.) Since the "Bible is a laconic, elliptical, and at times ambiguous text; thus it is open to a variety of interpretations of any one [word, phrase, or] verse" (Leila Leah Bronner, *From Eve to Esther: Rabbinic Reconstructions of Biblical Women* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994),

xv.) Midrash is the “unconsciousness of the text”(Robert Paul, *Moses and Civilization*, (New Haven, Yale, 1996), p. 93.)

⁸ Carl Jung defined the shadow as all that lies outside the light of consciousness, and may be positive or negative. “Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual’s conscious life, the blacker and denser it is.” Jung, C.G. “Psychology and Religion”, In CW 11: *Psychology and Religion: West and East* 1938. P.131.

⁹ The Book of Jubilees (part of the Pseudepigrapha and Second Temple literature) was written in Hebrew, in the second century BCE; fifteen copies were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. It is one of the “rewritten bibles” as is Chronicles. Segal, Michael, *The Book of Jubilees: Rewritten Bible, Redaction, Ideology and Theology*, (Leiden: Brill, 2007). James Kugel calls it “the most interesting and important composition of the late Second Temple Judaism.” *A Walk through Jubilees: Studies in the Book of Jubilees and the World of its Creation*, (Leiden, Brill, 2012), pg. 1.

¹⁰ Endres, John C., *Biblical Interpretation in the Book of Jubilees* (Washington, CBQ Monograph, 1987 pgs. 51-84 and The Book of Jubilees chapters 19-35.

¹¹ Endres, pg. 49.

¹² Halpern-Amaru, Betsy, *The Empowerment of Women in the Book of Jubilees* (Leiden: Brill, 1999) 81.

¹³ Riskin, Shlomo, *Jerusalem Post*, December 1, 2000, pg. B9.

¹⁴ Hirsch, Samson Raphael, *The Pentateuch – Genesis*, (New York: Judaica Press, 1971) pp. 393- 394.

¹⁵ *Midrash Rabbah* Genesis, Vol. II, 70:19.

¹⁶ *Midrash Rabbah* Genesis, Vol. II, 65:16; and Deut. 1:15.

¹⁷ *Zohar*, translated by M. Simon and P.R. Levertoff, (Soncono Press, London, 1976) vol. 2, pg. 66.

¹⁸ These can be found in some of the latter prophets (Obad. 1:10 and Mal. 1:2-3). In latter tradition, he is the ancestor of Amalek, Agag and Haman.

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