

# BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

## “Working The Angles”

Genesis 27:1-46

2003

### Introduction

*Working the Angles:* You may have heard this phrase before. It refers to doing whatever is necessary to arrive at a predetermined favorable objective. I don't think there is a better way to describe the lifestyle of Isaac and his family. They were a family accustomed to “Working the Angles.”

As we will discover, God's ultimate purposes prevailed. But the story of this family's life could have been dramatically different if Isaac, Rebekah, Esau and Jacob had rejected this worldly and sinful approach to “Working the Angles” and had adopted God's version of “Working the Angles” – in the physical angles formed when a man or woman bends the knee in prayer before their sovereign God.

### I The Transferring Of God's Blessing

A. Isaac was old, **blind** and about to die [Verse 1]

At this point, Isaac is approximately 137 years old. Because his brother, Ishmael, died at this age, he believed that his time to die might have been at hand. But in reality, Isaac would live another 43 years to the ripe old age of 180 years of age.

B. Isaac requested a tasty meal from Esau [Verse 1b-4a]

1. Hunt some wild game for me
2. Prepare the kind of tasty food I like
3. Then I will give you my blessing

Ps 141:4 “Let not my heart be drawn to what is evil, to take part in wicked deeds with men who are evildoers; let me not eat of their delicacies.”

Why does Isaac insist on giving the blessing to Esau, the one whom God had not chosen, who had despised his birthright, and who had married pagan wives? It seems Isaac is plainly operating in the flesh here, thinking only of the good food he gets from Esau's hunting.

In reality, he couldn't taste the difference between what Esau hunted in the field and what his wife Rebekah could prepare from the flock.

C. Isaac committed to giving Esau his **blessing** [Verse 4b]

In the willfulness of his old age, Isaac is determined to pass on the blessing to Esau, despite what the Lord has said and what the boys have shown with their lives. His sin is compounded by the fact that he attempted to make this transaction without the

knowledge of his wife, Rebekah, and his son, Jacob. Normally the blessing would have been given before the entire family. But here we find that Isaac is doing in secret what should have been a very public transaction. Why? Because he knew he was wrong!

Gen 25:23 “The LORD said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.”

In his *Exposition of Genesis*, Leupold states, “He that knows the duplicity and treachery of the human heart will not find it difficult to understand how a man will circumvent a word of God, no matter how clear it be, if his heart is really set on what is at variance with that word.”

**Application:**

Prov 3:27 “Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act.”

**II The Scheming For God’s Blessing**

A. Rebekah was eavesdropping on the conversation [Verse 5-7]

***She was listening*** = The Hebrew form that is used in the original text suggests that this was a habit, a pattern of behavior, not a happenstance. Her behavior gives us an idea of the level of mistrust and poor communication they had in their family.

***What should Rebekah have done in these circumstances?***

She knew that Isaac was wrong in what he conspired to do. Jacob was the son whom God had chosen to be the “heir of promise.” Nevertheless, evil must not be resisted with evil; it must be overcome by good (Romans 12:21).

The first thing Rebekah should have done was to speak honestly and directly with her husband about his wicked plan. Submission to authority never includes silence toward evil. We are to “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15), even to those in authority over us (cf. Acts 16:35-40).

Having fulfilled her responsibility to warn her husband of the consequences of the evil he had planned, Rebekah should have been content to leave the matter in God’s hands.

Instead, she began to “Work the Angles.”

B. Rebekah took things into her own hands: [Verse 8-13]

Rebekah was an incredibly shrewd woman. She had to be, being married to Isaac. He taught her everything he knew about lying and deceiving. And she was a great understudy! She posed as the faithful, loving wife, but under all of this she sought to

further Jacob's interests, even at the expense of her husband Isaac. Rebekah, not Jacob, was the mastermind behind the plot to outwit Isaac and obtain his blessing for Jacob.

1. She **informed** Jacob of the situation
2. She devised a plan to deceive Isaac  
This plan was far too complex to have been put together on spur of the moment.  
Obviously, Rebekah had been thinking about this day for years.

Many of the props were already prepared and ready:

The expertly fashioned goatskin gloves and neck coverings.

The garments belonging to Esau who probably wasn't living in his parents home but in his own house with his two Hittite wives.

3. She **conspired** with Jacob to steal the blessing  
What should Jacob have done at this point?  
He should have had Joseph's heart who, when enticed to covertly sleep with his master's wife, said, "How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"  
(Gen 39:9)

But he didn't! Instead, he joined his mother in her effort to "Work the Angles."

Apparently, Jacob's only concerns were pragmatic:

- How are we going to pull this off since Esau is hairy and I'm not (11-12).
- If we don't succeed, I don't want to be left holding the bag!

4. She accepted the potential consequences
  - a. "Let the curse fall on me."  
So, at this point, every family member is "Working the Angles" for, what they believe to be, their own advantage.

#### C. Rebekah's deceptive plans: **[Verse 14-17]**

1. She sent Jacob to get two young goats
2. She prepared them to taste like wild game
3. She clothed Jacob in Esau's **clothes**
4. She covered Jacob's hands and neck with goatskins  
Gen 25:25 "The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau", which means, "Hairy"

#### (Humor) **Little known facts about Esau:**

He was so hairy that the midwife didn't charge her usual fee – she charged by the yard. [He was like a hairy garment – get it?]

Esau was so hairy that he had dreadlocks on his back.

He was so hairy that when he went for his annual haircut during sheep shearing season, he supplied enough body hair to supply wigs for the entire Hair Club For Men!

5. She sent Jacob to **deceive** Isaac

### III The Intercepting Of God's Blessing

A. Jacob **lied** to his father by saying: 4 Times!! [Verse 18-20]

1. "I am Esau, your firstborn"

**Statistics:** Lying seems to be a way of life for many people. We lie at the drop of a hat. The book *The Day America Told the Truth* says that 91 percent of those surveyed lie routinely about matters they consider trivial, and 36 percent lie about important matters; 86 percent lie regularly to parents, 75 percent to friends, 73 percent to siblings, and 69 percent to spouses.  
(Our Daily Bread, August 28, 1992)

Lev 19:11 "Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another."

2. "I have done as you told me"

3. "**God** gave me success"

Because Jacob knows of the prophecy in Gen 25 and that it was God's plan for him to have the birthright, he justified his lies in the pursuit of the blessing – including taking the name of the Lord in vain.

Ex 20:7 "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name."

Rom 3:7-8 "Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?" Why not say-as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say --"Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is deserved."

#### Application:

Over the years I've heard many Christians justify their sin and disobedience to God by making God an accomplice to their sin:

"The Lord came to me in a dream and told me to leave my wife and family ..."

"The Lord showed in the Bible that I don't have to pay my taxes ..."

"The Lord has given me a wonderful peace about having sex with my girlfriend or boyfriend. There is nothing wrong with it as long we are monogamous ..."

These are nothing but pious platitudes to conceal and justify sin!

4. "I am really your son, Esau"

Even under repeated questioning, Jacob persists in his lie!

Deut 27:18 “Cursed is the man who leads the blind astray on the road.”

B. Isaac was convinced by: [Verse 21-27a]

1. The **persistent** lies of Jacob
2. The goatskin coverings
3. The flavor of the game
4. The smell of Jacob’s clothes

C. Isaac **transferred** his blessing to Jacob [Verse 27b-29]

Heb 11:20 “By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.”

It’s important to understand that it isn’t the actual words of Isaac to Jacob that made him blessed. Jacob was blessed because God had chosen Jacob long ago (Gen 26:23).

What matters is that God had said *the older will serve the younger* (back in Genesis 25:23), not that Isaac said “be lord over your brothers.”

Prov 19:21 “Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.”

“The point is that the sovereign will of God is done, in spite of our or any other person’s opposition to it.” James Montgomery Boice

D. Isaac quickly discovered the deception [Verse 30-33]

Num 32:23-24 “.. and you may be sure that your sin will find you out.”

1. He confirmed the validity of Jacob’s blessing
2. He acted as if the blessing had been stolen

**Trembled violently** = “Trembled excessively with a great trembling.”

Later, in Hebrews 11:20, it says *By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come*. Where was the faith? Here it is, after Isaac’s attempt to thwart the will of God has been destroyed and he said of Jacob, **"and indeed he shall be blessed."**

#### IV The Bitterness Of God’s Blessing

A. Esau complained bitterly about Jacob’s deception [Verse 34-36]

1. “He took my **birthright**”

Both Isaac and Esau were grieved when they figured out what Jacob has done. And now, all of a sudden, Esau is concerned about the birthright! But if you recall in our study of Genesis 25:22-34), Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of stew, and as a result *despised his birthright*. No one took it from him, he sold his destiny for a dinner!

2. “He took my **blessing**”

Esau’s tears were the tears of frustrated selfishness, not of regret for his own sin and despising of his birthright.

2 Cor 7:10-11 “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”

B. Esau was given second place to Jacob [Verse 37-40]

Heb 12:16-17 “See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.”

The irony of it all was that since Isaac had tried to give everything to Esau, there was nothing left for his favorite son – it had all had been given to Jacob.

C. Esau held a **grudge** against Jacob [Verse 41]

Prov 19:3 “A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the LORD.”

**Held a grudge** = Satam = “To lurk for, and patiently wait to persecute”

1. He planned to eventually kill Jacob

Esau comforted himself with thoughts of revenge against Jacob. He planned to kill Jacob as soon as Isaac died.

James 4:1-2 “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want.”

### **Application:**

Who do you think is behind the scenes of these events orchestrating the demise of God’s eternal plan in the promised Messiah? Could it be – Satan?!?

## **V The Fall Out From God’s Blessing**

A. Rebekah discovered Esau’s murder plot [Verse 42]

B. Rebekah **devised** a countermeasure plan: [Verse 43-45]

1. Jacob must flee to Laban in Haran

a. Until Esau’s anger had subsided

b. Until Esau had **forgotten** Jacob’s deception

2. Jacob could return when it was safe

Rebekah thought that Jacob would only need to be gone for a short time. As it turned out, Rebekah would never again see her son again.

C. Rebekah prepared the way for Jacob's escape [Verse 46]  
She successfully maneuvered Isaac into telling Jacob to leave.

1. She **complained** to Isaac about Esau's Hittite wives
  - a. She was disgusted with them  
*Disgusted* = Quwts (koots) = "To be distressed or grieved"
2. She **counseled** against a Hittite wife for Jacob
  - a. Otherwise, my life won't be worth living

**Code language:** "And if my life isn't worth living, yours won't be either."

### Review of the sad facts:

1. In the end, all four players paid a huge price for their sin:

#### Isaac

He lost all credibility as a spiritual leader in his family  
His plans backfired (In his effort to give Esau everything, he was able to give him nothing.  
His relationship with his wife was severely damaged

#### Esau

He had led a sexual immoral and godless lifestyle  
He had forfeited his birthright  
He has lost his blessing  
He had to spend the rest of his life asking, "What if ...?"

#### Rebekah

Her relationship with her husband, Isaac, was severely damaged  
She is forever remembered as a scheming deceiver  
She never saw Jacob again – the only son she really loved

#### Jacob

He lived a life of isolation from his family for the next 20 years  
He lived with the guilt of having "Worked the Angles" rather than trusting God.  
He never saw his mother alive again  
He spent the next 20 years looking over his shoulder in fear of his brother  
He didn't enjoy any of the material blessings associated with his inheritance.

**Bottom line:** Sin does not pay! It may be "pleasurable for a sin, but in the end it leads to death."

### Conclusion

Lessons from this chapter:

1. Man's sin can never frustrate the will of God, but it can fulfill it.  
Despite the sin and deceit of this family, the purpose of God expressed to Rebekah in Genesis 25:23 was fulfilled exactly!

Prov 16:9 “In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.”

Prov 19:21 “Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.”

2. No matter how noble your goal or objective may be, sin always produces awful results:
  - It separates close friends and even family members
  - It separates men or women from God
  - Isa 59:2 “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.”
  
3. There are really only two ways we can approach the challenges of life:
  - We can live our lives mentally “Working the Angles” in the strength of our flesh.
  - Or we live our lives physically “Work the Angles” God’s way – on bended knee before our Sovereign God.

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