



Was Jacob A Deceiver Or A Dreamer?

Or Was It All About Selective Breeding? Not Racial Breeding, But Spiritual Breeding.

(See a recap analysis of heroes of faith below.)

Almost invariably whenever Jacob is mentioned in any context, he is somehow described as a deceiver or a scandalous person who cheated his brother Esau out of what was rightfully Esau's. I know there are various reasons for this but, in Jacob's defense, I would like to focus on Jacob's life in sum total, in Biblical context, and in light of God's dealing with Jacob, and His people, and the future of God's people.

First of all when I read the whole story of Jacob I reason that he is the only honest person involved in the events of Jacob's life. And I say this because without understanding the whole story, we can look at Jacob's life and use human reasoning to judge Jacob.

Esau was born first, be it so briefly before Jacob. Legally Esau did deserve the rights of the first born. And if we examine the events of Esau's life, we do see that he really did receive the 'earthly' inheritance of Isaac (the wealth, the land, running the 'camp'). When Jacob left the camp, all Esau desired was his.

And when and who named Jacob 'deceiver'? Was it at birth? Being named Jacob because he was grasping Esau's heel? Seems to me that two embryos confined to a small space, both looking for a comfortable spot, or two embryos positioned 'head to foot' could be hanging on to each other. I see nothing deceitful about that. In fact I see a character trait in Jacob: he was willing to struggle with God and man and prevail.

And is it legally binding if two young men (or boys?) who probably were consistently addressing the birth order and who was going to be in charge, have lunch together and Esau is starving and Jacob, who 'minded the camp', prepared food and jested that the birthright be sold for stew? Esau just shows a serious disregard (or despised it) for 'his birthright'. Eventually he only brought grief to his parents concerning Esau's poor choice of wives, bad blood if you will, taken from outside the family group.

And it was really Rebekah's fear of having Esau in charge when it came time for Isaac to relinquish command that led to her 'urging or commanding, even threatening' of Jacob to get to Isaac first, even if deceitfully (on her part). It was Esau who, when he thought he had lost it all, named Jacob as 'deceiver'. In reality all Esau lost was the 'spiritual' birthright. Jacob had to leave and Rebekah had to endure Esau's poor leadership.

Even Jacob's uncle Laban, consistently cheated or 'deceived' Jacob, Even up to the time of Jacob's departure, when the two made an agreement about Jacob's wages, the spotted sheep. Laban took the current 'spotted sheep' for himself and Jacob had to breed his own spotted sheep (by the way, the spotted sheep today is known for its desirable traits) which we might compare to a true spiritual leader who breeds and maintains desirable traits among its members.

The story of Dinah in Gen 34 is an ugly chapter and many accuse Jacob of not exercising control in the matter of his daughter being raped by a local resident. Jacob's sons did try to negotiate a solution with the residents but Jacob's sons actually brought the incident to a shameful ending. Jacob was in a bad place by order of God for a purpose that may only be described as judgment on a people and a learning

experience for God's people – how do we deal with a pagan world around us?

After Jacob, and among his twelve sons (the future generations), we see Joseph (who had a few dreams of his own) being the next to receive the spiritual blessing of leadership, even though he was far from being the first born of twelve. Joseph isolated God's people away from pagan influences in Egypt, and prepared them for a new isolation in a promised land. Even though future leadership among God's people was suspect at times, the genealogies were preserved, and enough good leadership eventually led to Christ's permanent leadership role. And God did give Jacob a dream about that day: a stairway (or ladder) to heaven.

In the following verses we see 'the respect' that Pharaoh and the Egyptians had for Jacob concerning his burial. We have to ask 'how many Egyptians worshiped the God of Jacob (and Joseph), how many intermarried with the Hebrews, or stood by them during their persecution, or even joined them in their trip to the Promised Land?' Isn't that what evangelism is all about?

Genesis 50:1. And Joseph fell upon his father's face, and wept upon him, and kissed him. 2. And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father: and the physicians embalmed Israel. 3. And forty days were fulfilled for him; for so are fulfilled the days of those which are embalmed: and the Egyptians mourned for him threescore and ten days.

4. And when the days of his mourning were past, Joseph spake unto the house of Pharaoh, saying, If now I have found grace in your eyes, speak, I pray you, in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, 5. My father made me swear, saying, Lo, I die: in my grave which I have digged for me in the land of Canaan, there shalt thou bury me. Now therefore let me go up, I pray thee, and bury my father, and I will come again. 6. And Pharaoh said, Go up, and bury thy father, according as he made thee swear.

7. And Joseph went up to bury his father: and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, 8. And all the house of Joseph, and his brethren, and his father's house: only their little ones, and their flocks, and their herds, they left in the land of Goshen. 9. And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen: and it was a very great company.

10. And they came to the threshingfloor of Atad, which is beyond Jordan, and there they mourned with a great and very sore lamentation: and he made a mourning for his father seven days. 11. And when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning in the floor of Atad, they said, This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians: wherefore the name of it was called Abelmizraim, which is beyond Jordan.

12. And his sons did unto him according as he commanded them: 13. For his sons carried him into the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham bought with the field for a possession of a buryingplace of Ephron the Hittite, before Mamre. 14. And Joseph returned into Egypt, he, and his brethren, and all that went up with him to bury his father, after he had buried his father.

Exodus 12:37. And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children. 38. And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle.



Did Joseph Invent the Grain Futures Market?

And did he profit from ill gotten grain?

Or was it a matter of survival for all those around Joseph; or was it a matter of instituting a ‘provisional’ form of government, or was it a matter of teaching self reliance to citizenry; or was it a matter of instituting a 20 percent flat tax (provide for the common good), or was it a matter of opportunistic Pharaohs who turned servitude into slavery and bring judgment on their own people and themselves; or was it a matter of blessing God’s people for future accomplishments; or was it a matter of God meaning it for good, but man using it for evil, or was it a matter of man meaning it for evil, but God using it for good?



Was Abraham treacherous, was Isaac unaware, did Jacob deceive, did Joseph plunder the Egyptians while in charge, did Moses blow it, did Rahab lie, etc.?

My immediate response would be “let him who is without sin cast the first stone”.

But to be more thoughtful:

Many stones have been thrown, but qualified with “if God can forgive them....” Sounds good but we rarely hear the Hebrews 11 part, or we rarely hear the stories in a context of “walk a mile in my sandals”.

And of course many of the predestination and or holiness philosophy highlight and distort these incidents to prove their point and even minimize Hebrews 11 to distort the ‘faith’ issues of that chapter. Still thoughtful, I hope.

We have already covered Jacob’s (if one takes the time to study Jacob’s life, we see that he is really the victim of all the scandalous people around him) and Joseph’s stellar characters (at least Biblically – we all sin more than we admit).

And we could include Abel, Joshua, etc. in this list. Of course Moses had some faith issues that God was angry about (welcome to the club) but God visibly and indirectly displayed His glory to Moses, because Moses pleased God. We all should be so fortunate. Or even to converse with God personally so many times. The ‘sandal concept’, how about 120 years of the most severe trials of any human? My hat goes off to Moses, who did not pass go, but went directly to the real Promised Land. I can’t wait to meet all these heroes.

And of course Lot did not make the list; he cast his lot with the world and paid the price. Will we see him at the banquet? Not sure. What about Adam and Eve? Not on the list, but after their sin they showed remorse and God slew an animal to cover their body and also their sin. And of course Cain and Abel brought sacrifices which show some kind of family tradition. And of course Seth the replacement for Abel has a special attachment: ‘men began to call on the name of the Lord’. Of course Enoch was special (as was Abel). What about the rest of Adam and Seth’s line? What happened to them before the Flood where God rescued Noah?

What about the post flood patriarchs where Eber historically appears to be Melchizedek (passing the torch to Abraham; later Jethro again passing the torch to Moses)? I suppose the Book of Life would not fit into one of our books.

But we have 66 other books to fill in some gaps for some basic understanding of how to carry a torch.

What about Isaac? If anyone deserves a negative report, it is Isaac. God blessed him, and he did the ‘my sister thing’ but I do not sense an element of faith here. And when it came to bless a son (Esau or Jacob) he certainly liked Esau, even though Esau was described as ‘despising his birthright’. Given that Esau lost it when he found out Jacob got there first, I have to believe he was talking about the material blessing, which he got anyway. The spiritual blessing is what Jacob got. Through foreknowledge and providence God showed his love for Jacob and His hatred for Esau. Anyone of reasonable understanding should appreciate the implications.

Now Rahab was in a difficult position. Either she chooses to tell the truth, out of fear, or she chooses to cast her lot with the Israelites. Sounds like faith in her analysis of the situation. I guess we could say she lied to save her life, much like the Gibeonites who deceived Joshua. Both cases a form of capitulation to a sensible alternative. And maybe this is analogous to a lot people of ‘faith in Christ’ who initially reason that eternal life is a whole lot better than eternal death. Then comes the testing to see if ‘you are electable’ or ‘qualify to be one of the chosen’. **Romans 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your**

heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (or in the OT, faith in the promised sacrifice)” Many people have a hard time with that, having to make the choice, that is.

If we could flash forward to David, for just a second, 50 years a star, 20 years the murderer: found out, confessed, repented, and paid the price, Hebrews 11, next case. Seriously, no way to justify this incident or any incident for that matter. But, next case.

And the next case would be Solomon who, like his father David, was greatly and willingly used by God. And of course suffered from the same human frailty later in life (again, welcome to the club – pride in self or taking God for granted?) not to mention the damaging effects of all their political and spiritual enemies. But, I would put their accomplishments up against anyone else’s. Especially those who are so depraved, they must trash others to make up for their own non-accomplishments.

In fact, we recently had a US President trashed for saying ‘we need to make tough choices’. God rewarded us with the worst US President ever. Sound familiar? Nothing new under the sun?

How about Jonah? All we hear was “he was reluctant”. If we look at his history we see that he wore out about 36 years’ worth of sandals prophesying to deaf ears in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Then God wants him to go to a bunch of pagans with the same message. How many of us would not jump ship at this point. And Jonah is successful in Nineveh. But Jonah is depressed, maybe “why not my own people”?

Not sure if this is true about Jonah, but looking at history, we can add additional insights into Scripture. Instead of knee jerk understanding, or preprogrammed interpretations.

And we do have Daniel who is not mentioned specifically (Heb. 11:33), but through his proper upbringing and devotion, developed special skills to influence 4 Babylonian Kings, Darius the Mede and maybe even Cyrus the Persian to pave the way for the Jews to return to Jerusalem after a 70 year captivity. We talk so much about prophecy we gloss over Daniel’s successful witness to the world around him.

Now what about Abraham, the father of the faithful? Seems like he deceived not once but twice, ‘she is my sister’ (really a half-sister, but...) out of fear for his life? And this involved two powerful men of their day, Pharaoh and Abimelech (Philistine predecessor).

The ‘sandal concept’ here would be that Abraham was forced to go to an unknown place in a time where lawlessness prevailed. The accusation here is that Abraham jeopardized Sarah’s wellbeing. Like Rahab, Abraham had to make a choice and I would not rule out Abraham’s faith in God to preserve the choice he thought he had to make. And God is involved in both situations in support of Abraham (Remember providence? And speaking of, Abraham is blessed with necessary goods in both instances.).

In both instances God worked out the situation by revealing that these two men had respect for the institution of marriage. This had to surprise Abraham and was more of a lesson in interactions with a pagan world.

Abraham later had dealings with Abimelech at least in a political sense. Trust is a big word in any negotiations. This is what we should send to Washington.

And when Joseph went to Egypt he found the same kind of Pharaoh. Again, great interactions with the pagan world.

After Joseph died, my guess is that the Hebrews isolated themselves from the culture, aroused suspicion, and eventually were enslaved by a new Pharaoh. Much like today. We have abandoned the culture and the courts and the pharaoh in the White House are just looking for ways to be our taskmasters.

Why don't we lift up the 'heroes of faith' as Hebrews 11 describes them? We need new heroes to engage the culture, not scapegoats.

What if those who followed Joseph had leadership that would have at least built a standing army to contend with the Egyptians and control their environment, and then march into Canaan, eliminate the opposition, set up an ongoing witness to the world of God's Coming Glory, and then the Gospel could have gone out into all the world from Jerusalem (instead of through Europe, America, etc)? Well, too much to ask for? And, for a lack of consistent leadership, there go we.