

How a Family Falls Apart and How to Fix It

Genesis 27-28

How does a family fall apart and how can it be fixed? This is a logical question we come to through observations in the Book of Genesis. This is an important question to ask given the importance of the family. It is an especially important question given the state of the family in our day. In our day we have seen divorce rates soar (even amongst Christians!). We have seen respect for the family plummet. The world's definition of "family" has become so broad that "family" has become nothing more than a gathering of roommates. So low has the view of family sunken that there is a strong and popular movement for families headed by same-sex partners. The state of the family is a strong indicator as to the state of a society. Our society is on the decline.

But there is hope. There is always hope with the Lord. A study in Genesis 27-28 shows us the factors leading to the fall of a family unit, but we also see God's way to fix the family. So this is a very interesting and important portion of God's word for us to study. It is definitely pertinent to issues, especially family issues of our day. Let's begin our study.

The Blessing

Chapter 27 considers the passing on of the blessing from Isaac to his son. What is "the blessing"? In Genesis 25 we saw that the "birthright" is associated with a position of spiritual authority over the family. The "blessing" in chapter 27 is not referring to a general blessing but has a particular reference to the Abrahamic Covenant. The one upon whom the blessing was pronounced received a guaranteed God's favor. The blessing of God secured:

- Prominence, prosperity and protection – Genesis 12:1-3
- Promised Land and plenty of descendants – Genesis 13:14-18; 15:18-21; 17:1-3
- Place in God's plans – Genesis 17:4-8
- Permanent place with God – Genesis 17:19
- Part in God's miraculous provision – Genesis 18:9-15; 21:1-8
- Part in God's plan to save the world – Genesis 22:1-19

Isaac was old and he started to think about his legacy and passing on the Covenant blessings of the LORD to his son. As you can see, such a blessing carried with it many privileges from the LORD. This is what was at stake in chapter 27. But when we look at what happened next we see that carnality crept into Isaac's family and by the end of the chapter it falls apart. What led to this breakdown? We see a number of things when we look at this chapter.

How a Family Falls Apart

As we examine this chapter and look at the familial relationships we are able to identify the causes of its breakdown. These causes are as follows.

First, the family that falls apart is carnally pragmatic (27:1-17). Genesis 27 reveals the carnally pragmatic (i.e. the ends justify the means) nature of this family of promise. Isaac disregarded the will of God by seeking to bless Esau (compare 25:23 with 27:1-4). He uses the event of passing on the blessing to his son as a means to get a meal. Typologically this is a symbol of Isaac feeding his flesh. Rebekah and Jacob rely on a lie and deception rather than on God to fulfill God's plan (27:5-17). Jacob even draws God into his deception (27:20). Wherever deception and lies in their various forms are used, you can be sure Satan is involved in some way; he is the "father of lies" (John 8:44). **Relying on our flesh or carnal nature always opens the door to being influenced by the enemy.** The Bible warns us that when we lie or let anger motivate us we are opening the door to the devil to come in and influence us (Ephesians 4:25-27).

Second, the family that falls apart depends on works of the flesh and has a lack of love (20:18-29). Jacob and his mother Rebekah show little compassion or consideration for Isaac who is old, feeble and blind. They only want the blessing for Jacob and will stoop to anything to get it. They heartlessly take full advantage of his limitations in order to get their way (27:18-29). This shows a lack of love. Love is kind, "does not seek its own," "think no evil," "does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;" love is not found in this family (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8; Galatians 5:22-23). Instead of love, this family is reliant on "works of the flesh" such as "jealousies, . . . , selfish ambitions, dissensions, . . ." (Galatians 5:19-21). Such motivation and behavior is doomed to failure and the falling apart of this family.

Third, the family that falls apart is deceived, demoralized, and divided (27:30-46). When Isaac discovers the deception perpetrated against him, he trembles with emotion (27:30-33). Isaac demonstrates faith in that he surrenders to the will of God to bless Jacob (27:33; Hebrews 11:20). When Esau discovers what has been done to him, he is demoralized and cries bitterly (27:34). But Esau is grieved more for the political and financial loss incurred than the spiritual loss. He responds in hatred not surrender to God (27:34, 41; see Hebrews 12:15-17). Esau had murderous thoughts toward Jacob (27:41). This is a family of deceit and thievery (27:35-36). All this carnality divides the family of promise (27:42-45). Rebekah sends Jacob away with hope that one day he will be able to return, but she will never see her son Jacob again.

Fourth, the family that falls apart falls apart from weariness (27:46). All of this reliance on the flesh results in Rebekah saying, "I am weary of my life . . ." (27:46). The word "weary" is translated from the Hebrew term KOOTS (Strong's # 6973 - קוּטְס *qûwts, koots*) which has the idea of wanting to separate or sever oneself from something. It means, "to be disgusted or anxious; abhor, be distressed, be grieved, loathe, vex, be weary."¹ In modern words we might translate this word with the phrase, "sick and tired" which is exactly how the *Living Bible* and *New Living Translation* translates it. It is a tiring, frustrating and futile way of life when you rely on the flesh and not the Spirit of God. There is a consequence to carnality. And this consequence is often clearly exposed in the context of the relational dynamics of family life.

Four Fatal Flaws that Cause a Family to Fall Apart

¹Strong, J. (1997, c1996). *The new Strong's dictionary of Hebrew and Greek words* (electronic ed.) (H6973). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

We can summarize the breakdown in Isaac's family by noting four fatal flaws that cause a family to fall apart.

Genesis 27 gives us a perfect picture of problems that lead to division in the family unit. A family doesn't "fall" apart, but breaks apart due to some common problems. The flaws that lead to the break up of the family are:

FLAW #1 – THE HEAD OF THE HOUSEHOLD CONTRADICTED GOD'S WILL (Genesis 27:1-4, 26-29). The duties of a father are:

- Fathers should train/disciple the family in God's word and ways – Deuteronomy 6; Ephesians 6:4.
- Husbands/Fathers should love their wives/mothers of their children - Ephesians 5:21-33.
- Husbands/Fathers should be understanding with their wives/mothers of their children - 1 Peter 3:7
- Fathers should guide and warn family members - 1 Thessalonians 2:11.
- Fathers should "restrain" and rebuke if necessary - 1 Samuel 3:11-14.
- Fathers need to provide for the material needs of the family - Matthew 7:8-11; 1 Timothy 5:8.
- Fathers should teach and require respect from children – Ephesians 6:1-3.
- Fathers should not be harsh with family members – Ephesians 6:4
- Father's should take responsibility for training in the family - Ephesians 6:4.

FLAW #2 – THE PARENTS WERE WORKING AGAINST EACH OTHER – Genesis 27:5a.

- A house divided against itself cannot stand – Matthew 12:25
- Parents should work in harmony – Genesis 2:23; Ephesians 5:21-29
- Parents should come together in God – Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

FLAW #3 – GOD WASN'T LORD OF THIS FAMILY – Genesis 27:7, 20.

- Isaac sought to bend God to his will, he sought "My will be done," rather than "Thy will be done" (27:7,27-29; Matthew 6:10; 26:39).
- Rebekah relied on carnal means rather than prayerfully depending on God. "... obey my voice according to what I command you." (27:8)
- Jacob used "God" as a means of manipulation to see his selfish will done (27:20).
- Esau was grieved over his material loss not his spiritual loss (27:34; Hebrews 12:15-17).

FLAW #4 – THIS FAMILY FUNCTIONED IN THE FLESH.

- They deceived one another - 27:9-12
- They lied to one another – 27:24
- They preyed on each other's weaknesses – 27:1, 15-16.
- They focused on blessing rather than birthright. i.e. material rather than spiritual things – 25:29-34; 27:34; Hebrews 12:151-7

- They hated one another – 27:41
- They feared one another – 41-45; 32:7
- They were divided from one another – 27:41-45.

These are the fatal flaws that led to the falling apart of Isaac’s family. Maybe you can relate to such a situation. Maybe you know of a family who is behaving similarly and with the unfortunate similar results. Maybe you look at this falling apart family and say to yourself *that’s my family!* Is there hope for such a family situation?

Hope and How to Fix the Fallen Apart Family

There is hope and a way to fix a fallen apart family and we find it in chapter 28. From this point the focus of the scriptural account shifts its focus from Isaac to Jacob. As we read about Jacob we will see a man who is carnally deceptive, unscrupulous and self willed, but we will also see how he has a relationship with God. It is a relationship that begins with Jacob seeing himself as the center of the universe. But God works to peel away his carnal self centeredness until he is touched and lives a life governed by God.

How can a family that is fallen apart be fixed. As we look at this chapter we see a number of things that will ultimately lead to the repair of this family.

First, family repair starts with turning to God in holy obedience (28:1-5, 7). Isaac did not rebel against the Lord’s evident wishes that Jacob would carry on the legacy of the Abrahamic Covenant, he submitted to God’s will. We saw the seedling of this in the previous chapter when Isaac says of Jacob being blessed, “and indeed he shall be blessed” (27:33). Then we see Isaac charging and sending off Jacob to find a wife *from his own people* (28:1-5). Isaac knew it was important that Jacob marry *in the faith* so to speak. This was an indication that Isaac was concerned about the purity and perpetuation of the Covenant faith of God. Holiness involves separation from the world (James 4:4-5; 1 John 2:15-17). Isaac shows his concern for keeping his family line holy by sending Jacob away.

Isaac said, “**May God Almighty bless you, and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may be an assembly of peoples; and give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and your descendants with you, that you may inherit the land in which you are a stranger, which God gave to Abraham**” (28:3-4). Isaac moves from his superficial carnal concerns to the more substantial issues of passing on the covenant blessings in the power of God. And he does this *relying on God*. There is no hope for a fallen family outside of relying on God. The previous chapter’s troubles must have percolated in Isaac and moved him to return to dependence on God. For a family that is fallen to get back up the first step is turning to God in submission to His will.

We also see that Jacob “**obeyed his father and his mother**” (28:7). There was something working in Jacob too. Obedience to the things of the Lord always moves us closer to God whereas rebellion and disobedience to the things of the Lord always moves us away from Him.

Second, family repair understands that family members have a free will and may choose to rebel and remove themselves from the family (28:6-9). Esau saw how Jacob’s obedience pleased his family *and chose* to do exactly the opposite. Esau chose to do exactly what would displease his parents. This was perhaps an act of showing his displeasure. Maybe he felt as

though his father Isaac should have stood up for him and insisted he receive the blessing. A natural or carnal man cannot understand the things of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:14). When a family falls apart you cannot force its divided members to return. You can call for a decision and take a stand in your family to serve the Lord and if members cannot accept that, they may need to go. Esau chose to leave and go live with Ishmael who himself was the product of a lapse in faith and work of the flesh (cf. Genesis 16).

Third, family repair trusts in the Lord to work in its members (28:10-17). At some point parents have to entrust their children to the LORD. That is what Isaac and Rebekah were doing when they sent Jacob out. And they sent him out *trusting that God would minister to him*. Jacob had cooperated with the carnal plans of his mother Rebekah. He was a willing participant in the deception used to secure God's blessing. But Isaac sent Jacob out and the Lord did speak to Jacob.

There is nothing harder than entrusting your children to the Lord. When they are young you can be involved with a hands on approach. But at some point when they get older, they have to be entrusted to the Lord. This is a real test of faith for parents. To entrust that which is most precious to you to God is always a test. Sometimes parents get so "sick and tired" of their children (e.g. Esau) that they say, *Here Lord, You take him!* But when the dust settles a godly parent only hopes for God's best for their children. Children must learn to walk with the Lord and grow in their own relationship with the Lord. There are no grandchildren in God's family. You are either a child of God or not. And what is so hopeful for parents from this passage is that soon after his departure, God indeed does speak to Jacob.

For Jacob the LORD came to him in a dream and reaffirmed His covenant with him (28:13-15). There are many ways God gets through to people. While the scriptural account does not state it specifically, as a parent, I can say that Isaac and Rebekah were likely praying for their son while he was away. And God revealed Himself to Jacob as, "**I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac . . .**" (28:13). Notice God refers to Abraham as Jacob's father. This is not a mistake, it was merely the way predecessors were referred to during these times.

The LORD speaks to Jacob and reaffirms that He will give the Land to Jacob and that his descendants will be multiplied "as the dust of the earth" and spread far and wide, and that "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" by he and his descendants (28:13-14). That is Jacob's calling, to be blessed in order to bless others.

And more importantly, God promises, "**Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you**" (28:15). God promises His presence to Jacob. That is the greatest blessing! God was speaking to Jacob about the presence that comes with a personal relationship with Him. Later in the New Testament Jesus said eternal life is all about *knowing* God and Him, that is what the LORD is offering and revealing to Jacob in these words (cf. John 17:3). That is the most important aspect of any blessing from God.

How did Jacob react to this dream from God? He acknowledged, "**Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.**" (28:16). Jacob is in the infant stages of getting to know the LORD. He admits to himself that he was present in a place and was unaware of the presence of God. But now that he experiences the presence of God look what he says, "**How awesome is this place! This is non other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!**" (28:17). This

is Jacob's first real encounter with God and it sent chills down his spine. He was "afraid." But this fear was a reverential response. The LORD had made an impact on Jacob. Jacob was introduced to *God who is real*. And parents can read these words of Jacob and understand that God is just as real today and is able to minister to and touch our children. That should be a valued and comforting encouragement to every parent.

Fourth, family repair relies on God to patiently bring it back together (28:18-22). Jacob focuses on "this place!" indicating he is immature spiritually by emphasizing the place God met with him rather than the God who met with him (28:17). So taken aback is Jacob by his encounter with God that he erects a memorial stone and names the place "Bethel," which means "house of God" (28:18-19). "Bethel" becomes a place mentioned in the bible frequently (second only to mention of Jerusalem). God refers to Himself as the God of Bethel (331:13) but later the people of God desecrate Bethel by turning it into a place of pagan idolatry (1 Kings 13:32; Hosea 10:15; Amos 4:4).

Then Jacob makes a vow before the Lord. On first glance this vow by Jacob may seem entirely good. But notice all the personal pronouns Jacob uses in his vow. Jacob has a lot of "I" and "me" that still need to be worked out of him by the LORD. Jacob ("heel-catcher" "con-man", carnal-man, manipulator, "trickster") tries to make a deal with God, by making his obedience to God a *conditional* ("If . . . then") offer (28:18-22). Jacob responds to God in the only way he knows at this point in his life, he seeks to manipulate God with money, "a tenth to You" (28:22). Given Jacob's actions God's "hate" toward Esau (i.e. not accept him – Malachi 1:2-3; Romans 9:10-13) and his love toward Jacob is clearly only by the grace of God! God's silence to Jacob's conditions is a testament to God's patience.

There is still a lot of work to be done in Jacob, but the important thing to take from Jacob's response is that Jacob has it in his heart to return to his home. He says, "**so that I come back to my father's house in peace,**" (28:21). He is looking to God to bring him back to his family, to bring the family back together. That is always a good sign. Only God can truly bring a fallen family back to good standing.

Ingredients for Fixing a Fallen Apart Family

The Bible gives us very specific instructions on what is needed to hold a family together. They can be outlined as follows. For a family to function effectively and survive they need to:

- Be Christ-centered – 1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17
- Be in the Spirit – Galatians 5
- Be loving to each other – 1 Corinthians 13
- Be speaking the truth in love to each other – Ephesians 4:17
- Be encouraging to each other – Ephesians 4:29
- Be gracious to each other – Ephesians 4:29
- Be kind and forgiving in Christ to each other – Ephesians 4:32
- Be richly in the word and worship – Colossians 3:16
- Be in church together – Ezra 10:1
- Be true to each other – Ezra 10:2ff.

When carnal means are used to accomplish even “godly” goals, the result is division (27:41, 43). God accomplishes His plans despite people’s carnality, but the consequence of carnality is pain (27:34). It’s carnal to worship the place of God more than the God who is present in every place (28:17). It’s carnal to try to put conditions on your relationship with God (28:20-21). It’s a carnal thing to try to use your tithe as a bargaining chip with God (28:22). It’s good to know God continues to work and will continue to work in the carnal person until His plan is completed (28:13-15; Philippians 1:6).

Those in families need to serve the LORD and prayerfully be alert to His guiding. We should trust in God and speak the truth in love to each other rather than resort to carnal means to manipulate our way through life (Ephesians 4:15). Family members need to realize that God will not be thwarted by my attempts to carnally get their own way (27:33). There is a consequence to carnality, e.g. fear, hatred, division, loss (27:33, 41, 43). Instead of relying on ourselves, we need to depend on God’s grace through faith and not try to cut deals and put conditions on our relationship with God (28:10-22). The presence of God in places is more important than the places themselves (28:15, 17).

People need to be counseled to trust in God prayerfully rather than assert their own wills on situations by carnal means. This is very true in families and families will continue to fall apart until they come to God. But there is hope. The family that turns to God can be reunited as we will see as we continue to study the book of Genesis and its families.