Were Rebekah and Jacob Justified in Deceiving Isaac?

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[0:00] Welcome back. Today's question is, having read Jordan's Primeval Saints, I find that he interprets the life of Jacob through a different lens from a more recent Reformation reading.

Specifically, in the story of Jacob stealing the birthright, Jordan posits that Rebecca and Jacob are righteously deceiving Isaac in order for him to regain sight and be restored. Because the promise to Jacob had already been given, Rebecca and Jacob were acting righteously, even in lying. Jordan says that because Isaac has turned into a tyrant, the only way to restore him is through deception. Curious to hear your thoughts on this passage, which may, may not be often misunderstood. What is going on? And are we to condemn Jacob, Rebecca for what they did or see it as an act of faith? Thanks.
This is a fascinating question and one on which my thoughts have moved a bit over the last few months. The question really arises from, in part, how do we get a sort of textual standpoint upon the meaning of this event?
Because the event itself, taken in and of itself, could be interpreted in a number of different ways. So how do we get the text's own standpoint upon this event? And generally that's through typology.
[1:16] Through recognising the way that events repeat and develop, the way that they appear in connection with different events and how they play out in terms of their consequences. And I think that can help us to understand this. But there are a number of things to bear in mind.

First of all, that this is a case of the woman deceiving someone, possibly a tyrant. And we have that theme throughout the Old Testament.
That theme is developed in various ways as a sort of poetic justice reversal of the events of the fall. So the serpent deceives the woman.
And thereafter, we have a series of events in which the woman deceives the serpent. So whether that's Sarah deceiving Abimelech and Sarah deceiving Pharaoh or Rebecca deceiving Abimelech, Rachel deceiving her father Laban, Michael deceiving Saul, Jael deceiving Sisera, Rahab deceiving the men of Jericho, Esther deceiving Haman, etc.
Tamar deceiving Judah. These are all different examples of the woman in some way or other deceiving the serpent or the Hebrew midwives deceiving the men of Pharaoh.
[2:27] All of these are cases of deception with the woman involved in outwitting the serpent. And this conflict between the serpent and the woman or the dragon and the woman continues all the way throughout the Bible.

We find it in Genesis 3 and we find it in the end of Revelation. So these are deep themes in scripture and it's important to consider the way that they play out and often in ambiguous ways and complicated ways and ways that involve complexifications of that theme rather than just repeated simple form of it.
And I think that's what we have here in various ways. So first of all, the woman deceiving the tyrant. And that figure is something that we see in a number of ways within the character of Rebecca. Rebecca takes on the responsibility for this act of deceiving Isaac. Other things to notice is Isaac, that Jacob himself has serpent-like characteristics.
He comes out of the womb clutching his brother's heel. He's the one who grabs the heel. He's the one who is the supplanter. He's the one who is shrewd and cunning like the serpent.
[3:36] And then when we see his receiving of the birthright, what happens is he's cooking food and Esau comes in from the hunt and asks for some of the red, red stuff.

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And the red, red stuff, what is it? The question is, it's not entirely certain what he might think it is. But some have suggested that he thinks it's blood. The colour is emphasised.
And blood is forbidden food. He wants the forbidden food. And Jacob, being the supplanter, uses that as an opportunity to gain the birthright in exchange for it.
And immediately after that, we hear that Esau's name is called Edom. Now, Edom is a very similar form to Adam. It's pretty much the same form in Hebrew.
And so we have Edom, Adam. We have the serpent figure of Jacob deceiving concerning food, an Adam-like figure. An Adam who despises his birthright is then one who loses his birthright.
[4:37] And so Esau is condemned by his despising of his birthright. That's his sin that he commits. And he's the one that's judged for that, not Jacob. Jacob isn't judged in that action.

And so he deceives, playing the role of the serpent in different ways. So he's already come out of the womb, clutching the heel. And now he plays the role of the serpent, deceiving his brother and gaining the birthright, using forbidden food, and then immediately afterwards.
Esau is named Edom. And again, Edom is not just associated with the name Adam. It's also associated with the meaning red. Because Esau is red.
He's red and hairy. And as a red and hairy man, he's associated with, he's deceived with the red, red stuff. And his name is called Red from then on. Then we have the deception of Isaac.
Isaac plans to give the blessing to his preferred son, which is Esau. And so you have the favoured son and the unfavoured son. And the unfavoured son is Isaac, or is Jacob, who stays at home.
[5:42] But he's favoured of his mother. And his mother knows that he's the one that should get the blessing. He's the one that she has received the prophecy concerning that he will be the one that's preferred over his brother, that he will rule.

And so she takes matters into her own hands. And she uses two kids of the goats. And this is significant. There's a theme running throughout the book of Genesis of two kids or two rams.
And setting up the conflict between two sons in terms of two animals. So we see this within the story of Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael is placed under, is sent out into the wilderness.
He's under the bush. And then later on we see the ram under the bush that's given as a replacement for Isaac. And so there's a two kids theme there.
Two rams. And then we see the same thing in the story here. There's two kids. And the two kids that are used in the deception that takes place is, those two kids are associated with Esau and Jacob themselves.
[6:51] Later on we see two kids associated with Joseph and Judah. Joseph is, his blood is faked using a kid of the goats.

And then Judah sends a kid of the goats to Tamar. And in all of these cases we see two kids or two rams played off against each other.
And that's significant. It can help us to bring in certain Passover themes. And more importantly certain Day of Atonement themes. So these are playing in the background as well. Other things to notice is that there are a number of deception stories within the story of Jacob.
So Jacob deceives his brother in this sort of garden type scene as the serpent deceiving concerning forbidden food. Then he deceives his father and the instigation of his mother.
And then we see him being deceived by Laban. Then we see him deceiving Laban, using the white strips from the white tree to reveal the white beneath.
[7:55] And Laban's name is associated with white. So he's deceived Esau, who later becomes called Edom, red, using the red, red stuff, the stew. And then he's deceived Laban with the white strips from the white tree.

So as you look through the story there are a series of deception stories. There's another deception story when Jacob himself has a favoured son. And that favoured son is taken and sold into slavery. And his death is faked. And he's deceived concerning the death of his favoured son. So that the other sons would receive the blessing and the favour that has been denied them.
And so we see this series of events that help us to pick out some of the meaning of this. Another thing that's worth recognising is there are blessing events that occur later in the story.
So Isaac is here giving a blessing to Esau and Jacob. He wants to give it to Esau but Jacob takes it instead. And then later on at the end of the story of Genesis we see a similar event where Joseph brings his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, to Jacob.

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[9:07] And asks Jacob to bless them. And Jacob being blind, again significant, that's another connection. He crosses his hands and he blesses the youngest with the blessing of the oldest.

So we see again a hearkening back to this original event where the two brothers are mixed up. Later on you have the story of Tamar and Judah.
Again two brothers struggling in the womb, switching places. And we have significant events that occur in the context of the womb and the hands and other things like that.
And then we have again the story of kids involved in that particular account. So putting all these things together, I think what we can see is that there are factors within the story that help us to assess the moral status of each of the actors.
First of all, Jacob is the one who's supposed to get the blessing. And Rebecca knows that. And Jacob, or Isaac knows that as well, presumably.
[10:15] And he gives it, he wants to give it to the wrong son. He's in rebellion at this point. Isaac is blind. He's vulnerable in that position. And he's deceived.

And what we see, I think, there is an action that is achieving a proper end. A good end.
The good end is that Jacob will be blessed. Esau is not a good man. He's a wicked man who despises his birthright. And he's judged for that. Jacob isn't judged for deceiving him in that matter.
We also see the woman deceiving the tyrant more generally as a theme within the Old Testament. And that's often presented as a very good thing. Rebecca or Rahab deceiving the men of Jericho. Or the Hebrew midwives deceiving Pharaoh. All these things are very good things. Jael deceiving Sisera. So we have that in the background as well. But taking into account the further events within the story of Jacob, I think it complexifies the picture.
[11:18] Jacob then goes on to be deceived by Laban. Laban again switching the older and the younger child. And what you have in that case is a restoring of the order.

So the younger daughter, which Jacob wants to marry, Jacob wants to marry Rachel. But it's switched. So he's given Leah instead.
And he's deceived in the dark in that position of blindness. Laban later gets his comeuppance when in the dark he's deceived concerning the household gods that are taken from him by Rachel.
The daughter that he deprived of her husband in the way that he did. And so that is a significant event that suggests that his actions were not as straightforwardly righteous and justified.
Or at least that there was something about that event that that was not the way it was supposed to be. And there were consequences for that. Likewise in the story of Tamar and Judah. There was a righteous end being sought.
[12:25] Tamar had been wronged. And Tamar was seeking children. And Judah had wronged her. But yet the way it came about led to consequences. It led to Judah's line being removed from the line of succession for ten generations.

So they could not enter into the assembly for that period of time. And being cut off from the brothers. And that's a significant consequence of Judah's sinful action. And Tamar's approach to rectifying the wrongdoing of Judah.
And so there are consequences even if the thing is not. Even if the action achieves or is aimed towards a positive end. Likewise we see the deception of Jacob that occurs later concerning his preferred son.
The son that he wants to give the blessing to. And the one that he gives the coat of many colours. All these sorts of things. These things that give that son a special blessed status.
The firstborn status in many respects. And the other sons take that off him. And that again is using a kid of the goats as a means of deception.
[13:37] And so I think there's something significant about that. That suggests that this is an action with serious consequences. Jacob struggles for the rest of his life with these consequences of this event.

With the deception that occurs concerning the switch of the two daughters of Laban. With the deception that his sons commit. Concerning the supposed death of Joseph his preferred son.
And then he wrestles with God. And God says that you've wrestled with both God and man. And prevailed. And that is a significant thing. That Jacob resists his destiny.
He's the younger son. He's not supposed to get the blessing. He's not supposed to get the birthright. He's not supposed to achieve all these riches and other things. And all the things that he achieves.

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But yet he wrestles with his brother. He wrestles with his father. He wrestles with Laban and Laban's sons. And he prevails. And he prevails over God even.
[14:41] As he wrestles with the angel on the banks of the Jabbok. Which is again the name of Jacob mixed up. The letters of Jacob's name mixed up. And he's given a new name at that point.

And that is a significant thing. There's something good about the fact that he's wrestled against his destiny. He's wrestled against the fatalism. And he's said that in part I suspect.
There is a wicked brother of mine. Who's going to be inheriting this covenant blessing. He will despise the birthright. He despises the covenant. And yet this is something of great value.
And I will pursue it. I will take it from him. And there's something good about that. But yet the way he brings it about has deep and lasting consequences. It has consequences that play out in his life.
But yet at the end of his life. There's something like a reaffirmation of his original action. When he switches his hands in the blessings of Ephraim and Manasseh.
[15:40] That he switches in his blindness. In the way that Isaac would not. And so Isaac's sin. And Jacob's response to that sin. Have consequences.

And yet. And Rebecca's action as well I think. Has some degree of justification to it. But again it has consequences. Again we see in the story of Michael deceiving Saul.
Michael uses goat skin. To dress up David. David who's often compared with Jacob. In the narrative of 1st Samuel. And she uses that as a means to deceive Saul.
Concerning Jacob's. Concerning David's escape. And so putting these things together. I think what we get. Is a more complex picture. And it helps us to understand. That what we have in scripture.
Is not what we're often looking for. In a very neat moral tale. So and so is a good person. So and so is a bad person. But often it's more complicated than that. There are actions that are undertaken.
[16:38] For good ends. That have lasting consequences. That can be bad. And here I think we see. One such action. And in that respect. I would push back a bit.

Against James Jordan's position. I think he's helped me. To see a lot of the things. That I've missed here in the past. Particularly that Jacob. Is justified in many respects.
In seeking the blessing. And the birthright. He's not just a bad guy. And his deceptions are often presented. In positive ways. And so he's not. Just to be dismissed as a bad guy.
But yet this particular deception. Seems to be complicated. It seems to have repercussions. That are very negative for Jacob. In the long run. And even though he reaffirms that.
At the end. I think he bears the consequences. Of that action. So whether we interpret that. As a very. An action that. He was justified.
[17:32] And Rebecca was justified. In performing. But which. He was going to be wounded by. For the rest of his life. Or whether we see it. As a sinful action. To achieve. A positive end.

I don't know. Where exactly. To fall on that. I'm more minded. To fall on the. Former front. But. Recognising those consequences. I think. That. My judgement. Upon this action.
Is a bit. Less. Positive. Than. James Jordan's. Would be. If you have any further questions. Please leave them on my. Curious Cat account. If you would like to. Support this.
And future videos. Please. Do so using my. Patreon account. And the links for both of those below.
I've really appreciated. The feedback. That people have given me so far. Please continue to do so.
And I'll take them into account. And seek to. Reconsider the way. I'll go about these things. In the future. Thank you very much. For your time. God bless.

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