



# CAPITOL COMMISSION™

## Manipulation (Lessons from Jacob) – Genesis 25:29-34

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*For those of you beginning your first legislative session, welcome! For those returning for another legislative session, welcome back! Capitol Commission Maryland is starting our seventh year of offering pastoral care for the capitol community in Annapolis and I'm honored to spend time with you in whatever capacity I can.*

*These Bible study notes are made available to you each week during the session by email and, as we are able, by hard copies brought to your office. They can also be found on our website at [www.capitolcom.org/maryland](http://www.capitolcom.org/maryland). My prayer is that they will challenge you with the revealed truth of God and that each of us will be impressed with the ways we can live out the principles found in the Bible. If you ever have thoughts or questions about these notes, please contact me with the information listed in the heading.*

*Last year, we studied truths in a verse-by-verse series through the book of 1 John. This session will be a bit more topical as we consider lessons from the life of Jacob, the Old Testament patriarch who God changed in a dramatic way as the nation of Israel was just starting.*

*In Genesis 12, God made a covenant with a man named Abraham that he would do three things: give him a land to live in, make a great nation come from him and that the world would be blessed through him. Jacob, Abraham's grandson, lived an interesting life of struggle and stubbornness, but God was using his circumstances to fulfill his covenant to Abraham and the nation of Israel that he fathered. Today, we'll see a well-known incident in the life of Jacob (and his twin brother Esau) that still speaks to how we should treat others.*

*Genesis 25:29-34 - Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. And Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!" (Therefore his name was called Edom.) Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright now." Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" Jacob said, "Swear to me now." So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.*

### THE DEFAULTS (25:29, 30)

The twins, Esau and Jacob, could not have been more different from each other. The Scriptures tell us that Esau (whose name meant "red") was the first-born, was red and hairy, and was a skillful hunter who loved to be outdoors. Because of the meat he brought home, his father, Isaac, showed preference toward him. In this passage, he is in his default activity, coming home from possibly days of hunting.

Jacob, on the other hand was said to be smooth-skinned, the second-born who held on to his brother's heel as he was born. He was a homebody who stayed around the tent with his mother, Rebekah, who preferred him to Esau. His name was unfortunate, because it meant "deceiver". In Genesis 25, he is where we would expect him to be – at home cooking dinner.

So, the scene is set. A hungry hunter, a good stew on the fire and a cook whose name means "deceiver".

### THE DEMAND (25:31)

After Esau asks for some of the stew, Jacob sees an opportunity. He has something Esau wants and Esau has something he wants, namely a birthright. And that's what Jacob demanded.

In those days, the birthright was the legal financial and positional importance granted to the firstborn male. He had the rights to a double portion of the inheritance and the spiritual headship of the family when the time came. With this birthright came great honor and position, so this was no small thing Jacob was demanding.

What is strange is that God had already said that Jacob would have position over Esau. Before they were even born, God gave this prophecy to Isaac and Rebekah, when she prayed to ask why her unborn twins were struggling so much inside of her.

*Genesis 25:23 - And the LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger."*

So God's plan all along was for Jacob to be the one blessed to be the head of the family. How would God have done that? We'll never know because Jacob took matters into his own hands and took advantage of Esau when he was weak to take away the birthright.

Jacob also knew his brother had a character problem. He demanded the birthright immediately (he says "now" twice in this paragraph.) Esau apparently was an impulsive man who responded to his immediate desires. We get some more details about him from the New Testament.

*Hebrews 12:16, 17 - that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.*

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There is sexual immorality and unholiness all around us. That was Esau. His love for roaming away from home left him with little or no accountability and he impulsively fed his desires at any moment. You and I know the real temptations that are present during the session. At any time, really. Without accountability to God and our spouse or children or godly, caring friends, we too can fall to temptation like Esau. Please don't let that happen. Seek accountability and don't rely solely on your own willpower to reject sin. We all need accountability.

### THE DECISION (25:32)

Esau's impulsive nature is clear here as he considers his hunger. What good is the birthright if he dies? His decision to trade the rights of the first-born is a warning to us all that the important things we hold dear can be compromised and traded away as well. How many times have we seen marriages or relationships with children or even one's own good name traded away for something of lesser value? Political power, money or illicit pleasure should never have priority over the vow of marriage, yet we know there will be some sacrifice their spouse on the altar of politics and hedonism.

The time to avoid a damaging decision is long before the temptation happens. But make no mistake, it is a decision and blame can't be transferred to others.

*James 1:14, 15 - But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*

### THE DEAL (25:33, 34)

So Esau, in his weakened state and impulsive character, follows through on his end, selling his birthright to Jacob, who also meets his end of the bargain by serving the lentil stew and bread to his brother. The passage says Esau "despised" his birthright that day.

There is much to apply from this passage. We have been a little hard on Esau for his lack of morals and knee-jerk approach to life, but Jacob had his own issues in this story we must learn from.

We can manipulate, just like Jacob did. We can get people to do what we want. Jacob's very name meant "deceiver", but even with our names, the capacity to take advantage of the weaknesses of others is a temptation we must refuse.

We can do this with spouses, with whom we negotiate and make "bargains" with all the time. Power struggles within the marriage relationship can get ugly and we should be reminded often of the perfect standard of how marriage should be handled, which does not leave room for selfish manipulation.

*Ephesians 5:28-33 - In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

Manipulation is also easy to do in parenting. When we guide our children, we must take care to have right motives and reasons for our decisions.

If you are reading this as a staffer, there may be temptation to manipulate your boss. See that your work ethic is strong and your communication is truthful when serving your legislator. Constituents can also be taken advantage of if you're not careful. Again, honesty and integrity in your motivation is always the way to go. Jacob struggled with that and we need to learn from his example.

As legislators, you realize there will be a massive tendency to take advantage of your colleagues, whether they are on your side of the aisle or the other side. Political expediency may make this an easy decision to manipulate, but again, the choice to be forthright and deal squarely with people is not done in the spur of the moment. Often I hear how members undercut one another and leave a trail of unintended (and sometimes calculated and intended) consequences behind. Let's learn from Jacob. Let's treat those in our spheres of influence with love, grace and godly wisdom.

*James 3:16-18 - For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*