

**To facilitate group discussion, Public Affairs Television, Inc. has created the 175 page *Talking About Genesis: A Resource Guide*. You can purchase a copy of the Resource Guide for \$5.95 wherever books are sold or by calling Doubleday at 1-800-323-9872. In Illinois, call 847-768-7000.**

**Below is an excerpt from the chapter “Blessed Deception”. In addition to the essay and activities found below, the full guide contains a discussion of siblings, brotherhood and twins.**

## BLESSED DECEPTION

### THE STORY OF ISAAC, REBEKAH, ESAU, AND JACOB: GENESIS 25-28

Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The Lord answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. The babies jostled within her . . . so she went to inquire of the Lord. 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." When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment, so they named him Esau hairy. After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel, so he was named Jacob he grasps the heels, or he deceives. (Genesis 25:21-26, New International Version)

Now read the story of Isaac, Rebekah, Esau, and Jacob in your Bible. As you do, consider the following questions:

- How is Rebekah's relationship with God different from those of the women who preceded her in Genesis?
- What is so important about blessing, whether from Isaac or from God? Can a blessing be shared?
- What motivates Rebekah?
- Is deception ever warranted?
- Why is brotherhood so difficult between brothers?

### REBEKAH, A TRICKSTER HEROINE

by Susan Niditch

In Genesis 27, Rebekah is the trickster who formulates the plan and succeeds, moving the men around her like chess pieces. Lest the reader think that here one finally encounters a more liberated woman, beware that again success is gained through the symbolic counterpart of sex: food. Moreover, the status in question is not that of the woman but of her son. Nevertheless, within the confines and assumptions of her male-dominated world, Rebekah is very good at what she does. Indeed, she determines and directs the course of the clan and in doing so is the one who knows and fulfills what God wants . . . Rebekah's wisdom . . . is a vicarious power that achieves success for oneself through the success of male children, a power symbolically grounded in the preparation and serving of food. It involves as well a willingness to sacrifice oneself ("Let your curse be on me," 27:13) if necessary for the sake of the son. Such is woman's power in a man's world . . . It is the power of those not in authority. The woman in ancient Israelite literature who would succeed almost must be a trickster . . . Yet so clever is this trickster . . . so completely superior in wisdom to the men around her that she seems to be the creation of a woman

storyteller, one who . . . subverts its (male-centered) rules indirectly by making Rebekah a trickster heroine, for this is also woman's power in a man's world, a power of mockery, humor, and deception.

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#### ACTIVITIES FOR GROUPS AND FAMILIES

#### READING THE TEXT: JACOB AND ESAU

In your group, read Genesis 25:23-34 aloud and then have people identify at least five ways that Jacob and Esau are different that might have caused conflict between the brothers while they were growing up. (Think about: physical traits, the work they do, parental attachments and preferences, linguistic and intellectual abilities, personalities.) On one side of a big piece of paper, write down the characteristics you identify as Esau's; on the other side, write down Jacob's. What are the different definitions of manhood that emerge from these different characteristics? Are there similar points of difference and conflict in your own family? Are you and your brothers and sisters alike? How do your personal experiences shape your sympathy and antipathy toward Esau and/or Jacob? Have one group member play Esau and another play Jacob: Place them in a few situations and listen to them talk to one another. What can you learn from listening to the brothers this way?

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**Below is an excerpt from the chapter "Apocalypse". In addition to the essay and activities found below, the full guide contains a discussion of the environmental themes of the story.**