

The Search for Waldo Read Genesis 27, 37, and 38

My grandchildren love searching for Waldo. Complex and intricate pictures hide this red and white clad man. Waldo's tiny string bean portrait links a variety of unconnected scenes. Sometimes it takes merely a few minutes to find Waldo, at other times the hunt is more frustrating. Yet my grandchildren persist. Something like a "Waldo" lies hidden in the Jacob chronicles of the book of Genesis. And, just as Waldo unites a series of scenes in Martin Handford's books, a "kid" joins three narratives in the annals of Jacob. Your assignment, reader, if you decide to accept it, is to find Waldo (the "kid").

The first link of the trio of stories occurs when Rebecca learns that her husband Isaac is about to give the family blessing to Esau (Genesis 27). She craves the blessing for her beloved second born son, Jacob. Hence, Rebecca commands Jacob to "Go to the flock, and fetch me from there two choice kids" (Gen. 27:9). She informs Jacob that she has decided to use the kid goats in order to prepare "a dish for your father of the kind he loves" (v. 9). Rebecca's intention is to have Jacob deceive his father into granting the blessing to him rather than to Esau. To accomplish this, she places Esau's garments on Jacob (v. 15), and uses the "skins of the kids" to "put on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck" (v. 16). The ruse works. When Jacob enters Isaac's tent, his blind father does not recognize him as Jacob for his hands are, "like Esau's hands, hairy." Thus, Isaac blesses Jacob (v. 27). A son deceives his father.

The story of Joseph's enslavement is the second narrative of the trio (Genesis 37). Ten jealous brothers concoct a plan to kill Joseph as he comes searching for them. As Joseph languishes in a pit in which his brothers have dumped him, his brother Judah decides that killing Joseph is not advantageous for them. A band of merchants, traveling toward Egypt, prompt an imaginative scheme. "What profit is it for us to kill our brother," Judah insists (37:26). He suggests, "Come let us sell him" (v. 27). To deceive Jacob their father, who will be waiting for Joseph's return, they take "Joseph's tunic" and, after slaughtering "a kid goat," dip the tunic "in the blood" (v. 31). When they present the coat to Jacob, he recognizes it. With great anguish Jacob wails, "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him" (v. 33). Again, a ruse works. Sons deceive their father.

In the final story, a daughter-in-law deceives her father-in-law. This narrative (Genesis 38) begins with Judah reneging on his promise to Tamar his daughter-in-law. Her first two husbands, Judah's sons, have died. According to the levirate law, Judah was to provide his third-born son as a husband for her. The levirate law (the Biblical forerunner of today's social security laws for widows) required that a widow, who had no children to provide for her, be wed to the brother of the dead husband. Since Judah has not satisfied his obligation, Tamar improvises. Removing her widow's garments, she dons the garments of a prostitute and positions herself along the path he will travel. As Judah is passing by, he assumes Tamar is "a harlot" for she has "covered her face" (38:15). In payment for her services, he vows "a kid goat from the flock" (v. 17). She accepts the vow only after Judah relinquishes to her his seal, cord, and staff as a pledge. Unwittingly, Judah fulfills the levirate law by having intercourse with his daughter-in-law, which results in the birth of twin sons. A ruse works again. A daughter-in-law deceives her father-in-law.

Three acts of deception. Each act is linked by a Waldo-like figure—a goat “kid.” And each son, who has deceived his father is himself deceived by a son or a daughter-in-law. Linking narratives through one or more repeated terms is the third key to a dynamic Bible study. This third key often reveals a multiple punch. The triple punch in the previous narratives teaches that deception has its consequences. When we suppose that “a ruse works,” we ourselves are deceived.