

# ESAU AND JACOB AND THE BIRTHRIGHT

God promised to give Jacob the birthright. He didn't need Jacob and his mother's help. But they thought they needed to lie. Their lies caused many problems.

by Shelby Faith

Abraham's son Isaac married Rebekah when he was about 40 years old. She still didn't have a child after 20 years. Isaac prayed that she would be able to have children. God answered his prayer, and Rebekah became pregnant.

But Rebekah felt something was wrong within her. She asked God what was happening. God told her she would have two babies, representing two nations. One would be stronger than the other one, and the older one would serve the younger one.

When she gave birth, there were twin sons. The first one born was covered with thick hair all over his body. They named him Esau. Right away the other son was born. His hand was holding onto Esau's heel. He was named Jacob.

Because Esau was born first, he would have normally received the birthright and blessing from his father, Isaac. (The birthright would give the son a bigger part of what the family owned and more authority. Since God had made big promises to Isaac, this birthright was a big deal.) But God had told Rebekah that their younger son, Jacob, would be blessed.

## QUIZ TIME

Why did Esau sell his birthright?

## ESAU SELLS THE BIRTHRIGHT

As the boys grew up, there were many differences between them. Esau became a skillful hunter and liked to be out in the fields. Jacob was a gentle man. He helped take care of the sheep and goats.

Esau would go hunting and bring back game meat. Isaac loved Esau because of the food he would prepare from his hunting. Jacob stayed around home and was close to his mother. Rebekah favored him more.

One day Esau came home very hungry and tired. Jacob had cooked a pot of stew. It looked and smelled so good. Esau was so hungry that he wanted some of it right away.

Esau said, "Please feed me some of your red stew."

But Jacob said, "I'll feed you if you sell me your birthright today."

Esau said, "Look, I feel like I'm about to die, so what good is my birthright to me?"

Then Jacob made Esau swear that he would give his birthright to him. After that, Jacob gave Esau some bread and stew. Esau ate until he was full and then went on his way.

Esau foolishly gave away his birthright for just a bowl of stew. He would regret this later.

## TAKING THE BLESSING

As the years passed, Isaac grew old, feeble and blind. He said it was time for him to pass on the family blessing before he died.

Isaac called Esau and said, “Son, I’m getting old. Please hunt for some meat for me. Make me some of the delicious food that I love. Then I’ll bless you before I die.”

Now Rebekah was listening. Esau left to go hunting. Meanwhile, Rebekah called Jacob to her. She said, “I heard your father speak to Esau. He told Esau to hunt for some meat and make a meal for him. Then he plans to bless him before he dies.

“Now do what I tell you. Bring me two young goats so I can make a delicious meal of them for your father. You shall take it to him for him to eat. Then he will bless you before his death.”

(Rebekah knew lying was not right, but she wanted Jacob to have the blessing. Rebekah and Jacob should not have done this. Jacob would later have someone lie to him and trick him.)

Jacob said, “Esau is a hairy man. I have smooth skin. My father may feel my skin. He will know I’m not Esau. Then I’ll be cursed instead of blessed.”

But his mother said, “Let your curse be on me. Just do what I say.”

## TRICKING ISAAC

So Jacob brought the goats to his mother. She made a delicious meal of them.

Then Rebekah took some of Esau’s clothes for Jacob to put on. She took the skins of the goats and put them on Jacob’s hands and around his neck.

Then she gave the food to Jacob. Jacob went to his father and said, “My father.”

Isaac said, “Who are you?”

Jacob said, “I am Esau, your firstborn. I have done just as you told me. Eat the meal that I prepared for you. Then bless me.”

Isaac asked, “How did you find it so quickly?”

Jacob said, “The LORD your God brought it to me.”

Then Isaac said, “Come close, that I may feel you and see whether you are really Esau.”

Jacob went near his father. Isaac felt his hands and arms. He said, “You sound like Jacob, but your hands feel like Esau’s.” Jacob’s hands and arms now felt hairy because they were covered with goat skins.

Isaac asked again, “Are you really my son Esau?”

Jacob said, “I am.”

Then Isaac ate the food. He said, “Now come close and kiss me.”

As Jacob came close and kissed his father, Isaac smelled his clothing. He said, “You smell like a field which the LORD has blessed. May God give you the dew of heaven, the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. Let people serve you and nations bow down to you. Rule over your brethren. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be those who bless you!”

### QUIZ TIME

What did Rebekah tell Jacob to do?

## ESAU FINDS OUT

Jacob left after his father finished blessing him. Just then Esau came in from his hunting. He had made the meal Isaac loved and brought it to him. He said, “Get up, father, and eat this meal. Then bless me.”

Isaac was confused. He said, “Who are you?”

Esau said, “I am your firstborn son, Esau.”

Isaac started shaking. He said, “Who? Someone just brought me a meal, and I ate all of it before you came. I have already blessed him.”

When Esau heard this, he cried out angrily. He said, “Bless me also!”

Isaac said, “Your brother tricked me and has taken away your blessing.”

Esau said, “Jacob already took my birthright, and now he has taken my blessing too!”

Then Isaac said, “I have made him your master. I asked God to give him grain and wine. What shall I do now for you?”

Esau again cried out, “Do you have only one blessing? Bless me also!”

Esau was very unhappy to hear he would serve his brother.

## ESAU'S ANGER

Esau hated Jacob for taking his blessing. He said to himself, “After my father dies, I will kill my brother Jacob.”

Rebekah heard about Esau's threat. She feared for Jacob's life. She spoke with Isaac. He sent Jacob away to Rebekah's brother, Laban. Isaac told Jacob to choose a wife from among Laban's daughters.

Jacob went to live with his uncle Laban, where he would live for many years. Laban would trick him as Jacob had tricked his father and brother.

Later, Jacob repented for what he had done to his brother. God showed him mercy. His name was changed to Israel.

## QUESTIONS

Here are some questions to think about or talk about as a family:

1. Who was the firstborn who would normally receive the birthright and blessing from Isaac?
2. How were Esau and Jacob different?
3. How did Esau please his father, Isaac?
4. Why did Esau sell his birthright to Jacob? What did Jacob do to get the birthright from Esau?
5. How did Jacob trick his father into giving him the blessing?
6. What happened when Esau found out what Jacob had done?
7. What happened to Jacob because of his lies?

These stories are found in Genesis 25, 27 and the beginning of 28. Read more about Jacob in the Bible Stories “[Jacob Is Deceived by Laban](#)” and “[Jacob and His 12 Sons](#).”



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