

The Birthright

25:27-34

We continue in our study of the generations of Isaac

This 8th book of Genesis in the 25th ch. focuses primarily on Jacob

Last week we looked at his birth, the turbulent pregnancy of Rebekah his mother after waiting 20 years to conceive, and the violent battle in the womb between he and his twin Esau

Rebekah's pregnancy was so difficult she feared that neither she nor her child would survive it, not yet knowing ... twins

She sought the Lord in prayer, and God told her what was going on inside of her

Genesis 25:23 (NASB)

The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb; And two peoples will be separated from your body; And one people shall be stronger than the other; And the older shall serve the younger."

She had no idea she was pregnant with twins, there were no sonograms in those days, but God's words assured her that both she and the unborn children would survive

God tells Rebekah what is going on and why, as well as what will happen in the future

Two nations or two peoples will come from her

One stronger than the other

The older shall serve the younger

God is telling Rebekah not only of the struggle her two boys will have with each other, but also of the conflict the nation of Israel will experience after it is formed over 500 years in the future

The two nations, the two peoples are the Israelites and the Edomites, the descendants of Jacob and Esau

Esau is stronger than Jacob, and the Edomites will be militarily stronger than Israelites

The younger serving the older is in anticipation of the birthright exchange we will study today, and a prophecy of what will happen in Israel's history hundreds of years in the future

We will see in ch. 32 that Jacob will submit to Esau, but the descendants of Esau will serve the descendants of Jacob throughout

the OT, thus fulfilling the words of God

The twins are born, Esau is red and hairy, his name means red

And Jacob is grasping his heel, and his name means he grabs the heel

The word “heel” can be used metaphorically, indicating a trusted friend’s deception,

The child grabbing the heel conveys the ideas of not only deception, but also betrayal, and opportunism, and this is who Jacob becomes, as we will see today in

B. The Birthright

Genesis 25:27–34 (NASB95)

27 When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field, but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents.

28 Now Isaac loved Esau, because he had a taste for game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

29 When Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished;

30 and Esau said to Jacob, “Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished.” Therefore his name was called Edom.

31 But Jacob said, “First sell me your birthright.”

32 Esau said, “Behold, I am about to die; so

of what use then is the birthright to me?”

33 And Jacob said, “First swear to me”; so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob.

34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

1. The setting

Just as we saw last week, there is another long gap in time

27 When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field, but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents.

The boys are now grown up, but it can't be known for sure how old they are

The Hebrew word for boy can refer to the age range of an infant to a young adult

It is used in Exodus to refer to Moses floating in the basket when he is found by Pharaoh's daughter

Isaac when he was 14 in Gen 21 when Ab was sending Hagar and Ish away, and Joseph when he was 17 in Gen 37 when he was pasturing the flock

It can also be used opposite of old to

express a contrast between young and old, which would refer to young men and old men

It would be safe to say they were older teens/very young adults since both were still at home and not married, but we can't know for sure an exact age

What is most likely is that Abraham would be dead by this point, but he most certainly would have told both boys about the promise God made him, and Rebekah would have told A about the prophetic word told her by God and there would have been some understanding about what was ahead for J

We could assume Ab would have had some interesting words with Jacob about the future because of the parallels between Ish and Isaac and Esau and J

Both of the younger boys were the boys of promise, the ones God had chosen

Vrs 27 tells us Esau becomes a man of the field: a hunter

A trait that is viewed negatively in the Bible

Nimrod, the founder of the cities that stood opposed to God in Gen 10 is identified as a mighty hunter

Ishmael was also a hunter at home in the open country who was disassociated from mainstream society

The biblical writers favored pastoralists like shepherds and those that raised animals, not hunters, those seen as predators

Jacob was such a man, a peaceful man, which translates as civilized, a man of the tents

These descriptions set up a stark contrast between the two

One, a rugged, brute hunter, almost like a barbarian, the other, a cultured and complete man, the kind parents would like their daughter to date and eventually marry

Of course, this only speaks of the outward appearance of Jacob and not his moral character, inwardly, he is clever and conniving

2. The friction

28 Now Isaac loved Esau, because he had a taste for game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Adding fuel to the dysfunction of the family, we see here that each parent had a favorite

Isaac and Esau are aligned together by a love for wild game, and they tied Esau's birthright and blessing to their appetites

Isaac was old... **Genesis 27:3-4 (NASB)**

3 "Now then, please take your gear, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me;

4 and prepare a savory dish for me such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, so that my soul may bless you before I die."

This is an odd connection for such an important moment

We aren't told why Rebekah favored Jacob, but it was likely because he was always home, probably always helping, spending lots of time with her

Another point of favoritism that could be assumed, but isn't stated in the text, is that both Rebekah and Isaac would have understood what God's words to Rebekah would have meant for the boys, especially with the experience and influence of Ab

If Jacob was in fact the chosen one by God, as His word to Rebekah indicates, certainly that would have circulated within the family at some point

And assuming it did, Jacob likely had little faith that Isaac, his father, would give him the blessing, or that God would fulfill His words spoken to his mother

This would have likely cause Jacob to ingratiate himself to his mother to help plead his case, which she in fact does later in the story

So there are several points of friction here:
The polar opposites of the people E and J
The preference the parents have for E and J
The words God spoke to R about E and J
The lack of faith J had in those words

Each boy would have been able to see the favoritism being displayed by one parent upon the other, and it would have created immense tension between the two

And yet, many years later, Jacob was guilty of the same thing

Genesis 37:3-4 (NASB)

3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic.
4 His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and so they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms.

3. The opportunity

29 When Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished;

Jacob, the skilled homebody, was cooking lentil stew, a meatless dish, when the unsuccessful hunter Esau comes home from the field famished

The word famished means he was in a weakened state, the condition of a depleted traveler

Esau was vulnerable, and Jacob was ready to take advantage of the situation

The battle that began in the womb, that was visualized in the grasping of the heel at birth, that was realized in the differences in their vocations, lived out amongst the favoritism of their parents, set against a backdrop of a lack of Jacob's faith, was very likely a constant in Jacob's mind

The time was now, the best moment has come

The first recorded dialogue between the embattled brothers

4. The weakness

30 and Esau said to Jacob, "Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I

am famished.” Therefore his name was called Edom.

Esau begs for a swallow of the red stuff
The phrase ‘let me have a swallow’ carries the idea of devouring or gulping down

It doesn’t mean just a spoonful as we may think

The color of the stew is red, giving him the name Edom, consistent with his color at birth

31 But Jacob said, “First sell me your birthright.”

The weakness here is mutual, and for both, there is a physical and spiritual weakness present

Esau’s physical weakness makes him a slave to his appetite, so much so, he is willing to forsake something of great spiritual value, the birthright blessing

Jacob’s physical weakness makes him a conniving manipulator, willing to take advantage of his own brother for selfish gain, and he displays zero faith in God’s ability to accomplish the words spoken to R during her pregnancy

What God had spoken to Rebekah meant nothing, as far as he was concerned, it was up to him to secure his future

The birthright blessing was a common practice in ancient cultures

The firstborn son received special honor because he symbolized his father's power and potency

This practice would be carried on for centuries and was eventually adopted into Jewish culture, which consisted of a double portion of the inheritance

Jacob makes an extreme request in exchange for single meal of stew

But Jacob knows more about his brother than we do, he knows his heart, his character, his values, his priorities

While Jacob is very clearly living up to his name, he knows his brother well and he knows he is likely to do most anything to satisfy his physical desires and physical needs

We see verification of this in Esau's response

32 Esau said, "Behold, I am about to die; so

of what use then is the birthright to me?”

A bit of hyperbole on Esau's part, but likely consistent with who he is and what he is like. To downplay his failure at an unsuccessful hunt, he exaggerates his exhaustion and his need, all he can think about is satisfying his hunger and his thirst.

He exclaims that he is about to die, so what good is a birthright?

And this is exactly what Jacob expects his brother to say in this moment.

Esau is impulsive and so driven by his appetites, both physical and otherwise, that he will do most anything in order to satisfy them.

And in this moment, a birthright means nothing to him, only the satisfaction of a meal to gratify his hunger.

5. The oath

33 And Jacob said, “First swear to me”; so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob.

Jacob also knows his brother is likely to not uphold his end of the bargain, so he forces his brother to swear to him that he is selling

his birthright,

In doing so, he is making an oath
When one makes an oath, he does so
before God, he invokes God as his witness,
it is a solemn thing, a sacred thing, and so
Esau sells his birthright for a single meal

6. The commentary

34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Jacob gives his brother bread, stew and drink and Esau goes on his way as if he has just eaten an ordinary meal

He has been physically satisfied and he gives absolutely no thought to what he has just done

Moses' commentary on this exchange is recorded for us: thus Esau despised his birthright

The selling of the birthright leaves neither Jacob nor Esau in a positive light

Esau is willing to sell perhaps the most honorable and treasured aspect of a father-child relationship for a single meal

Jacob is willing to manipulate and take advantage of his brother in a desperate condition to advance his own position

The commentary on Esau in the NT isn't very flattering

Hebrews 12:15-17 (NASB)

15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;

16 that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. ****

17 For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

Esau had an eat drink and be merry attitude, he lived for the moment with no real thought about tomorrow, the tears he shed over losing the blessing were no different than those of Judas after betraying Jesus

His willingness to sell his birthright for a single meal shows that God's choice of Jacob over Esau did not run contrary to the wishes of either of the two brothers

It is clear from the narrative that Esau was

one who “despised” his birthright, while Jacob is portrayed as one who would go to great lengths to gain it

while Moses makes no commentary on the virtue of Jacob, he will tell Jacob’s story we will see his eventual transformation from a man of deception and manipulation to a man of faith

we should all give thanks that God is willing to take people like Jacob, people like us, and use them for His purposes

God IS a God of grace, He is a God worthy of worship and worthy of praise