

The Birth and Early Life of Jacob and Esau

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to explain how the various Arabic nations are related to Abraham. We also want to help them explain why Abraham was promised that the blessing given to him was to be passed on to Isaac. In this topic, we will begin to learn about the development of the family of Isaac.

In Genesis 25:19-23, we read, “This *is* the genealogy of Isaac, Abraham’s son. Abraham begot Isaac. Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah as wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan Aram, the sister of Laban the Syrian. Now Isaac pleaded with the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived. But the children struggled together within her; and she said, ‘If *all is* well, why *am I like* this?’ So she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said to her: ‘Two nations *are* in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; *one* people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger.’” We saw that the families of Keturah and Ishmael were summarized in our last topic. Here, we are introduced to the family of Isaac and Rebekah.

Isaac and Rebekah had been married almost twenty years and had not been given any children by the Lord. As a result, we see that Isaac began to plead with the Lord to make it possible for Rebekah to have a child. We see that the Lord granted his plea, and Rebekah became pregnant. This is a clear reminder that the Lord is the One who makes it possible for a couple to have children. Psalm 127:3 says, “Behold, children *are* a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb *is* a reward.” Many couples have a great desire for children but have not been able to have any. Here, we see that Isaac gives us an example of one thing that a couple can do. If God has a particular reason for not giving them children, He will assure them of His grace. 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 says, “And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Here, we see that Rebekah conceived in answer to the prayer of Isaac. However, Rebekah had a new problem. She felt like there was a conflict going on inside of her. Just as Isaac had done when she could not conceive, she prayed to the Lord to ask the Lord what was happening that caused her to feel like a big conflict was going on inside her body. The Lord also answered her prayer as the Lord let her know that she was going to have twins. However, the twins were very different from each other and they were already in conflict. The twins would become two separate nations. They would have two very different groups of descendants. One group of descendants would be much stronger than the other. A final thing about these two different sons was the fact that the older son and his descendants would serve the younger son and his descendants. Rebekah was able to understand what was happening within her once the Lord had explained this to her.

Genesis 25:24-28 says, “So when her days were fulfilled *for her* to give birth, indeed *there were* twins in her womb. And the first came out red. *He was* like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau. Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau’s heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac *was* sixty years old when she bore them. So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau because he ate *of his* game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.” We see that there were noticeable differences between the two sons from the day they were born. As God had told Rebekah, she did

have twins when the day of birth came. We see that the first son looked very different from the second son when they were born.

The skin of the first son was very red when he was born. In addition, when he was born, he had hair all over him. There was so much hair on this older son that it almost looked like he was wearing clothing made of hair. That was how he got his name, because the name “Esau” means *hairy*. In verse 30, we see that Esau was later given a second name. Genesis 25:30 says, “And Esau said to Jacob, ‘Please feed me with that same red *stew*, for I *am* weary.’ Therefore his name was called Edom.” In this verse, we see that Esau was also given the name Edom. “Edom” means *red*. As a result, the two things that were true at his birth became a part of both of the names he was given, even though he received the second name quite a number of years later. His younger brother was born very soon after Esau. In fact, the younger son was holding onto the heel of Esau when Esau was born. That became the reason why the younger son was given the name Jacob. The name “Jacob” means *heel holder or supplanter*. Many cultures name children based on things the parents first see when a child is born. That was certainly true in the case of Esau and Jacob. We also see that Isaac was sixty years old when the twins were born.

Other differences became noticeable as the two boys grew and became young men. Esau loved to be out in the fields and wooded areas and he became a skillful hunter. In contrast, Jacob became a very quiet and ordinary young man who preferred to spend most of his time in the tents. This created a new problem as the boys grew into young men. Isaac loved to eat the meat that Esau got through his hunting. As a result, Esau became his favorite son. Meanwhile, Jacob was quick to help care for the tents and do other things around the tents. As a result, he became the favorite son of Rebekah. This always creates problems when a parent has a favorite child and favors that child over the other brothers and sisters. We will certainly see how this favoritism, by the parents, created conflicts between the two sons.

We see some additional differences in the two sons, in Genesis 25:29-34, where we read, “Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he *was* weary. And Esau said to Jacob, ‘Please feed me with that same red *stew*, for I *am* weary.’ Therefore his name was called Edom. But Jacob said, ‘Sell me your birthright as of this day.’ And Esau said, ‘Look, I *am* about to die; so what *is* this birthright to me?’ Then Jacob said, ‘Swear to me as of this day.’ So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised *his* birthright.” Here, we see Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of stew. We will see that really shows the lack of spiritual life in Esau.

As a part of liking to work in the tents, we see that Jacob liked to cook. One day, Esau came in from the field and he was tired and hungry. Jacob had just finished preparing a nice red stew. Esau saw the stew and immediately asked Jacob for some of the stew. There had apparently been an ongoing discussion between Jacob and Esau about the meaning and importance of the birthright, which belonged to the oldest child. Jacob had been able to tell by the attitude of Esau that the birthright did not mean much to him. As a result, Jacob decided to make a deal with Esau. Jacob asked Esau to sell the birthright to him for a bowl of stew. Esau showed his complete lack of interest in the birthright by his statement, as he said that the birthright would be worth nothing if he died of hunger.

After a day out in the field, an extra hour or even two does not mean life and death. Instead, it means that you are just in a hurry and do not want to wait an hour. That is why it shows that Esau really had no interest in the birthright. Jacob just said, “Swear to me as of this day.” Esau quickly made the promise that the birthright was sold, as of that time, to Jacob. Then, Jacob gave Esau bread and the lentil stew to eat. Esau ate the food and then got up and went his way.

By this action, we see that Esau despised his birthright. The word translated “despised” means *to show contempt or to treat as worthless*. Hebrews 12:15-16 says, “looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there *be* any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.” The word translated “profane” means *ungodly*.

What was the importance of the birthright? The most important part of the birthright was the responsibility to be the spiritual leader of the family. Exodus 4:22-23 says, “Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord: ‘Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn.’”” In the Old Testament, Israel was chosen to be a priesthood to speak to God for the world. Psalm 67:5-7 says, “Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. *Then* the earth shall yield her increase; God, our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.” In the same way, each individual father was to be a spiritual priest for his family and speak to God for his family. Here, we see that Esau was an ungodly man who had no desire to be a priest on behalf of his family. He was very willing to get rid of that responsibility and also get a bowl of stew for getting rid of it. He was actually showing the condition of his heart by his actions. That was why he could not inherit the blessing.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain why the Lord told Rebekah that her older son would serve the younger son. The Lord knew that Esau would reject the spiritual leadership of his family, so his family certainly could not provide the spiritual leadership of the nation. May the Lord richly bless you as you equip your children to explain these things to others.