

Then Jacob Gave Esau Some Lentil Stew and Esau Despised His Birthright

25: 27-34

DIG: What kind of a man was Esau? What is God's opinion about Ya'akov? How do we know that? What do you think of Jacob and Rebekah each picking a favorite son? In what sense did the LORD love Ya'akov and hate Esau? What did Esau really think of his birthright as the elder son? Why did Esau fail the supreme test of his life? Were there consequences? What was Jacob's sin?

REFLECT: Jacob didn't have to bargain for the birthright. ADONAI had already given it to him. How often do we manipulate others to get what we want, instead of letting the LORD work things out in His timing and in His way? Is your faith ready for the supreme test in your life? Have you ever disparaged the promises of God in exchange for some worldly privilege?

Sadly, things of great spiritual value are often handled in profane or crafty ways. Some people treat spiritual and eternal things with contempt, for they see them as of no value. And others, though regarding such things highly, make the things of God serve themselves through craftiness and manipulation. Esau and Jacob are examples of both types.⁴⁰⁹

The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter just like Nimrod (10:8-12). In the context of Genesis, being a skillful hunter has a negative connotation, just as it was with Nimrod. And he was a man of the open country, a man of the world. He decided to do his own thing and not work within the family unit. He was very streetwise and worldly.

In contrast to his brother, however, Jacob was a *righteous* man. The NIV says Jacob was a quiet man, and the NKJ says he was a mild man. But the Hebrew word *tam* is always translated elsewhere as *righteous, perfect (KJ), or upright, whole, complete, blameless or without blemish*. For example, when speaking of Noah, the Bible says: Noah was a *righteous (tam) man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God (6:9)*. ADONAI puts Jacob in the same company as Noah. And again, when the LORD was speaking to Satan He said: Have you considered my servant Job. There is no one like him; he is *blameless and upright (tam), a man who fears God and shuns evil (Job 1:8)*. Again, ADONAI puts Ya'akov in the same company as Job. It does not mean sinless perfection, but it has the sense of *righteousness, or a man whose heart is right towards God*. As a result, the word *tam* is never translated quiet or mild anywhere else in the TANAKH. Then why is it translated thus here? Not because it doesn't make sense in the context, but because it does

not fit people's preconceived notions about **Jacob**. Here is the beginning of this trend that the way **Ya'akov** is portrayed by Scripture is the opposite of the way **he** has been portrayed by many pastors, commentators and even some Bible translators. This is a very dangerous proposition (**Revelation 22:18-19**).

Therefore, because **Jacob was a righteous man, he stayed among the tents of his father (25:27)**. Regrettably, **Ya'akov** is often portrayed as a mama's boy, but this is not what it means at all. **Jacob** chose the same occupation as **his father**, that of a shepherd and shepherds lived in **tents**. This was true of Abraham and it was true of **his father Isaac**. Being a shepherd was not the job of a sissy. Later on we will see how much suffering **Jacob** had to endure as a result of being a shepherd. David would be a shepherd, and it was no easy task, protecting **his flock** from both **the lion and the bear (First Samuel 17:34-37)**. **Ya'akov** chose to be a shepherd, and work within the family unit and within the covenant, in contrast to being a **hunter and a man of the world** like **his brother Esau**. Unfortunately, the parents mirrored the conflict between **the twin boys**.

Two unwise parents only added fuel to the fire of any potential problems that **Esav** and **Jacob** might have had with each other. **Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau**. Literally, the Hebrew reads that **Yitz'chak had game in his mouth**. Because **Isaac** had a preference for **wild game, he** had a preference for **Esau**. Not exactly a spiritual outlook, but then again Abraham wasn't sinless and neither was **his son**. With the understanding that **Rebekah** told **her** husband the prophecy of **the LORD** when **she** was pregnant, **Isaac** basically ignored the choice of **God**. At some point it seems as though **Rebekah** had also told **Ya'akov** of **his** destiny. **ADONAI** said: **Yet I have loved, or chosen, Jacob, but Esav I have hated, or not chosen (Malachi 1:2b-3a)**. **She** initially favored **Ya'akov** because **she** wanted to follow **the LORD's** will. And because **she** believed **ADONAI**, **she** knew that **Jacob** was **the son of promise** and not **Esau**. As a result, **she** and **Jacob** became kindred spirits, and **Rebekah** loved **Jacob** because **God loved Jacob (25:28)**.

Jacob was a righteous man and wanted to see the will of **God** accomplished. **He** also wanted to serve **ADONAI** and valued the covenant that **the LORD** had made with **his father Abraham**. The material blessings were immaterial to **him**. **His mother** had told **him** that **he** was the one through which the Messiah would come. In addition, having grown up with **Esau**, **he** knew the only aspect of the **birthright** appealing to **Esau** was the material benefits. **He** didn't want or value the spiritual aspects at all. In fact, the Bible says that **Esav despised his birthright (25:34)**. **Jacob** had thought about these things for years as **he** grew up. But instead of letting **God** work it out, **he**, like **his grandfather Abraham** before **him**, thought **he** would take matters into **his own hands**, and one day the opportunity presented itself.

If only **Ya'akov** had been willing to wait on **God's** timing, what a difference it would have made. The birthright would have been **his** anyway, but **he** was unwilling to allow **God** to give it

to **him**. But we do the same thing! We take **the LORD** at **his** word, but we will not wait for **His** timing. The result is that we bring untold trouble upon others and ourselves. It is not enough to believe what **ADONAI** has said, we must **wait patiently for Him (Psalm 37:7)**.⁴¹⁰

Nevertheless, **once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in tired from the open country**. The Hebrew word means nothing more than *to be tired*. **He said to Jacob his brother: Quick, let me have some of that red lentil stew!** The Hebrew literally reads: **Let me** gulp down **some of that red, red**. The word, *gulp down*, implies an animal like ferociousness. Ironically, this **skillful hunter** came home empty handed and said: **I am famished! That is why he was also called red or Edom (25:29-30)**.

Esau would face a supreme test in the next few minutes that would change **his** life. The real proof of life is our personal faith, and what happens next will reveal who **Esav** really was. **He** never made a decision in **his** life to choose to believe in the promises of **God**. **He** never had any faith. Faith is continually growing, and when a crisis comes we act, not solely according to what we want at the moment, but according to who we really are, for our actions are the expression of our real faith. The real us comes out instinctively. This was true of Abraham. When the supreme test in **his** life came **he** had sixty years of preparation for that one moment, and **he** passed with flying colors. **He** was willing to sacrifice **Isaac** because of **his** faith in **ADONAI**. It was faith in action. Now **Esau** is staring **his** supreme test in the face, and because faith in **the LORD** had never been built into **his** life, **he** failed.

Ya'akov made **Esav** a proposition, perhaps initially only joking, not really expecting **Esau** to accept it. **He** said: **First sell me today your birthright (25:31)**. The **birthright** was the right of the firstborn to take precedence over **his** brothers. The firstborn had the ability to sell **his** birthright, and as far as **Jacob** was concerned, it contained four elements. First, it included physical benefits because at **the father's** death, the firstborn received a double portion of **the father's** estate (**Deuteronomy 21:17**); secondly, it included spiritual benefits because **he** was to be the head and priest of the family (**First Chronicles 5:1-2**). Therefore, the eldest **son** had some somber responsibilities. **He** was to preside over the household and provide materially and spiritually for it. These spiritual responsibilities were particularly important (**18:19**). Specifically, **he** was supposed to build and officiate at the altar, as well as to preach **God's** Word and **his** promises (**22:9; 26:25**). Thirdly, it included being in the Messianic line because this was the birthright of **the LORD's** Covenant with Abraham; and fourthly, it included the possession of the land of Canaan. The loss of the **birthright** could occur if a grave offense was committed. Ruben committed incest (**35:22, 49:4**) and forfeited his right as the firstborn of the twelve tribes.

All this was formalized at one point in time when the father blessed the firstborn. Just as we write a will today, there was an occasion in the family where the father, once and for all, sanctioned the confirmation of the **birthright** by blessing one particular son. In that

sense, the ultimate decision of the birthright was with the father. So theoretically, **Isaac** could have overridden **Esau's** foolish decision here and still given **him** the blessing. That is why we see **Jacob's** deception in **Chapter 27**. And that may be one of the reasons for **Esav's** seemingly flippant attitude toward the birthright at this point. **He** thought, "Dad loves me more and will certainly bless me no matter what I do here."

Esau always lived for the sensual enjoyment of the moment and said to **his** brother: **Look, I am about to die**. This is another instance where people have maligned **Jacob** because they take **Esau's** words a bit too literally. But actually **Esav** is exaggerating, just as someone who comes home after work and says, "I am starving to death." That person may be hungry, but is surely not starving. The same is true here with **Esau**. Abraham was a very wealthy man and all **Esav** had to do was to go to the next tent and **he** could have been given all the food **he** could have possibly wanted. Then **he** rationalized: **What good is the birthright to me (25:32)**. Well, there were a lot of spiritual benefits, but **he** wasn't concerned about those.

But **Jacob** said to **him**, "**Swear to me first**." This swearing is what would make this sale legal and binding. **So Esau swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob (25:33)**. Some people will compromise and sell what **God** really has for them for some instant gratification. But the Bible says: **Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you (Matthew 6:33)**. Just as Ishmael was excluded from the promised blessing because **he** was born according to the flesh, **Esau** lost the promised blessing because **his** disposition was likewise according to the flesh.⁴¹¹

Then **Ya'akov** gave **Esau** some bread and some lentil stew. **He ate and drank, and then got up and left**. There is nothing in this passage to imply that **Jacob** took unfair advantage of **Esav**. **God's** evaluation of the situation is that **Esav despised**, or treated **his birthright** as worthless **(25:34)**. So far as we can see, **God** had no place in **his** life. The Bible says: **See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son (Hebrews 12:16)**. But this did not justify **Jacob's** conduct in the matter. **He** did the wrong thing for the right reason. However, the end doesn't justify the means.

Jacob, of course, should have been willing to let **ADONAI** work out this problem. **The LORD** would certainly have overruled the situation even if **Yitz'chak** had not been willing to give **Ya'akov** the birthright as **God** had instructed **him**. However, **Jacob's** sin was not a sin of greed or blackmail, *but rather a lack of faith*. **He** so strongly wanted to see **His** purposes advanced that **he** felt he must help them along by **his** own actions. This sin, of course, is one of which we also are guilty. Abraham and **Isaac** themselves both suffered far greater lapses of faith than this.⁴¹²