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Then Jacob Gave Esau Some Lentil Stew and Esau Despised His Birthright 25: 27-34

Then Jacob gave Esau some lentil stew and Esau despised his birthright
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** always has a
negative connotation, just as it was with **Nimrod**. And **he was a man of the open**
country, a man of the world (26:27a). **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 blameless (tamim) man**. The
NIV says **Jacob was a quiet man**, and the **NKJ** says **he was a mild man**. But the
Hebrew word *tamim* is always translated elsewhere as *perfect, or upright*,

blameless or without blemish. Noah was a righteous man, blameless (tamim) in his time (6:9). When **God** was speaking to **the Adversary**, **He** said: **Have you considered my servant Job. There is no one like him; he is blameless and upright (tamim), a man who fears God and shuns evil (Job 1:8).** Again, **God** puts **Jacob** in the same company as **Noah** and **Job (25:27b)**. It does not mean sinless perfection, but it has the sense of *a man whose heart is right towards God*. It is translated *without defect* 36 times in the TaNaKh, *blameless* 22 times, and *perfect* 5 times. As a result, *tamim* 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 doesn't fit people's preconceived notions about **Jacob**. Here is the beginning of this trend that the way **Jacob** is portrayed in the Torah is the opposite of the way **he** has been portrayed by many pastors, commentators and even some Bible translators. They say things like, "Well, Jacob was a deceiver and stole his brother's birthright, but God blessed him anyway!" This is a very dangerous proposition (**Revelation 22:18-19**). Jews never, ever, denigrate the patriarchs.

Therefore, because **Jacob was upright and blameless (tamim), 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 (**to see link click [Hr - Laban Pursues Jacob](#)**). 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 business and within the covenant, in contrast to being **a hunter** and **a man of the world** like **his** brother **Esau**. Therefore, 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. Human nature tells us that **Rebekah** undoubtedly told **Isaac** of **God's** prophecy concerning **their two sons** when she was pregnant (wouldn't you!); however, it seems as though **Isaac** basically ignored the choice of **God**. Also,

at some point it seems as though **Rebekah** certainly 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 blameless 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.

Humanly, you can understand how difficult it was for **Ya'akov** to be willing to wait on **God's** timing. 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**. The word,

gulp down, implies an animal like ferociousness. Ironically, this **skillful hunter** came home empty handed and said: **I am famished!** The fact that **he** would trade **his** birthright for some “red,” 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,



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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