

In our last session we left off with the birth of Esau and Jacob, twin brothers (Genesis 25:24-26). In this session we move from these boys as babies to young men. There is a gap of time between 25:26 and 27. We are thrust immediately into the drama.

Chapter 25:27-34 | The sale of Esau's birthright

Verse 27–

We are not given the time that has elapsed between verses 26 and 27, only that the **boys grew**. They were old enough for Esau to have become a **cunning hunter**. That just means we was knowledgeable and skilled in hunting and the use of bow and arrow (27:3). Young's Literal translation says he was *acquainted with hunting*. The same Hebrew word translated **cunning** in the KJV is also translated as *husband* in other passages. It could have the sense that he is intimate with hunting. Is the verse implying that Esau was *married* to the field, in other words he had no other interests or cares? It is easy to see how a man can be *married to a sport, or a hobby* and simply ignore his responsibilities in other areas of life. Perhaps Esau was more like his father, Isaac, who also spent time in the **field** (24:63).

Jacob on the other hand is described as **a plain man, dwelling in tents**. We may have the wrong view of Jacob from our English translations. The NKJV translates the Hebrew word as *mild*, but has a footnote that says he was *complete*. And indeed that may be more of the sense of the word, i.e. *upright or pure; possibly mature*. Maybe Jacob is more balanced in his day to day life? He was far from *soft* (as we will see in a later session) as some commentators make him out to be.

By taking a closer look we see that Jacob is more of the man to be commended and Esau's characteristics to be avoided.

Verse 28–

And Isaac loved Esau...but Rebekah loved Jacob. Esau's father, Isaac was partial to Esau because gratified Isaac's human desires **because he did eat of his venison**. If Esau was irresponsible, perhaps it was encouraged by Isaac? But there was danger lurking. God had told Rebekah that He was going to bless the younger in that *the elder shall serve the younger* (25:23). Rebekah knew that it was Jacob who would be the stronger of the two and she trusted God's word. Isaac should have known this prophecy too. Maybe she could tell that Isaac was favoring Esau so much that he just might go around God's plan and give Esau the blessing? That would not have been God's program and yet blessing the older son was the custom for the firstborn to receive a double-portion of the inheritance and the right to lead the household.

The eldest son, of course, also had sober responsibilities. If he was to rule over the household, then he had to provide for the household, both materially and spiritually. In fact, in this particular family, the spiritual responsibilities were of great importance (Genesis 18:19). In particular, there was the responsibility of building and officiating at the altar (Genesis 22:9; 26:25; 35:1; etc.), as well as the transmission of God's word and His promises.¹

It appears Esau could not have cared less about this, or maybe he never questioned what he believed was the inevitable fact that he would receive his father's blessing regardless of his behavior or actions? He just assumed it was all his.

¹Morris, Henry M. *The Genesis Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Beginnings*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1976. Print.

Verse 29–

And Jacob sod pottage. The word **sod** as used here is one we no longer use in our vocabulary. It is the past tense of seethe, and it means *boiled*. **Pottage** is something *boiled*, or literally anything cooked in a pot. In verse 34 we read that it was lentil soup.

And Esau come from the field , and he was faint: The verb *was* is in italics meaning it is inserted by the translators, the Hebrew says *and he faint*. Did he literally faint? The text isn't clear, but from Esau's perspective he was about to die (vs. 32).

Verse 30–

Esau said...feed me. It seems a bit dramatic, but the food was ready, he was hungry.

Verse 31,32–

Jacob said, sell me...thy birthright. This hardly seems a fair trade, a birthright for a bowl of red lentil soup? Did Jacob throw this proposition out on a whim? Did he really think Esau would go for it? Nonetheless, the advantage was in Jacob's favor. Esau was a worldly guy and Jacob was going to capitalize on Esau's hunger.

I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? Instant gratification is what he was after. Isaiah wrote, "Let us eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow we shall die."²

Verse 33–

Swear to me this day. Could Jacob have believed his ears? **And he sold his birthright to Jacob.**

Verse 34–

He did eat and drink...and rose up, and went his way...thus Esau despised his birthright.

Jacob must have known the promise God had made to Rebekah, that the *elder shall serve the younger*. Did he sin in not allowing God to work it out? Did Jacob lack faith? It is a pattern we have seen all along where men take matters into their own hands instead of trusting God's promises. Yet, Jacob is never condemned for his actions, instead God's promise stays intact. Esau on the other hand is condemned in Scripture where he is described as a fornicator, or a profane person (Hebrews 12:16).

Why was a birthright so valuable:

1. It gave the one who held it the priestly rights of the family (until the Aaronic priesthood; Exodus 28) and certain other spiritual responsibilities of the household.
2. The promise given in Genesis 3:15 of the one who would crush the head of the Serpent (i.e. Satan) was given through the line of Abraham, i.e. Abel, Seth, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Esau.
3. That the earth would be blessed from the direct line of Abraham would have fallen on Esau (Genesis 12:3).

² Isaiah 22:13

Two of the great Messianic promises, Satan-bruiser and Earth-Blesser might have been fulfilled through Esau.

This birthright Esau sold for a momentary fleshly gratification. Jacob's conception of the birthright at that time was, doubtless, carnal and inadequate, but his desire for it evidenced true faith in what God had promised.³

Chapter 26 | Isaac and Abimelech

The narrative shifts back to Isaac and deals with his trials and God appearing to him. This is the first time, as far as Scripture records, since Mt. Moriah where Abraham had offered Isaac as a sacrifice that God has appeared to him. It has been at least fifty years. In reality, although He was always working, God appeared few and far between in Scripture. The purpose of this appearance of God? To show he had not forgotten His covenant. God repeats it in much the same fashion as He did when He first gave it to Abraham decades before. Today we don't have appearances of God, but we can see Him working throughout the world as He has done since the beginning of time. We seem to be living at a particular time in history where the hand of God's work appears to be evident throughout the world on the political scene—aligning itself with Scripture.

Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of. The promise was that God would bless him with all the blessings He had promised Isaac's father, Abraham. Isaac obeyed and **dwelt in Gerar** which was still part of Canaan (located just east of what is known today at the Gaza Strip).

Like his father, Isaac repeats the same sin (Genesis 12:13; 20:3). Isaac and Rebekah dwelt in Gerar because of famine (most likely his entire household was with him, including his flocks and herds (vs. 14), although the text only mentions husband and wife). Jacob and Esau may have stayed back and not gone into Gerar.

Gerar was controlled by the Philistines with Abimelech as their leader. The name Abimelech is a title, like Pharaoh. This was not (or it is doubtful) the same Abimelech Abraham encountered. Isaac was rich (vs. 13) from inheriting all that his father had, and the Philistines were impressed and apparently left him alone, except they **asked him of his wife** (vs. 7) because **she was fair to look upon**. As his father had done before, he lied and said **she is my sister**. Of course, the ruse if found out, however nothing of consequence appears to come of it. Eventually, due to the strength of Isaac, Abimelech asks him to leave the region.

In an attempt to drive Isaac away, the Philistines began to fill up the wells which were essential for Isaac's continued prosperity. Isaac succeeds in digging a productive well **and he called it Shebah: therefore the name of the city is Beer-sheba unto this day**.

Verses 34,35—

The conflict between Jacob and Esau will escalate in chapter 27, but verses 34 and 35 help set the stage. Such care had been taken by Abraham for Isaac not to have a Canaanite bride, but now Esau throws out the family tradition and custom of not marrying foreigners and takes not one, but two wives, both of them Hittites, **which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and Rebekah**, as we will see when we continue in chapter 27 next session.

³ C.I. Scofield. Study notes. Scofield Bible, Page 38.