

## ***Beginnings and Belongings***

### ***The Price of Duplicity***

Lesson #10 for December 9, 2006

Scripture: Genesis 25:19-29:30.

1. Continuing our story of Abraham and his descendants we now come to the stories of Esau and Jacob.
2. When Isaac was about 60 years old, finally, his wife, Rebekah/Rebecca, had twin sons. How could twin brothers be so different?! Were Esau and Jacob identical twins or fraternal twins?
3. Do you think God was responsible for the development of these twins? Or were they just born in the normal course of events? Why didn't God just arrange for Jacob to be born first? Is there anything really important about being first-born? Does the birth sequence make any real difference?
4. Is there anything magical or significant about being the first one to pass through the birth canal? How many of the biblical giants were not first-born? Jacob, Joseph (who was first-born to his mother but not his father), Moses, David, Solomon, etc. Were all of the antediluvian "sons of God" that we know about first-borns?
5. In biblical times the first-born son was supposed to receive the birthright which included two main benefits: 1) He was supposed to receive a double portion of the father's wealth so that when his father and mother were elderly, he would be responsible primarily for caring for them. This was the Social Security system of those days. 2) He was also supposed to be the priest of the family and to be the progenitor through whom Christ was to be born. This required special obligations of the first-born son. He was expected to be the spiritual leader of the family.

With these promises Esau and Jacob were familiar. They were taught to regard the birthright as a matter of great importance, for it included not only an inheritance of worldly wealth but spiritual pre-eminence. He who received it was to be the priest of his family, and in the line of his posterity the Redeemer of the world would come. On the other hand, there were obligations resting upon the possessor of the birthright. He [178] who should inherit its blessings must devote his life to the service of God. Like Abraham, he must be obedient to the divine requirements. In marriage, in his family relations, in public life, he must consult the will of God. {PP 177.3}

6. Read Genesis 25:19-26 and Malachi 1: 2,3. Did God choose Jacob over Esau even before he was born? What is implied by the prophecy given to Rebekah? Did God love Jacob and hate Esau? How do you understand the words of Malachi 1? Shouldn't every father be the priest of his own family?

When in answer to Rebekah's troubled prayer he [God] declared that two sons would be given her, he opened to her their future history, that each would become the head of a mighty nation, but that one would be greater than the other, and that the younger would have the pre-eminence. {PP 177.1}

7. Why do you think Esau and Jacob (Israel) turned out to be so different? Did God make them that way, or did he just foresee that they would be that way?

**Romans 9:10-16:** <sup>10</sup> And this is not all. For Rebecca's two sons had the same father, our ancestor Isaac. <sup>11-12</sup> But in order that the choice of one son might be completely the result of God's own purpose, God said to her, "The elder will serve the younger." He said this before they were born, before they had done anything either good or bad; so God's choice was based on his call, and not on anything they had done. <sup>13</sup> As the scripture says, "I loved Jacob, but I hated Esau."

<sup>14</sup> Shall we say, then, that God is unjust? Not at all. <sup>15</sup> For he said to Moses, "I will have mercy on anyone I wish; I will take pity on anyone I wish." <sup>16</sup> So then, everything depends, not on what human beings want or do, but only on God's mercy. (GNB)

### **Is God playing "fair" here?**

8. What's in a name? Esau tended to be known by two names *Seir* which means "hairy" and Edom (*'admoni*) which means "red." Jacob (in Hebrew *Ya'acob*) is an abbreviated form of the Semitic name *Ya'acob-el* meaning "may God protect." But in this context the name is associated with the Hebrew word *Ya'acab* translated "to take by the heel," "to supplant," or "to deceive." (Genesis 27:36)
9. How do you understand the promise given to Rebekah regarding Jacob? Is this a guarantee that the second-born would receive the birthright? Why did both Rebekah and Jacob feel it was absolutely essential that Jacob receive this birthright?
10. If God had promised to make Jacob superior in any way, why was it so difficult for Rebekah and Jacob to patiently wait to see how God would work things out? Do we sometimes get impatient and try to move ahead of God? What does it mean to "move forward in faith"?
11. Both Abraham and Jacob were involved in experiences where it would have been a much greater exercise of faith to patiently wait for God to work things out. Why is this so hard for many humans to do? How often does God want us to move forward even when we cannot see his guiding hand?
12. Should Genesis 26:1-33 come before Genesis 25? Where were Esau and Jacob when Rebekah was living in Gerar?
13. Read Genesis 26:28-29. How much did these pagan rulers from the Philistines know about Yahweh?
14. Isaac lived to be 180 years old. At what point in his life did he become basically blind? The last part of Genesis 26 makes it clear that Isaac, as he moved around the country of Canaan continued the practice of Abraham, his father, of building altars wherever he went. What does this say to us about his relationship with God?
15. This lesson focuses on certain promises from God which the recipients were not willing to wait to be carried out. What promises from God should we be waiting for in our day? Are we impatient to see God fulfill his promise? While we are waiting for God to fulfill his promise, are we supposed to sit idly by? Or are we supposed to be active during this wait?
16. Read Genesis 27. What was it in the birthright that Jacob and Rebekah wanted? What was it that Esau wanted? Could Isaac have given each one what he wanted? How would things have been different if Jacob had been the first-born?
17. What difference do the words of a blind old man make anyway? Was God bound by these words? As we know Isaac blessed Jacob after being deceived and gave him "fertility" and "dominion."
18. Did Jacob really want to be dominant over Esau? Did he really want Isaac's wealth? How could anyone who knows the nature of God believe that he would call down God's blessing by repeatedly lying?
19. Look at the promises made by Isaac to Jacob. Did either Jacob or Esau ultimately receive these blessings?
20. Why do you think Rebekah preferred Jacob? Why did Isaac prefer Esau? Did Rebekah and Jacob feel that—since they believed they were doing God's will—any methodology was okay?

21. Review carefully the role of each of the four participants in this saga. Isaac, Rebekah, Esau, and Jacob. Were any of them truly innocent? Review the deeds, the character and the motives of each of the participants:

- a. Isaac: did not consult with his wife, didn't recognize the true character of his sons, ignored God's word, tried to defeat God's plan.
- b. Rebekah: assumed her will was God's will, argued with her husband, planned deceit, ran ahead of God, schemed with Jacob to deceive her husband.
- c. Esau: despised his birthright, didn't care about spiritual things, lived for the moment, was a wild hunter, chose to ignore God's promise.

Esau grew up loving self-gratification and centering all his interest in the present. Impatient of restraint, he delighted in the wild freedom of the chase, and early chose the life of a hunter. Yet he was the father's favorite. The quiet, peace-loving shepherd [Isaac] was attracted by the daring and vigor of this elder son, who fearlessly ranged over mountain and desert, returning home with game for his father and with exciting accounts of his adventurous life. {PP 177.2}

- d. Jacob: lied, schemed, envied, ran ahead of God, deceived his father, stayed more at home.

Jacob, thoughtful, diligent, and care-taking, ever thinking more of the future than the present, was content to dwell at home, occupied in the care of the flocks and the tillage of the soil. His patient perseverance, thrift, and foresight were valued by the mother. His affections were deep and strong, and his gentle, unremitting attentions added far more to her happiness than did the boisterous and occasional kindnesses of Esau. To Rebekah, Jacob was the dearer son. {PP 177.2}

22. As a result of his deception and Esau's anger, Jacob and Rebekah felt it was best that he flee to the home of Laban to find a wife. The wives of Esau provided a very timely excuse. (Gen. 26:34,35)
23. How would you feel about departing on a 500 mile journey with nothing but what you could carry on your back, traveling through territories of marauding tribes and wild animals?
24. How well do you think you would sleep lying on the dirt with a rock as a pillow? Jacob no doubt felt completely alone. Fortunately, he recognized that God was still with him. Before lying down he confessed his sin with weeping and deep humiliation and asked the Lord for some evidence that he was not utterly forsaken. (PP 183)
25. What lessons are we supposed to learn from the vision of the ladder? (Genesis 28:10-22) Had Jacob developed a regular communication program with God? Or was this vision an entirely new experience? (See PP 183.4-184.3)
26. What does it tell us about God that he takes time to reassure a homeless, poor, cheating wanderer through a dream? What did the onlooking universe learn from this story?

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