



**Adult Lesson Summary for October 7, 2007
Released on October 3, 2007**

"Jacob and Esau as Rivals"

Devotional Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:26–31.

Background Scripture: Genesis 25:19–34.

Printed Text: Genesis 25:19–34.

Genesis 25:19–34

19 And these are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham begat Isaac:

20 And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan-aram, the sister to Laban the Syrian.

21 And Isaac entreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD was entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

22 And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to inquire of the LORD.

23 And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.

24 And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb.

25 And the first came out red, all over like a hairy garment; and they called his name Esau.

26 And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them.

27 And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents.

28 And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.

29 And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint:

30 And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom.

31 And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright.

32 And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?

33 And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob.

34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

INTRODUCTION

Sibling rivalry is common and considered somewhat normal. Healthy competition between siblings can often encourage them to excel.

On the other hand, unhealthy sibling rivalry can be disastrous. There are some notable examples in the Bible. Because Ishmael mocked Isaac, Hagar and Ishmael were sent off into the desert (Gen. 21:8-10). The brothers of Joseph hated him so much that they wanted to murder him (37:19-20). Instead, he was sold into slavery, and his brothers lived in deception for many years.

In this week's lesson we see an unhealthy sibling rivalry develop between two brothers, Jacob and Esau. Isaac and Rebekah did not help matters by making it obvious they had favorites.

Children need direction from their parents regarding how to live and act toward others, especially within the family. Since parents are a child's first teachers, they have a very important role to play.

LESSON AIM

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. Describe the early rivalry between Jacob and Esau.
2. Compare and contrast the rivalry between Jacob and Esau with rivalries within families and/or churches today.
3. Create a plan for his or her church to help people recognize and defuse destructive tensions that threaten families and/or the church.

Siblings Struggle Before Birth (Genesis 25:19–26) Family Background (vs. 19, 20)

1. What does the phrase “And these are the generations of Isaac, Abraham’s son” mean in Genesis?

The phrase “these are the generations of Isaac, Abraham’s son” is the title of the eighth of ten generational segments in Genesis.

After the initial introduction of creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3, there are ten generations given. These are the heavens and the earth (Genesis 2:4–4:26), Adam (5:1–6:8), Noah (6:9–9:29), Ham and Japheth (10:1–11:9), Shem (11:10–26), Terah (11:27–25:11), Ishmael (25:12–18), Isaac (25:19–35:29), Esau (36:1–37:1), and Jacob (37:2–50:26). We note that the rest of Genesis is taken up with the stories of Esau and Jacob in this regard, primarily with the latter.

2. How old was Isaac when he married? How old was he when his twin boys were born (Genesis 25:20, 21)?

Although we do not know the age of Rebekah at the time of her marriage, Isaac was forty. Rebekah could have been considerably younger than her husband, which was quite common in their culture. We also note that Rebekah was the daughter of Bethuel, who was the youngest son of Abraham's brother Nahor (Gen. 22:20-23). This meant that Isaac married his cousin, a practice not uncommon in those early days.

It would be some twenty years (v. 26) before Isaac and Rebekah had children. During this time, however, Isaac was petitioning the Lord for her barrenness to be removed. The original text suggests a very strong request by stating the verb in two forms: *Isaac*

entreated the Lord and the Lord was entreated of him. God is willing to listen to the entreaty and thus respond to it. The answer follows: *and Rebekah his wife conceived.*

On the surface it seems that God answers Isaac's prayer of supplication immediately.

However, Isaac's plea to God thus may cover a rather long period of time—perhaps 15 or more years of pleading. This should teach us to wait on God and be content in His timing. The prayers are answered. God's sovereignty over His creation is demonstrated in this conception.

3. Why was having children so significant to Isaac and Rebekah?

"To remain unmarried was considered a disgrace by the Hebrews, largely because the production of offspring was viewed as essential for the perpetuation of the covenant community. For women not to marry made life tenuous, because necessities of life normally came from a husband's support. Since having no descendants was a disgrace for a man, a wife who failed to bear children was of less value than one who did" (Myers).

4. What did Rebekah experience before the birth of her children (v. 22)?

During Rebekah's pregnancy, the children struggled with each other. This was apparently more than the normal prenatal movement experienced by mothers-to-be. Thinking that this was something unusual, Rebekah went to the Lord for an answer.

5. What answer did God give her when she prayed about this (vs. 23,24)?

Whether the Lord responded audibly, in a dream, or otherwise we are not told. Rebekah nevertheless received an answer from God: Two nations were in her womb, and two peoples would descend from these important twins.

The two nations were the descendants of Jacob (Israel) and the descendants of Esau (Edom). Subsequent history reveals that these two nations were constantly warring with each other.

As we shall see, the firstborn was Esau, but even prior to their births, God declared that the elder would serve the younger. This, of course, was a reversal of what normally occurred in a family. We are not told why the younger son, Jacob, would take precedence over his brother; it was, however, a matter of God's sovereign choice.

It is not clear whether Rebekah understood from the Lord's words that she was going to have twins. When the time of delivery came, though, the meaning was plain for all to see (Gen. 25:24).

6. Why was Esau given his name (v. 25)?

When Esau, the firstborn, came from his mother's womb, two things are noted. First, he was red. This, of course, is not entirely unusual at the time of birth. It may be that Esau's body retained a reddish color as he grew to manhood, though. Second, Esau was very hairy. Hence, the name "Esau," which means "hairy," was given to him. After he traded his birthright for a bowl of red soup, he was also called "Edom" (v. 30), which means "red."

7. Why was Jacob given his name (v. 26)?

As his twin brother followed Esau from the womb, he grabbed hold of Esau's heel; so the name "Jacob" was given to the second boy. The name "Jacob" is drawn from a Hebrew

noun that means "heel" and a verb meaning "to seize at the heel," "hence 'to beguile' or 'to overreach, supplant.'

Siblings Struggle After Birth (Genesis 25:27–34)

Differences (v. 27), and Preferences (v. 28)

8. How were Jacob and Esau different (v. 27)? Why was this so?

The narrative jumps from the birth of the twins to a time when they were fully grown. Very clearly, the two boys had different personalities and interests. Most twins are very much alike, but in this case they were very different. Part of this may have been due to nature, but much of it likely had to do with nurture.

Esau is described as a skillful hunter, a man of the open country. He was what we would call an outdoorsman. In the world in which Esau lived, this was probably the choice of many men, especially those who lived in remote areas where such skills would be necessary for basic survival.

Because of his outdoor skills, Esau was the favorite of his father, Isaac (v. 28). Perhaps Isaac saw himself in young Esau as well. Nevertheless, it was clear that Isaac and Rebekah had favorites. Such preferential treatment is bound to cause ongoing conflict within the family. And it does.

In contrast to rugged Esau, Jacob is described as a "plain man" (Gen. 25:27), which can also be translated "quiet man." That he dwelled in tents simply means that he was content to stay at home rather than face the risks of hunting wild animals as Esau did. That being so, he became more attached to his mother and learned the domestic skills she was more acquainted with. While Esau may have been a cunning hunter, Jacob learned from his mother a different kind of cunning that eventually got him in trouble.

9. What family principles do we learn from the differences between Esau and Jacob?

Two children of the same parents growing up in the same environment can be totally different. Children are not "blank slates" that merely take on the personalities of their parents.

This is true not only in families, but in the church as well. Being born again through the blood of Jesus Christ makes us brothers and sisters in the family of God. But we are different. God has given us differing spiritual gifts and abilities (see 1 Corinthians 12:4–7). There is nothing wrong with such differences. In fact, there are benefits in them (1 Corinthians 12:12–31). Just as we don't force our children all to be the same, so in the church we respect the diversity of gifts and abilities. In so doing, we allow God to use each of us differently for His glory.

10. What was the significance of the birthright? How did Esau feel about his birthright (vs. 29-32)?

One day Jacob was cooking some lentil stew when Esau came in from a day of hunting. Famished and faint, Esau implored his brother for a bowl of soup. The stew, in fact, was red in color. This fact was the basis for Esau receiving the nickname "Edom," which means "red."

It is doubtful that Esau was at the point of death as he claimed. He was, however, weary and hungry, possibly even faint. Even so, Jacob was not quick to offer his brother something to eat. Food would be given only if Esau traded his birthright to Jacob for the soup.

The normal practice in the ancient Near East was to pass the father's inheritance to the sons in the order of their birth, with the eldest son receiving a double inheritance (Deut. 21:17). Upon the death of the father, the oldest son would become the head of the clan and function as the family priest. This was a very coveted position, and the likelihood of it being sold to another was remote, although archaeology confirms that the birthright could be sold or traded. But to sell the power and privilege of the birthright for a bowl of soup would have been unthinkable.

While Esau saw no immediate value in his birthright, Jacob did. Esau was a man of the moment, Jacob a schemer, a planner. Describing Esau as a "profane person," Hebrews 12:16 warns us not to be like him, "who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright."

11. How and why did Jacob confirm the agreement with his brother (v. 33)?

Wanting to make sure that Esau would not claim that his actions occurred under duress, Jacob made Esau take a solemn oath concerning the transference of the birthright.

The bargain struck, "Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up" (Gen. 25:34). Satisfied that his current needs had been met, Esau "went his way," apparently oblivious to the tremendous consequences of his actions. "Thus Esau despised his birthright" is an instructive comment concerning the character of this firstborn son of Isaac and Rebekah.

Later, Esau would be deceived by his mother and brother when the parting blessing was stolen from him and given to Jacob (Gen. 27:1-40). On that occasion, "Esau lifted up his voice, and wept" (v. 38). The book of Hebrews refers to this incident when it says, "For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it care-fully with tears" (12:17).

Because of these events, Esau would plot Jacob's death (Gen. 27:41). This sets the stage for next week's lesson about Jacob fleeing to Padan-aram (28:2), the land of his mother.

CONCLUSION

Rivalry, God's Choice, and Consequences

The rivalry between Jacob and Esau yielded bitter fruit for many years. Their two peoples (the Israelites and the Edomites) would forever be known as enemies (see 1 Samuel 14:47, 48; 2 Samuel 8:13, 14; Jeremiah 49:7-22; Ezekiel 25:12-14; 35; Obadiah; Malachi 1:2-5).

But today's story is really about God's choice —His purpose and will being worked out through the life of a young man who was chosen in spite of himself. The deceiver would be deceived often enough that one day he would learn how to struggle not only with others but with God and prevail (Genesis 32:28). The consequences would change his name (*Jacob* to *Israel*) and his life forever.

Sometimes when God chooses a person, it may not be pleasant—it may be for a life of struggle rather than one of contentment. God sees to it that we all must struggle with Him before we can make a significant contribution to His kingdom.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Struggles today can yield much fruit tomorrow—either good or rotten.

PRAYER

O Sovereign Lord, may Your purposes and will for us be realized in spite of our weaknesses and desires. Teach us to desire Your will above all felt needs that beg for instant gratification. Lead us to resolve all conflicts within our families as well as within our church families to Your honor and glory. In Christ's name, amen.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

In our next lesson we follow the life of Jacob as history unfolded further. We will see how God assured him of His presence wherever he went. That is a wonderful promise for us too. Study Genesis 27:41-28:22.

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