

Osaka International Church
Date: August 3rd, 2008
Daniel Ellrick
Series: Patriarchs
Title: Jacob and Esau
Scripture: Genesis 25-27
Key Verse: Genesis 28:14

I. Introduction

Good morning! Abraham was 137 years old when his Sarah died and he buried her in the cave of Machpelah. Many people spend their last years in loneliness after a spouse has died, but from Genesis 25 we know that Abraham remarried and had six more sons. Abraham lived to the age of 175, and after he died, Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah with his first wife, Sarah. After this, the focus in Genesis shifts fully to Abraham's descendents.



When we study the Bible, we can learn a great deal from almost any chapter. But we should also be thinking about the larger story. Since the time when Adam and Eve first sinned, God has been working in history to prepare the way of salvation. The author of Genesis reminds us of this larger story from time to time through the blessings which God gives to the people through whom Christ Jesus will come.

In **Genesis 12:3**, God blessed Abraham saying, **“I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”**

In **Genesis 26:4**, God blesses Isaac saying, **“I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed.”**

And in **Genesis 28:14**, the blessing is passed on to Jacob with these words, **“Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.”**

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are all blessed by God using similar words. This, “line of blessing,” continues onward to the birth of Jesus. The repeated promise that all peoples or nations will be blessed through Abraham's descendents especially points to Jesus. In the Bible, the idea of God's blessing is something that we receive and then pass on to others. No one is blessed just so they can enjoy the blessings for themselves. Each blessing has a greater purpose, a purpose which is accomplished through passing the blessing on to others, leading to the salvation of many.

In the Old Testament, we find the story of the blessings and promises leading to the coming of Jesus, the Savior. And in the New Testament, and on until today, we find the story of the proclamation of the Good News that the Savior has come. We also are part of this story, being blessed, and passing the blessing of the Good News of salvation through Jesus and His finished work on the cross to others. When we read the Bible, we should remember that we are part of the story which it tells. Through faith in Jesus, we also become children of Abraham, part of the line of blessing.



This awareness of being part of a larger story is one of the characteristics that separates people of faith from the rest of the world. Many people live thinking only of themselves, or of themselves and their immediate family. A few people think of their city, or even of their nation, and of its story and role in the world. But people of faith think of eternity and the destiny of all of humanity, past, present, and future. Through Jesus Christ, we become part of the big story of how God is blessing the nations and accomplishing His loving purposes in the world.

Today we will take a look at the story of Jacob and Esau. Both of these men are members of fallen humanity, both of them are sinners. And yet, there is a difference between them. One of them lives with an

awareness of being part of a larger story, God's story. And the other lives only for the moment. One of them is a man of faith, and the other is not. Let's read from Genesis 25:19-34.

II. Scripture Genesis 25:19-34

[19] This is the account of Abraham's son Isaac. Abraham became the father of Isaac, [20] and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram and sister of Laban the Aramean. [21] Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The Lord answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. [22] The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the Lord. [23] The Lord said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."

[24] When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. [25] The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. [26] After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them. [27] The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents. [28] Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

[29] Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. [30] He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom.) [31] Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright." [32] "Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?" [33] But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. [34] Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright.

III. Teaching

In this passage, the focus shifts from Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob. Jacob becomes the central figure. When we read this passage, it seems like this happens very quickly. But actually, Isaac and Rebekah had to wait twenty years before she became pregnant and, by the end of the passage, Jacob and Esau are grown men. Many years are covered in just a few verses. During those years, Isaac and Rebekah probably spoke many times about their faith in the Lord and about the promises the Lord had given to Abraham and about all that had happened.



Jacob and Esau were twins, but they were very different from each other. **Genesis 25:27-28** tells us that, **“The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents. Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.”** In the chapters that follow, it is clear that Jacob is a rugged man capable of hard outdoor work and able to hold his own in a fight. So Jacob is not some kind of weak, mama's boy. But Jacob prefers the quiet, and perhaps studious, home life. On the other hand, Esau prefers the outdoor life of the open country. Isaac loved Esau, the son who brought back wild game for the kitchen table. But Rebekah loved Jacob. It is apparent that these preferences led to problems between Isaac and Rebekah as the years went by. Parents, it is a warning to us, do not have favorites among your children, love each child the same; trouble comes from showing favoritism.

Rebekah's preference for Jacob may have been the result of his spending more time at home, or it may simply be the result of her knowledge that Jacob would prevail over Esau in life. She knew this because of the word the Lord spoke to her while she was still pregnant. **Genesis 25:23**, **“The Lord said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.””**

Both of these sons were to become nations. Esau would become the nation of Edom, which interestingly means red, and Jacob will become the nation of Israel. Already in the womb there was conflict between the two, and that would continue off and on for centuries. Esau was born first, and so he was the eldest son, if only by minutes. Yet, the Lord said that, “the older will serve the younger,” so Rebekah knew that Jacob and his descendents would eventually prevail over Esau and his line. In any case, Rebekah became the ally of Jacob in opposition to Esau.

The line of blessing was to be continued through Jacob. But this does not mean that Jacob was a nice guy. Jacob means, “heel-catcher,” one who overtakes another; and the name also came to mean, “deceiver.” Jacob lived up to his name. One day Esau returned from hunting and found Jacob cooking. **Genesis 25:30-31, “He said to Jacob, “Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!” (That is why he was also called Edom.) Jacob replied, “First sell me your birthright.””**

That has got to be the highest price that anyone has ever asked for a bowl of stew. Jacob is taking unfair advantage of Esau’s hunger; Jacob is not being nice. But I cannot help but notice that Jacob must have been thinking about the birthright for a long time. Jacob is not driven by day-to-day desires. Jacob sees a bigger picture, and wants to be part of a larger story. Jacob must have known the promises the Lord gave to Abraham, and he would have been aware that Isaac, his own father, was the heir. According to custom, usually the first born son would be next in line. But Jacob is seeking to obtain the birthright and the blessings for himself. The birthright would not mean much as long as Isaac is alive; and Isaac will live for many years. But Jacob isn’t focused on the short-term; Jacob is a long-term thinker who wants his place in the larger story.

Genesis 25:32-33, ““Look, I am about to die,” Esau said. “What good is the birthright to me?” But Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob.” Esau may indeed have been very hungry. But the family of Isaac was wealthy and there would have been many tents with much food. If Esau had gone to his mother or to one of the servants, he could have had a free meal within an hour or so at most. But Esau wants the delicious looking stew that is before his eyes and he does not want to wait. He wants to eat right now! Esau thinks only of the moment, and does not care about the long-term or the big picture. Esau also would have known about the promises that God had given Abraham, but Esau doesn’t care about the promises.

Esau’s behavior is a warning to us. The author of Hebrews states it in these words. **Hebrews 12:16,” 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.”** Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of stew, but it could just as well have been a night with a girl, or any of a dozen other momentary pleasures. We need food and drink, and sex within a proper marriage is a wonderful thing. But we need to keep perspective and guard against the temptation to satisfy our momentary passions at any cost. Esau did not care about the promises of God because Esau had no faith.



On the other hand, although Jacob was wrong to seek unfair advantage in the moment of his brother’s weakness, Jacob was a man of faith. He believed the promises of God and wanted to obtain them for himself. I think that Jacob would have understood Jesus’ meaning in **Matthew 4:4, “Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’””**

Later on, when Isaac is old and blind and wants to give his blessing to Esau, Rebekah and Jacob will conspire together to steal the blessing by disguising Jacob as Esau. This is deception and sin and there is no excuse for it. And yet, when you read that story, in Genesis 27, it is again apparent that Jacob and Rebekah are focused on the long-term and on the promises of God. But if our faith in God is mature, then we should be content to wait on Him instead of trying to obtain the promises by wrong means.



In an ideal world, faith and goodness should always go together. People of faith should be good people and they should never lie, cheat, steal, or take unfair advantage of the weakness of others. But we live in a fallen world. And the Bible tells us, and experience shows, that even people of faith sometimes do bad things.

That does not make it okay to do wrong or to sin. It is not okay; we should keep away from every kind of sin. And yet, the stories of Jacob and others like him encourage us, because we see that the Lord still loves and chooses sinners, if they place their faith in His promises and want to belong to Him and be part of His story.

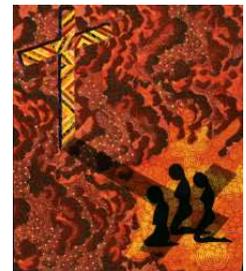
IV. Conclusion

How about us? Do we see ourselves as alone in the world? Do we focus on satisfying our moment-by-moment passions and desires? Esau seems to have been like that for much of his life. Esau spent his time out hunting alone and when he did return to his family he was still focused on himself and his own needs and wants. I think that Esau was a lonely man. Esau did not see the big picture and had little interest in the larger story. Are we like Esau?



I won't ask whether we are like Jacob. But a lot of us are more like him than we want to admit. Jacob was a man of faith, but he was also a man of deception and a man who would take advantage of another's weakness. We don't want to be like that, but it is easy to fall to temptation. We need to pray that we will be mature in our faith, and to resist temptation and walk in righteousness at all times. But one thing Jacob did right. Jacob focused on the big picture. Jacob believed the promises of God and he longed to be part of God's story of blessing. Jacob knew he was not alone; he lived as part of a family, a family that possessed the promises of God.

In Jesus, in the shadow of the cross, we also have a wonderful inheritance of God's promises. The Apostle Paul mentions this inheritance often in his letters. Paul speaks of the incomparable, unsearchable, and glorious riches (Ephesians 2:7, 3:8, 3:16) that are promised for all who trust in Jesus. Let us remember our birthright as people of faith, born again in Jesus, at all times. Let's trust in God and His promises and remember that we are part of His story, the story of how He is bring His loving blessings to the people of the world.



V. Let's Pray