

Jacob and Esau  
June 29, 2008  
Genesis 33: 1-10  
2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Twins struggled together in the womb. The one born first was red and hairy. In those days, names were given to match the situation of the child. So the hairy one was named Esau. The second one was born reaching out, and he grew grasping and grabbing whatever he could get, so he was named Jacob.

Esau was a hunter, a man of the field. lived the nomadic life. Jacob stayed home and learned domestic tasks, lived the settled life. Issac the father loved Esau, Rebecca, the mother favored Jacob.

**Birthright.**

The eldest son was to have the rights and privileges of leadership in the family. He made business decisions, protected the family name and traditions. He was the spiritual leader, the shaper of values and ideals and connection to God for the family. When the eldest male died or couldn't do it anymore, he conferred the birthright to the eldest son. It was like the family inheritance.

But grabby Jacob wanted to be number 1. He wanted the authority and respect and power. He wanted the role of connection to God.

One day, Esau came in from hunting, and he was hungry. He was so hungry that's all could think about. Jacob had some stew cooking, and took advantage of his brother's appetite. "I'll trade you this stew for your birthright" Jacob offered. Esau was so hungry he felt like he was starving. "What good is a birthright if I'm dead" he said, and made the trade.

Later on when Issac was too sick to make the family decisions and nearly blind, he called Esau in to give him the family blessing, pass on God's authority as leader. But Jacob and his mother connived to trick Issac and get the family blessing instead.

When Esau learned he had been cheated, he was so angry, Jacob had to leave for his own protection and headed off to make a living with his uncle's tribe.

On his journey, he lay down and slept and had a dream. He saw a ladder that reached from earth to heaven. Angels were going up and going down on that ladder. He got a message that he and his descendants would have the protection and blessing of God. He got the sense that his purpose in life would be to connect earth and heaven, connect people to God. It was his calling in life.

These events were important to the Old Testament Hebrews because they were having conflicts, too. They were having personal family conflicts, where one brother or sister was at odds with another. They had class differences. They were in a time when the economy was shifting from a hunting and gathering nomadic lifestyle to a settled farming lifestyle, tending sheep and raising crops. They were at odds with ethnic groups around them. This story shows all those conflicts.

- Do brothers and sisters struggle and compete in our families? Sometimes. Sometimes they are so angry with each other, they have to separate.

- Esau, of the red neck, and Jacob, of the clean hands, had different values. So do blue collars and white collars in our towns.

- Jacob, the cheater, got to be the forefather of the Jewish people and Esau's offspring were the tribes around them. Jews and Arabs are still competing for power in the Middle East.

We are still dealing with all the conflicts Jacob and Esau had.

### **Esau sold the birthright**

He spent the future for the sake of the present. He threw away the future good life for the present appetite. He was short sighted. He treated something holy as if it didn't matter. He didn't care.

This is the person who drives too fast and doesn't worry about an accident. This is the person who spends their money and doesn't save it for what is important later. This is the person who'd rather play and blows off their chances to learn at school. They don't care about the future. They only care about what they feel now. Later on they wonder why other people are getting the good jobs and have enough money to live when they are struggling to survive. God says in the New Testament "To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the spirit is life.

So Esau was a loser because he set his mind on the flesh rather than on the spirit.

There are things we have that must not be harmed by temporary pleasure: marriage vow, citizenship of our country and world, a job done fairly, loyalty to a friend, commitment to Christ as Lord and Savior.

### **Jacob Cheated**

But Jacob was a loser too, because he cheated his brother, and had to separate to survive. He wanted God's blessing so badly, he decided the ends justify the means, and he cheated himself in the process. But later on, Jacob, the cheater, gets cheated himself. It happens to us, too. Taking a shortcut at work, hiding things from a spouse, cheating on taxes, ignoring our kids. We cheat ourselves.

This account is in the Bible because is telling Old Testament people and us, what to do with our conflicts.

The descendants of Esau were the Edomites, the Moabites who lived on the East side of the Jordan River. The descendants of Jacob were the Hebrews who lived on the west side of the Jordan River. They had to learn to reconcile their differences in order to live well. And the present day Jews and Palestinians have to learn to cooperate with each other if there is going to be peace in the middle east.

Esau was a good old boy, probably with lots of cowboy friends, a man of the field, outdoors. Jacob was a good manager, went on to a successful life, rich, two wives and lots of children. This is also an account of a conflict of social groups with different lifestyles. We have blue collars and white collars too, and sometimes they don't

appreciate each other. We have to learn to put aside our differences and cooperate in order to live well.

But it is also an account of conflict between two brothers.

**Who deserved the birthright?** Who should get the blessing from God to be a leader of the family and make a great nation that demonstrates God's love to the world?

Esau was firstborn, but didn't care if he had it or not. He gave it away. Jacob wanted it very much, but cheated to get it. He stole it.

Neither one deserved it. Both brothers are at fault. One social class is no better than another social class. The Jews are no more deserving than the other ethnic groups of the Middle East.

And yet God gives his blessing.

Jacob tricked his father and manipulated his brother to get what he wanted. Then he had to leave to save his life. He was tricked and manipulated himself as he made a living, but overcame it and made a success of his life. But down inside him, he wanted to be right with God. He wanted God's blessing. He wanted it so badly he wrestled with an angel and wouldn't let go until he got it. He wanted to sense that his life counted for something important, he wanted to hear God say "well done, good and faithful servant". But he could only get that sense of peace if he got right with his brother.

So he went back to where he had grown up to find him. He didn't know what would happen. He didn't know if his brother would want to kill him or kiss him. But he had to go back. He had to take a chance. He had to try to make things right.

He sent some of his crew and family on ahead to make a peace offering with his brother, a gift. But he didn't know if it would be accepted.

When he saw Esau approaching he bowed down, honoring his brother. But Esau ran up, embraced him, held him tight and kissed him. And they both wept. Esau asked why he brought along all these herds of sheep and goats and servants. "I was hoping this gift would convince you to welcome me." said Jacob. "When I saw your face, it was as the face of God smiling on me. Accept the gifts I brought for you. God has been good and I have more than enough."

I know people who seem to enjoy their grudges. They carry their hurts, they nurse their grievances. They remind themselves of the reasons to feel hurt. They keep convincing themselves they have a right to be angry. Are you like that? Have you been hurt and keep reminding yourself of it?

But it's a small life. It's a waste of energy. It's not the life Christ came to give.

Life's too long to live like this.

We can't be right with God until we are right with our brother.

A verse in Colossians reminds us of what Jesus did. “God made us alive together with him having forgiven us all our trespasses, having cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.” Col 2:4

We can set it aside.