

Genesis 25:19-34, pt. 2
Sibling Rivalry Past and Present

Are you an impulsive person?

- Or would you say that you are cautious?

Even if you aren't an impulsive person all the time, you are probably impulsive some of the time

- We have all known the dangers of being too spontaneous
 - o Decisions
 - o Purchases
 - o Relationship

This mindset has nothing to do with age, either

- There are younger and older individuals who fall into both of these categories

Considering that we have all been spontaneous and impulsive at times, then this message is a good warning for us

- God's Word will help you to see the dangers of being too impulsive

Last week, we continued looking at this 25th chapter of Genesis

- Specifically, we began looking at the history of Isaac, the promised son of Abraham

We have waited for quite some time for this son to be born

- Promise after promise of God was made regarding his birth, his future, and his part in carrying on the lineage of the Messiah

His birth finally arrived

- Then the test of Abraham where it seemed that the life of the promised son would end
- But God provided a fit substitute so Isaac could live

Then we saw the marriage of Isaac

- Abraham had arranged for his servant to travel back to Haran in order to find a wife for his son
- As you remember, the LORD guided the servant and provided the right woman to be Isaac's wife

We then took a look at a brief reunion between Isaac and Ishmael at Abraham's death

That brings us to chapter 25

- This is the beginning of the history of Isaac
- This is another one of the *toledot* passages that Moses uses in order to narrow humanity down to one specific lineage through whom the Messiah would come

We began looking at this last section of Genesis 25 last week

- In it we learn three (3) exhortations that are related to Isaac, Rebekah, and their twin boys

Let's read Genesis 25:19-34

I. Take your problems to the Lord (25:19-22)

We learned that Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah

- Of course, Abraham was still alive at this time
- Abraham was 140 years old at the time of Isaac and Rebekah's marriage
- In fact, Abraham lived long enough to see his grandchildren turn 15

But there was a problem in this marriage that seemed to be made in heaven

- God had made it very clear that Isaac and Rebekah were to be married
- After all, the LORD chose Rebekah specifically for Isaac!

But we find out that Rebekah is "barren"

- That is a huge problem!

We know very little about Isaac up to this point

- He is not given very much attention in the book of Genesis
- He is a transitional character between Abraham and Jacob

But it does seem that Isaac is a spiritual, godly man

- He was in the field meditating when Abraham's servant returned with Rebekah
- He was obviously praying or spending time thinking about the things of God

In response to Rebekah's barrenness, we see the spiritual side of Isaac

- We are not told that he complained
- We are not told that he argued with God
- We are not told that he became bitter

We are told that he "prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren" (25:21)

- What a godly example!

Isaac didn't take matters into his own hands

- He didn't marry another wife
- He didn't attempt to have children through a concubine

Instead, he showed faithfulness to his wife

- He showed trust in the LORD Who alone could remedy the situation
- Only the LORD can open or close the womb (Gen 29:31; 30:22)

The lesson from Isaac is that you should take your problems to the Lord!

- Don't trust in yourself
- Don't take matters into your own hands

God wants us to depend on Him, not ourselves

- "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight" (Prov 3:5-6)

This isn't to say that prayer is a substitute for our responsibilities

- If you need food, then get a job
- If you need a wife, then start looking
- If you need wisdom, then read and study the Bible

But all of your responsibilities should be started with and saturated with prayer

- Humbly confess your inadequacies to God
- Remind yourself that you can't do this without Him

The result of Isaac's prayers is that "the LORD answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived" (25:21b)

- God was gracious to honor this man's prayers
- God opened Rebekah's womb so that she could conceive

But this joy and excitement quickly turned into concern on the behalf of Rebekah

- Verse 22 tells us that "the children struggled together within her"

The word here for "struggled" has a wide range of meanings in the OT¹

- It can refer to the breaking of bones
- It can refer to the oppression of the stronger over the weaker
- It can refer to mistreatment

Rebekah knew something was wrong inside of her womb

- There seemed to be violence
- This was no ordinary pregnancy

The result of this was that Rebekah was confused

- Even her statement in verse 22 indicates that she didn't even know what was happening in her own body!

So Rebekah did the right thing

- Verse 22 says, "she went to inquire of the LORD"

This terminology normally referred to someone consulting a prophet for guidance

- Keep in mind that Rebekah didn't have a pocket Bible to pull out
- She didn't have Psalms and Proverbs to consult

What revelation she may have heard was passed down in an oral form, most likely from Abraham himself

- Her knowledge of God's character and revelation would have been severely limited

Since she didn't know what was going on inside her body, she consults the LORD

- She knows that He has the answers!

Isaac and Rebekah both take their problems to the LORD

- They refused to trust in themselves
- They refused to be self-sufficient and self-reliant

But this passage teaches us another lesson that is equally important

II. Trust the word from the Lord (25:23-26)

After inquiring of the LORD, Rebekah hears a word from the LORD

- But it wasn't what she wanted to hear
- It wasn't what any mother wants to hear

¹ TWOT, 2212b, גִּוְרִיָּה.

The LORD tells her that there were twins in her body

- These two sons would become “two nations”
- In other words, they would not have much common ground
- They would go their separate ways during their lifetimes
- There was internal violence going on in her body

The LORD also told Rebekah that one of the twins would be stronger than the other

- This is common in most sibling relationships

But Rebekah learns that “the older shall serve the younger” (25:23)

- This was counter to the culture of the day
- Normally, the firstborn – the older – was the one who was in a position of prominence
- But not so with these twins

When it was time for Rebekah to give birth, “behold, there were twins in her womb” (25:24)

- Just like the LORD had said!
- The word of the LORD had come true!

We are witnesses to the birth of these twins

- Esau is the firstborn
- Jacob is the second son born

Esau is described as “red, all over like a hairy garment” (25:25)

- His parents named him according to his appearance, what he looked like

Jacob, on the other hand, “came forth with his hand holding on to Esau’s heel” (25:26)

- His parents named him according to his actions, what he did
- Literally, Jacob means “heel-grabber”

So we have this fitting introduction to these twins

- The LORD has already told the future of these twins
- Now we await its fulfillment

The important lesson for us in these verses is the need to trust the word of the LORD

- There is no hint that Rebekah scoffed when she heard from the LORD
- There is no hint that she doubted God’s Word

But oftentimes, we doubt

- Oftentimes, we don’t trust God’s Word
- We trust in ourselves or others to bring about action in our lives

We can learn a lot from Isaac and Rebekah

- Take your problems to the Lord (25:19-22)
- Trust the word from the Lord (25:23-26)
- *But thirdly...*

III. Treasure the blessings from the Lord (25:27-34)

²⁷ When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents.

We skip ahead a few years in the lives of Esau and Jacob

- They are no longer newborns
- They are much older, probably in their teens or early adulthood

These twins show remarkable differences as it relates to their occupations in life

- Esau is a “**skillful hunter**”
- The King James has “**cunning hunter**”

The idea behind “**skillful**” or “**cunning**” is the Hebrew word “to know”

- In other words, Esau knew how to hunt
- He knew how to hunt and track animals
- He was good at it!

Esau is further described as “**a man of the field**”

- He was a man who loved to be outside
- This fits the description of being a hunter, doesn't it?

Jacob, on the other hand, “**was a peaceful man, living in tents**”

- Different versions give different variations for “peaceful”
- Other choices are “plain,” “mild,” or “quiet”

Actually, the root word has in mind the idea of being perfect with a sense of integrity and maturity²

- This certainly fits with the examples of Noah (Gen 6:9) and Job (Job 1:1, 8)
- But this term certainly cannot point to Jacob's moral behavior

This term most likely is used to contrast Jacob with Esau

- Jacob was a homebody – someone who was content to be at home
- Esau was a hunter – he couldn't stand being around the camp all day

Jacob was a level-headed fellow³

- He is not normally given to huge emotional swings
- Of course, going up against such an opponent would be a formidable challenge
- Unfortunately for Esau, he would soon be the in cross-hairs of Jacob's strategy

In the womb, Esau and Jacob warred with one another

- Coming out of the womb, Jacob was holding on to Esau's heel
- Later in life, these twins were polar opposites
- It is very easy to see that these two men would lead separate lives
- No wonder they would become “**two nations**” (25:23)

² Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 415.

³ Derek Kidner, *Tyndale OT Commentaries, Genesis*, 152.

²⁸ Now Isaac loved Esau, because he had a taste for game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Now the differences in Esau and Jacob caused varying responses on the part of Isaac and Rebekah

- “Isaac loved Esau”
- “Rebekah loved Jacob”

Isaac the father loved the firstborn

- Rebekah the mother loved the secondborn

Not only are Jacob and Esau different

- Their differences caused favoritism by their parents

Isaac loved Esau “because he had a taste for game”

- Simply put, Isaac loved Esau since he could provide the wild game that he loved so much

This could let us in on something of Isaac’s character

- He could have been tempted to make choices based on his physical senses
- Isaac loved Esau because he gave him what he wanted⁴

Since Esau was a skillful hunter, he could obviously bring home the type of meat that Isaac loved

We are not told why Rebekah loved Jacob

- Perhaps it was pity
- Perhaps she noticed Isaac’s appreciation for Esau

Or perhaps it goes deeper than this

- Could it be that Rebekah remembered the promises of God for her children?
- You remember that the LORD Himself told Rebekah, “the older shall serve the younger” (25:23)

How much of this she told Isaac, we are not told

- But she definitely knew how the story would end
- Jacob, not Esau, would be the chosen seed

Perhaps Rebekah decided to be on the side of Jacob

- Later in life, this could definitely play to her advantage

So the twins are divided over different occupations

- The parents are divided over different sons

²⁹ And when Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished; ³⁰ and Esau said to Jacob, “Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished.” Therefore his name was called Edom.

Moses selects an event that took place in the normal life of these twins

- The events of this story, however, would have life-altering effects

Let’s picture the scene

- Moses helps us to accomplish that

⁴ Allen P. Ross, *Creation & Blessing*, 449.

We see Jacob sitting by the campfire near the tents

- Remember, Jacob was “a peaceful man, living in tents”
- We get the impression that he never left too far from home

What is Jacob doing?

- He “had cooked stew”

The writer makes it clear that the meal was ready for eating

- He “had cooked” stew
- Not “was cooking”

Verse 34 tells us that this stew was “lentil stew”

- This is still a favorite meal in Palestine

This stew is normally made with onions, garlic, rice, and olive oil

- All of this is served with lamb or some other meat⁵

Sounds good, doesn't it?

- It would smell especially good if you were hungry and tired from a long day's work

That is exactly what we find in the rest of verse 29

- This meal was being prepared when “Esau came in from the field”

Most of you know what it is like to pass through the Fellowship Hall after Sunday School on potluck Sundays

- The aromas of so many different kinds of foods fill the area
- Immediately your stomach sends off alarm bells that you are hungry...even when you really aren't!

But for Esau, he was hungry

- He had been out in the field
- No doubt, he had been hunting

A good hunter is not always successful, however

- There are times when you don't see any game
- There are other times when you see game, but can't kill it
- There are some times when you see game, have an opportunity to kill it, but miss
- There are a few times when everything works out and you bring home some food

Perhaps Esau had been out hunting all day

- Perhaps he had risen early that morning in order to go hunting

As he comes back home, he smells something

- Boy does it smell good!

Keep in mind that verse 28 has told us, “Isaac loved Esau, because he had a taste for game”

- Undoubtedly, Esau was able to kill wild game
- But he was also able to prepare that game in a savory manner

It just so “happened” that as Esau was returning home, Jacob was preparing this stew

- This stew that smelled so good

⁵ W.H. Griffith-Thomas, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary*, 233.

- This stew that was ready to eat...no waiting

The end of verse 29 informs us that Esau “**was famished**”

- This word indicates a physically weakened condition of the body
- This can be caused by extreme thirst, hunger, or physical exertion⁶

No doubt Esau was tired and hungry

- But the choice of words that he uses describes a man in a desperate situation

Sometimes when we are very hungry, we use the expression, “I am starving to death.”

- That is what Esau is claiming

Being in such a desperate situation, Esau told Jacob, “**Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished**”

- For a hungry man, the smell and sight of such a savory dish would have been all-consuming
- A meal was already prepared and ready to eat

Esau’s language is very simplistic, “**Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished**”

- Notice that he says, “**Please**”

This word was used in times of urgency

- It was more than merely a term of politeness
- It was a term that implied a pressing, critical situation

You can almost see Esau looking and pointing at the stew, “**let me have a swallow of that red stuff there**”

- The verb “**swallow**” is better translated gulp or devour

Esau didn’t want to taste test that stew

- He wanted to devour it!

For the second time in two verses, Esau speaks of his condition as being “**famished**”

- “**Jacob, don’t you see that I am dying of hunger?**”

Esau actually repeats the color of the stew twice, “**let me gulp down some of this red stuff, red stuff**”

The mention of “**red**” should remind us of something that we noticed about Esau from last week’s study

- In verse 25, Esau’s appearance after birth is described as “**red**”

The term for his appearance after birth and his description of Jacob’s stew are both given as “**red**”

- They are two different terms which are very close in meaning

Moses was using these two terms to tell the reader what kind of people would come from Esau

- The Edomites would be impulsive and profane, just like their ancestor⁷

Everytime the Edomites heard their name, they would be reminded of this one event in the life of Esau

- It would only serve to heighten the enmity and bitterness between these two twins who led two different nations

⁶ TWOT, 1614a, עֵיף.

⁷ Ross, 450.

In his day and age, there were no microwaves or fast-food restaurants

- Esau didn't have the liberty of going through KFC and picking up a bucket of fried chicken on the way home!

In his day, meals were prepared from scratch

- They took a long time to prepare

But not so for Esau

- Here was a meal
- Jacob had prepared it

Surely, Jacob would give his brother some of this meal, right?

- Sure he would...at a great cost

³¹ But Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright."

Knowing that his twin brother is in a desperate situation, Jacob does something that we don't expect

- We does not give Esau something to eat
- Instead, Jacob wants something from Esau

Isn't Jacob taking advantage of the situation?

- Isn't this unloving behavior toward a sibling?

Jacob demands that Esau "first sell me your birthright"

We have to understand what this birthright was

- This will help us to see why it was so important to Jacob

The birthright was the privilege bestowed upon the firstborn

- Having the birthright signified a position of leadership
- Obviously, as the oldest child, there would be a fair share of responsibility in looking after the other siblings and setting a good example for them

The birthright also had its privileges

- Upon the father's death, the firstborn inherited double what the other siblings received

Since Esau and Jacob were grandsons of Abraham, the birthright somehow tied in with the promises and blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant

- A seed, a land, and a universal blessing to the world

As strange as it sounds, in some cases, the birthright could be transferred to another sibling⁸

- We will see an example of this in Esau and Jacob

⁸ Kidner, 152.

³² And Esau said, “Behold, I am about to die; so of what *use* then is the birthright to me?” ³³ And Jacob said, “First swear to me”; so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob.

In a very exhausted and “**famished**” condition, Esau concedes that the birthright is pretty much useless

- After all, he feels that he is about to die!
- If he dies from hunger, “**of what *use* then is the birthright to me?**”

From Esau’s perspective, this is a life-or-death situation

- If he doesn’t get something to eat quickly, then he will die!

Even though Esau thinks that he will die from hunger, Jacob still presses the issue further, “**First swear to me**”

- Jacob is not content with Esau merely conceding his birthright
- Jacob wants Esau to enter into an oath that he is transferring his birthright to Jacob

When Esau emerged from the birth canal of Rebekah, something unusual took place

- Jacob somehow latched onto Esau’s heel

Well, we see the heel-grabber in action again

- He had Esau just where he wants him
- Jacob knows what he wants and he is intent on doing what it takes in order to gain it

Esau had fallen into Jacob’s trap

- The hunter had been outwitted by a better hunter⁹

God had told Rebekah that “**the older shall serve the younger**” (25:23)

- By succumbing to Jacob’s plan, Esau partially fulfilled the LORD’s words

Unable to do anything about the situation, Esau entered this oath and “**sold his birthright to Jacob**”

In a split instant, Esau made a foolish trade

- He sold the privileges and responsibilities of a birthright for one meal

We are allowed to see Esau’s perspective of the birthright

- For him, it must have meant very little or nothing

Granted, he probably would have been lured by the double inheritance

- However, he didn’t want to do the hard work in order to receive that double inheritance

Let’s put the matter bluntly

- Esau traded a birthright for a bowl of stew!

To many, Esau is a man’s man¹⁰

- But Scripture refers to him as a man of the world
- A man who is very worldly
- We will look at that in a few minutes

⁹ Ross, 449.

¹⁰ Griffith-Thomas, 231.

³⁴ Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

After sealing the deal with Esau, Jacob gave him what he wanted, “bread and lintel stew”

- Esau was “famished”
- He thought he was going to die
- So he made a foolish trade

The middle part of verse 34 captures the movements and actions of Esau using four verbs, “and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way”

- These come at us like a machine gun in rapid fire
 - o He ate
 - o He drank
 - o He rose
 - o He went on his way

After Esau went his way, the Text tells us that he “despised his birthright”

- As we have seen, Esau didn’t seem to put a high value on the birthright
- He never seemed to desire the spiritual responsibilities that accompanied the birthright

Specifically, the term “despised” is a strong term

- It implies having little or no regard for something precious
- It can be used of someone having little regard for the Word of God (Num 15:31; 2 Sam 12:9)
- It was used of Goliath “despising” little David (1 Sam 17:42)

The birthright was a very special privilege for the firstborn

- It should have motivated Esau to value it highly
- On the contrary, Esau didn’t value it at all
- He could have cared less about it

We are left with the impression that Jacob is perfectly content in giving up a little bread and stew for the birthright

- Jacob received what he wanted
- Jacob’s plan had worked out well

I believe that Jacob had intentionally planned this attack on Esau

- Keep in mind that even in the womb, these two twins didn’t get along with one another
- They were struggling, even in the birth order
- Esau was the firstborn; however, Jacob was a close second in that he was holding on Esau’s heel

Perhaps Jacob was always trying to concoct a plan for revenge

- How could Jacob obtain the blessings?
- As the secondborn son, he would not have received as much inheritance as Esau
- As the secondborn son, he would not have had the spiritual responsibilities as Esau

Without a doubt, Jacob knew Esau’s schedule

- He knew when he returned home from hunting
- So he waited for the right time to spring his plan into action

The author of Hebrews allows us to know a little bit more about Esau that we wouldn’t know otherwise

- In chapter 12, the author speaks of the need for sanctification in the life of the believer

- Listen to these verses that highlight the character of Esau, “Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵ See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; ¹⁶ that *there be* no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a *single* meal. ¹⁷ For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears” (12:14-17)

The author of Hebrews uses Esau as a negative example

- Believers should have no root of bitterness – Esau had bitterness
- Believers should pursue sanctification – Esau neglected this
- Believers should be focused on the eternal – Esau focused on the temporal
- Believers are given repentance from their sins – Esau begged for repentance, but it was not granted to him

From the inspired Word of God, we come to realize that Esau was an unbeliever

- Hebrews 12:16 classifies him as “immoral” and “godless”

Esau wasn’t concerned about eternal matters

- For him, he lived day to day
- He would deal with the future one day at a time

Esau was set on present gratification

- If it feels right, then it is probably right
- He lived for the moment, no matter the cost!

Jacob, on the other hand, is not the perfect specimen, either

- He is cunning
- He patiently waits until his purpose is accomplished
- He takes advantage of opportunities

Jacob knew that Esau despised the birthright

- These two knew each other well

Jacob appreciated the birthright¹¹

- He wanted the spiritual blessings
- However, he went about them in the wrong manner!

The amazing thing is that God had chosen Jacob before he was even born

- He didn’t have to resort to deceit in order to gain the spiritual blessings
- God would have given those to him...*if he had waited for God’s timing*¹²

Certainly both men were at fault

- Esau obviously didn’t value the birthright
- Jacob obviously coveted the value of the birthright

Although both twins were at fault, Scripture repeatedly place more responsibility on Esau

¹¹ Griffith-Thomas, 232-33.

¹² Morris, 418.

Esau had many advantages, if you think about it¹³

- Esau had believing parents and a grandfather who was called “the friend of God”
- He saw the benefits and blessings of God
- He knew the promises of God

Yet Esau chose to be more concerned with the present here and now

- He seems to have had little regard for some abstract, future promise of blessing
- He is a worldly man with his heart set on temporal, earthly things

Sure, he may have participated in some religious activities

- But his heart was not in them

Does that sound like any of you here today?

- Are there men, women, boys or girls who are more concerned about this world than God?

Oh, initially, you may object to that

- But if you look at your passions, your desires, your goals, your dreams, do they revolve around God, His Word, and holy character?
- Or, do they revolve around selfish pursuits, worldly success, and financial abundance?

Even as believers, we can become worldly-minded

- We often choose to focus on earthly instead of eternal matters
- We often choose sin over obedience

May God grant us repentance

- May He do a great work in our minds, renewing them with the truth found in God’s Word

¹³ Adapted from Rick Kress’ message on Genesis 25:27-34, preached at Grace Community Bible Church in Tomball, Texas.