



50

BIBLE STORIES

Every Adult Should Know

Volume 1: Old Testament

MATTHEW LOCKHART

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50 BIBLE STORIES EVERY ADULT SHOULD KNOW

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JACOB AND ESAU



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SETTING THE SCENE

Abraham and Sarah's son, Isaac, married Rebekah, and they had twin boys—Esau and Jacob. From the beginning, these two were rivals jostling in Rebekah's womb, with Jacob, the younger of the twins, grasping his brother's heel at birth.

Though twins, they could not have been more different in both appearance and temperament. Esau was hairy and an outdoorsman who liked to hunt. Jacob was smooth-skinned and quiet, preferring to spend time at home.

Further fueling their rivalry, Isaac, a fan of wild game, preferred Esau, while Jacob was Rebekah's favorite.

Sibling Rivalry

FROM GENESIS 27

After Isaac had become old and almost blind, he called in his first-born son Esau, who asked him, “Father, what can I do for you?”

Isaac replied, “I am old and might die at any time. So take your bow and arrows, then go out in the fields, and kill a wild animal. Cook some of that tasty food that I love so much and bring it to me. I want to eat it once more and give you my blessing before I die.”

Rebekah had been listening, and as soon as Esau left to go hunting, she said to Jacob, “I heard your father tell Esau to kill a wild animal and cook some tasty food for your father before he dies. Your father said this because he wants to bless your brother with the Lord as his witness. Now, my son, listen carefully to what I want you to do. Go and kill two of your best young goats and bring them to me. I’ll cook the tasty food that your father loves so much. Then you can take it to him, so he can eat it and give you his blessing before he dies.”

“My brother Esau is a hairy man,” Jacob reminded her. “And I am not. If my father touches me and realizes I am trying to trick him, he will put a curse on me instead of giving me a blessing.”

Rebekah insisted, “Let his curse fall on me! Just do what I say and bring me the meat.” Then she took Esau’s best clothes and put them on Jacob. She also covered the smooth part of his hands and neck with goatskins and gave him some bread and the tasty food she had cooked.

Jacob went to his father and said, “Father, here I am.”

“Which one of my sons are you?” his father asked.

Jacob replied, “I am Esau, your first-born, and I have done what you told me. Please sit up and eat the meat I have brought. Then you can give me your blessing.”

Isaac asked, “My son, how did you find an animal so quickly?”

“The LORD your God was kind to me,” Jacob answered.

“My son,” Isaac said, “come closer, where I can touch you and find out if you really are Esau.” Jacob went closer. His father touched him and said, “You sound like Jacob, but your hands feel hairy like Esau’s.” And so Isaac blessed Jacob, thinking he was Esau.

Isaac asked, “Are you really my son Esau?”

“Yes, I am,” Jacob answered.

So Isaac told him, “Serve me the wild meat, and I can give you my blessing.”

Then Isaac said, “Son, come over here and kiss me.” While Jacob was kissing him, Isaac caught the smell of his clothes and said:

“The smell of my son is like a field the LORD has blessed. God will bless you, my son, with dew from heaven and with fertile fields, rich with grain and grapes. Nations will be your servants and bow down to you. You will rule over your brothers, and they will kneel at your feet. Anyone who curses you will be cursed; anyone who blesses you will be blessed.”

Right after Isaac had given Jacob his blessing and Jacob had gone, Esau came back from hunting (CEV).

TRUTH FOR TODAY

This wasn't Jacob and Esau's first clash involving their respective positions as heirs. Prior to this episode, Esau had returned home famished one day and foolishly traded away his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew. His attitude toward his status of eldest son was so indifferent that it is said of this incident that “Esau despised his birthright” (Genesis 25:34, ESV).

Ironically, the Lord had already revealed to Rebekah during her pregnancy that she would have twins and that “the older shall serve the younger” (Genesis 25:23 ESV). Rather than leaving things be, Rebekah schemed to deceive blind Isaac in order for Jacob to receive his blessing. And in Jacob Rebekah had a willing accomplice.

While successful in having Jacob receive Isaac's blessing, the deceit further fractured this already fragile family, resulting in Jacob fleeing in fear to Haran (the far-away home of Rebekah's family), never to see his mother alive again.

Oh, what a tangled web
we weave When first
we practise to deceive!
—SIR WALTER SCOTT,
Marmion, (1808)

Oh, the unintended pain and repercussions when we plot and scheme to manipulate circumstances to our advantage.

You can make many plans, but the LORD's purpose will prevail. Proverbs 19:21

FYI

So what's the big deal about the *blessing* in Bible times? It was a bequeathing similar to a last will and testament, whereas *birthright* had more to do with one's standing or authority to lead a family or tribe.

There are two sets of known twins in the Bible: Jacob and Esau and Perez and Zerah. As noted in Genesis 38, Perez and Zerah were Jacob's grandsons, born to his son Judah.