

Sunday School Lesson

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except by the father's pronouncement.

In the episode describing the trading of his birthright, Esau is pictured as an uncouth hunter who, returning home famished, impulsively gives up his privileges of birth in exchange for some bread and reddish beans. Thinking only of his stomach and the comfort of the moment, Esau showed himself shockingly irresponsible. Since the birthright included divine

promise of future blessing, exchanging it for worldly goods was offensive also to God.

Esau seemed to have no perception of the meaning of religious faith, no concern for responsible stewardship of wealth, position, and privilege. But, although Esau was foolishly irresponsible and utterly careless, Jacob displayed neither brotherly affection nor family respect and concern. Taking advantage of Esau's weaknesses, Jacob persuaded him to forfeit his spiritual heritage and future position and wealth.

The Father's Last Blessing

Genesis 27 is a sharp and sensitive story of further competition between Esau and Jacob. The author seizes our emotions and calls forth feelings deeper than intellect.

Here the issue is not the birthright as such but the final blessing of their father. This blessing was a kind of deathbed will and testament believed to be confirmed by deity and thus unchangeable. It was necessarily linked to the birthright since it carried with it the father's designation of one of his sons to receive the rights and responsi-

bilities of being chief heir.

The father could, at his own discretion, designate a son other than the one actually born first to possess the rights of the first-born. Priority of birth was therefore not always the deciding factor in determining who held the birthright. A father had the last word.

God Controls

Isaac was, in reality, not able to determine his successor to the covenant promises. He himself had received the promises by special grace, and in like manner they would pass on. It is always by divine prerogative

that the covenant and its promises are transmitted from generation to generation.

Nevertheless, human action must not be thought puppetlike or meaningless. The way people act is taken and used by God to carry out his purposes. However, God is not forced to depend upon men's actions any more than he forces men to do his will.

Isaac did not intend to bless Jacob as first heir, but he did so because of the fraud Rebekah plotted and Jacob carried out. Despite a contrary intention,

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