

Sunday School Lesson

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Isaac's blessing was in fact a legal, correct transfer of the birthright from Esau to Jacob. With the birthright went also the covenant promises, which God confirmed with Jacob later.

According to Genesis 25:23, God had chosen Jacob before his birth to have first place. Therefore, what both Hebekah and Jacob wanted would have come to pass if they had only been willing to wait, to trust in God. Taking matters into their own hands and acting dishonestly did not cause the privileges and responsibilities of the birthright to go to Jacob. But they did destroy the family relationships.

None can justify or condone the intent or deeds of Rebekah and Jacob. Their deceit posed ethical questions even in biblical times, as is clear from the disapproval expressed in Hosea 12:2-3 and Jeremiah 9:4.

In the way the story is told, we can recognize that Esau had the author's personal sympathies. His treatment of the anguish of both Isaac and Esau, following the treacherous fraud, is deeply sensitive and conveys keen pathos and moral courage. Moreover, retribution is reported: Jacob paid for his lies by some twenty years of fugitive absence from his homeland.

The sorry consequences of human pride, worldly ambition, and moral irresponsibility are laid bare in the story. At the same time, we are made aware of the divine dimension operating in human affairs.

Underlying this history of family strife and jealousies is the biblical testimony that divine promises do not automatically or mechanically pass from one generation to the next in agreement with human custom. God is ever the initiator of faith, and he remains free to extend or withhold its promises.

The Chosen and the Not Chosen
We must remember that God chose Abraham and some of his descendants to serve his ultimate purpose of redemption of the secular order. Many of his ways will always be beyond our

understanding. Nonetheless, it is possible to see that he takes a person or a group and directs him or them for final righteousness, redeeming each as is necessary so that each may be a servant of spiritual realities.

What, then, of those who are not specially chosen? Are they left out of God's blessings? The biblical answer is Yes in regard to special providence and mission, No in regard to ordinary care and mercy. Everyone receives life as a gift, along with its sun and rain. Thus Esau finally prospered, although he was denied the Promised Land and could not inherit the covenant promises. (See Genesis 27:39-40; 33:9-11; 36:6-8.)

What Do You Think

How do people in our day barter or sell their birthright?

Which of the twins, Esau or Jacob, do you think was the more worldly in attitude and action? What are your reasons for your answer?

Almighty Father, Spirit of truth, enable us to value spiritual realities above material things. Grant us temporal pleasures, but do not let them become first in our lives. Help us control our appetites so that our wants may conform to thy will. May love, loyalty, honesty, and justice fill our family relationships so that the reality of thy kingdom may dwell in our homes. We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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