

Jacob and Esau



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Genesis 27:1-19

This is the story of Isaac, his twin sons Jacob and Esau (Esau was a little bit older than Jacob) and Rebekah their mother. In those days, Esau, being the oldest son, would traditionally receive a special inheritance and blessing from his father.

After Isaac had become old and almost blind, he called in his firstborn 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." So Jacob brought the meat to his mother, and she cooked the tasty food that his father liked. 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 firstborn, 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."

Commentary

Here begins a Bible story full of family feuding, deception and out-and-out lies! These 'heroes of faith' are far from perfect, but make mistake after mistake, just as we do. Esau and Jacob are not only twins but rivals. Their parents, Isaac and Rebekah, each show favouritism; and before this part of the story, Esau has already shown that he is more interested in a full stomach than his position as the senior of the two brothers. It seems strange that God should choose to use such a messed-up family to bless the world, when all they can do is plot and scheme over who gets the blessing of the family inheritance. They are each as bad as the other, but God does not give up on them, just as he never gives up on whatever's going on in our family life. As Jacob starts to lie to his father encouraged by his mom, it doesn't seem possible that one day God will bring good out of all this. However, God does do just that.

Questions

- ▶ “You’ve always been Mom’s favourite!” ... “It’s not fair!” ... “It’s my turn!” must have been phrases regularly heard in Isaac’s home. Are you ever tempted to say something similar?
- ▶ Who do you think is most to blame for how things turned out? Isaac? Rebekah? Esau? Jacob?
- ▶ If you were asked to help sort out this family mess, where would you start?
- ▶ Why do you think God didn’t just step in and put an end to all the arguments, the hurt and the lying?



Visual aid

Make up a card game like ‘Go Fish’ by drawing picture cards illustrating made-up family members. Like ‘Go Fish’, collect a complete set of cards showing a complete family with members wearing matching colour clothes. After you’ve played once, play again, this time collect a totally mixed-up set of unrelated people. Who will be the first to make an unhappy family, like Isaac’s family?



Activity idea

List together all the words that describe things that tear families apart—for example, jealousy, disrespect, lying, favouritism and so on. Talk about how they can creep in, even between people who love each other, and how we can stop them. You could make a list of golden rules or maybe use symbols such as an ear for listening, a clock for spending time together, scales for being fair or a speech bubble with ‘sorry’ in it for being the first to say ‘I’m sorry’.



Prayer idea

Fold a long strip of paper like an accordion and then, on the top, draw the outline of a person, making sure the arms stretch out and touch each side at left and right. Cut out the figure without cutting through where the hands touch the sides, and unfold your people chain. On each figure write the name of a person in your immediate or extended family (tape two or three chains together as necessary). Use this prayer chain as a reminder of who to pray for, turning over one person in the accordion at a time.

Key verse

“What can I do for you?” (Genesis 27:1). *Use Esau’s question as you look for ways to bless others today.*

New Testament story link

Luke 12:13-21: Jesus tells a special story about what really matters to two brothers who were quarrelling over a family inheritance.



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