

Chapter Six – Esau and Jacob

Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebecca. At first she was childless but he prayed to God for her and his prayer was answered. During her pregnancy, the twins constantly struggled against each other in her womb. God told her that her sons were like two nations; one would be stronger than the other, and the older son would serve the younger. She named the red and hairy first-born son, Esau, and the second, Jacob.

When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter who loved the open plains. Jacob became a shepherd for he loved to be quiet and spend more time at home. Isaac loved Esau who brought him animals to eat but Rebecca loved Jacob. One day, when Esau came back tired from hunting, he found Jacob making some vegetable soup for his lunch and he said to him, "Please let me have a mouthful of that soup of yours for I am very tired and hungry." Jacob replied, "I have not enough for myself but I can give you some if you give me your birth-right." He wanted to have the birth-right and become the first-born as traditionally only the first-born would get a special blessing from his father and inherit the property when the father died. He would also be the next chief of the tribe.

Esau was too hungry to think properly so he replied, "What is the use of my birth-right if I am going to die of hunger?"

"Swear then to me," said Jacob, and Esau did so. Then Jacob gave him bread and soup, and Esau went away not caring about what he had done.

When Isaac was old and blind, he called Esau one day and said to him, "See how old I am now. I may die soon. Take your bow and arrows and go out hunting. When you have killed an animal, cook it for me. After the meal, I will give you my blessing as you are my first-born." Rebecca heard everything and, as soon as Esau left, she told Jacob what his father had said.

"Now," she said, "this is my plan. Go to your herd and pick out two fat goats and bring them to me. I shall cook them just as your father likes and you will take them to him. When he has eaten them, the blessing will be yours."

But Jacob said, "Remember that Esau's skin is hairy and mine is smooth. What will happen if my father should feel it? Instead of a blessing, I will get a curse."

"Let the curse fall on me," she answered, "but go and do quickly what I ask you."

She cooked a meal in the way Isaac liked. She dressed Jacob in Esau's clothes, poured scent on them, covered his hands and neck with furry skins and gave him the meal with some bread. Isaac thought it was Esau preparing the meal for him and he gave the final blessing to Jacob. He could not tell it was Jacob in disguise. Jacob could have told his father that he got the birth-right from Esau to get the blessing but instead he chose to deceive his father.

Not long afterwards, Esau returned and cooked the meat for his father. He brought the dish to him and asked for his blessing. Isaac trembled when he found that it was Jacob who got his blessing. Esau begged his father to bless him as well but it was too late. This meant that Esau would be under his brother, serving him for the rest of his life.

Esau was very angry and muttered to himself, "I will kill Jacob after I have mourned the death of my father."

Rebecca heard his plan so she told Jacob to flee to Haran and stay with her brother Laban until Esau's anger died down.



Isaac blesses Jacob

Questions:

1. Describe the character of Esau.
2. Describe the character of Jacob.
3. What is meant by a "birth-right"?
4. Who caused the conflict between Esau and Jacob? Explain your answer.
5. Why was the father's blessing so important?
6. Give examples of people who take revenge nowadays.
7. Why do you think taking revenge is wrong?