



But Mom Always Liked You Best

Birth order can have a profound impact on a family's expectations. In our Bible story this morning, it's a theme we see between Jacob and Esau as well as Leah and Rachel – Jacob's anger at Esau's birth placement plays itself out on Leah and her children, continuing the unhealthy pattern.

Genesis 25:24-34 When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. Afterwards his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them. When the boys grew up, Esau was a skilful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob. Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. Esau said to Jacob, 'Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!' (Therefore he was called Edom.) Jacob said, 'First sell me your birthright.' Esau said, 'I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?' Jacob said, 'Swear to me first.' So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Reflection

Esau and Jacob were twins, born to Isaac and Rebekah. Esau was the first of the twins to be born. Before Esau's birth, the Lord told Rebekah that her older son would serve the younger son (Genesis 25:23). This was an unusual concept in ancient times because the oldest son was regarded as the heir of the father's wealth, power, and authority.

Esau was born first. But when his twin brother Jacob was being born, Jacob's hand was holding onto Esau's heel. This was taken as a sign that Jacob wanted to be born first. Later in life, Jacob continued to show that he wanted to be his father's heir.

One day, Esau returned from an unsuccessful hunting trip and was famished. He saw that Jacob had been cooking food and he asked for a serving.

Jacob asked him if he would be willing to sell his rights as the first-born son in exchange for a bowl of food. Esau agreed.

Regardless of whether Esau was being serious or flippant in selling off his birthright, Jacob sought to make good on the deal and, with his mother's help, tricked his aging father into giving Jacob the blessing that traditionally would have been reserved for the first-born.

After Jacob had gotten the blessing from his father, Esau vowed to kill Jacob. To protect Jacob, his mother arranged for him to live with her relatives in Haran. Jacob lived in Haran for about 20 years, working for his uncle, Laban.

Leah was Laban's oldest daughter. She became Jacob's first wife and the mother of six of his sons. Jacob, however, was in love with Leah's younger sister,

Rachel. Jacob had agreed to work for Laban for seven years to get permission to take Rachel as his bride. However, Laban tricked him into marrying Leah. Jacob kept Leah as his wife but worked another seven years for Laban so that he could also marry Rachel.

So Jacob receives a blessing that should have been given to Esau and then Jacob is tricked into marrying Leah when he was in love with her sister Rachel. Esau and Leah were first born children and Jacob and Rachel were the second oldest children. What do they all have in common?

Resources

[Generation to Generation, Family Process in Church and Synagogue](#) by Edwin Friedman.

[Solutionsonvideo.com](#) by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend

Readings

Sunday, January 28

Genesis 25:24-34

Growing up what was the worst swap you ever made with a brother or sister? Why did you do it?

Monday, January 29

Genesis 25:24-34; Romans 9:10-16

Which of these two men (Esau and Jacob) does God elect? On what basis? What does this tell you about God?

Tuesday, January 30

Genesis 25:24-34; Hebrews 12:16

What was the "birthright" that Jacob coveted and Esau despised? Why did Jacob covet the birthright and Esau despise it?

Wednesday, January 31

Genesis 29:1-30

Laban gave Jacob Leah instead of Rachel. Why do you think Laban tricked Jacob?

Thursday, February 1

Genesis 29:31-35

The 12 sons of Jacob become the 12 tribes of Israel? Why did God choose to accomplish so much through such an imperfect family?

Friday, February 2

Genesis 35:22; Genesis 49:1-28

Reuben was the first child of Jacob and Leah, and the founder of the tribe of Reuben. When the Bible lists the names of Jacob's 12 sons, Reuben's is listed first. But Reuben lost the privileges that traditionally were given to first-born sons because he had an affair with Bilhah, who was his father's concubine

In Genesis 35 it was mentioned that Reuben had an affair with Bilhah. Genesis 49 describes the consequences of this behavior. Does it surprise you that Jacob took away Reuben's birthright? Why or why not?

Saturday February 3

Gen 30:22-24; Genesis 37:1-28

Joseph was one of 12 sons of Jacob. He was the first born son of Rachel. He received preferential treatment which angered his ten older brothers. His brothers faked his death to their father Jacob, and sold him to a caravan of Ishmaelite traders who were on their way to Egypt.

Why did Jacob play favorites? Didn't he remember how favoritism ruined his relationship with his brother, Esau?