

REBEKAH'S TWIN BOYS

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THERE have always been twins and triplets in the world, and sometimes there have been quadruplets and quintuplets. Once there were very important twin boys, the children of Isaac and Rebekah. They had been married for twenty years before these boys were born. Like their father, Isaac, and their grandfather Abraham, these boys were very important in the sight of God, because he had promised such wonderful things concerning Abraham's family. One thing about these twin boys which was different from many twins was that they didn't look alike. Their names were Jacob and Esau. The Bible tells us that Esau's body was covered with red hair. Wasn't that odd? But this was what made him look so different from Jacob, who didn't have hair on his body. Oh, I suppose he had some on his head, but not much on his body.

When Esau grew to manhood he spent a great deal of his time hunting, and the Bible tells us that he was a very good hunter. His red hair, however, had nothing to do with this. Jacob lived a quieter life, dwelling in tents. Probably he was a farmer, and also raised sheep and cattle.

The Bible says that Isaac loved Esau very much. When Esau went hunting he always brought home a nice meal of meat. But the Bible says that Rebekah, the mother of the boys, loved Jacob more than Esau.

Now God had revealed to Rebekah, the mother of the twins, that Jacob was to be the one whom he would especially bless. Perhaps

that is the reason she loved Jacob more than Esau. As we read the Bible story of the two boys, we learn that Jacob was the one most loved by God because he believed that God's promises would come true!

The wonderful promise that God had made to Jacob's grandfather, Abraham, and to his father, Isaac, was very dear to Jacob, and he wanted to do everything he could so that that promise would belong to him. In the Bible this promise is called the "birthright." Esau thought the birthright belonged to him because he was born first and therefore the older of the two. But God had explained to their mother that he wanted Jacob to be the real heir of the promise. No doubt Jacob's mother had told him all about this, and what God had said to her, so he was watching for an opportunity to secure the birthright as God desired.

One day when Esau had been hunting he came home very hungry. Jacob had stayed at home and had cooked a delicious meal of what the Bible calls "pottage." Probably it was very much like bean soup which, as I am sure you know, is very appetizing when it is properly made. So when Esau came in from hunting, and asked Jacob for a meal of his tasty pottage, Jacob told Esau he could have it if he would let him have the promised birthright.

To Esau this seemed like a very good bargain indeed, because he didn't have as much faith as Jacob had in God's promises. When Esau was hungry a very good meal was much more important to him than any promises God had made. So he agreed to sell the birthright to Jacob in order to have something good to eat! As we will see, Esau made a great mistake in doing this.

And that is true now, too, boys and girls. Whatever God has promised to us is much more important than getting something to eat when we are hungry, or satisfying any other craving that we may have. Of course Esau was sorry later for what he had done; but having sold his birthright for the meal of pottage, it was too late to do anything about it. It now belonged to Jacob, not only because God wanted him to have it, but also because he had bought it from

Esau. And Jacob appreciated it, because he believed the promises of God.

Years after this, when the boys' father was very old and did not expect to live much longer, he wanted to give his blessing to the boy to whom the birthright belonged. Fathers don't do things like that today, but they did when Abraham and Isaac and Jacob lived. It was then the custom, when a father became very old, to call his family together and give them his good wishes and remind them of the promises God had made to him and to his children. They called it "giving a blessing," and when a blessing was given to a child by his father it could not be changed.

Their father did not know that Esau had sold his birthright to Jacob, so he asked Esau to go out into the fields and bring him some meat for supper. He told Esau that he wished to bestow his blessing upon him before he died.

Rebekah, the twins' mother, heard Isaac telling this to Esau, and she knew that the blessing Isaac was planning to give to Esau really belonged to Jacob. Esau, you see, was not quite fair, was he? He had sold the birthright to Jacob, and now, without explaining to his father, he was anxious to get it back for himself.

But Rebekah, who loved God, knew that God wanted Jacob to have that birthright, so she arranged with Jacob to obtain the blessing from his father before Esau returned from hunting. She told Jacob to kill a young goat and she would prepare it for him to take to his father.

Isaac was now very old and blind, and so he wasn't able to see whether it was Esau or Jacob who brought him his supper. Besides, Jacob's mother fastened some hair of a young goat on the back of his hands. This made Jacob's hands feel just like Esau's, and Isaac was sure that it really was Esau, so he gave him the blessing.

In this way Jacob received the birthright from his father which he had bought from Esau. From this day on, all the promises that God had made to Jacob's grandfather, Abraham, and to his father, Isaac, belonged to him! Now he was to be the one whom God would use in his wonderful plan to make his promises come true!

QUESTIONS

- Who were the first twin boys mentioned in the Bible, and did they look like each other?
- What is a birthright, and why did Esau sell his birthright to Jacob?
- Why did Rebekah, Jacob's mother, want him to receive the blessing of the birthright rather than Esau?

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Jacob receives the birthright from Isaac

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