

## THE SALE OF A BIRTHRIGHT

– APRIL 6. – GENESIS 27:22-34. –

**"Esau...for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected." – Hebrews 12:16,17.**

IN OLDEN TIMES, and still in some countries, the birthright belonged to the firstborn son. At the father's death the oldest son took his place at the head of the family; and the property, usually consisting of flocks and herds, became his possession. But today's lesson introduces us to a birthright which included much more than the earthly possessions. It included the inheritance of certain great Divine promises.

Abraham's estate went to Isaac, the others of the family receiving portions of it of and through him. Abraham was very rich, but the possession which he prized more than all earthly things was the Divine Promise, or Covenant, made with him – that the blessing of the Lord would specially be upon his seed, his posterity; and that eventually all nations of the earth would be blessed and favored of God through them.

This great promise Isaac had inherited. At the time of our lesson he was more than a hundred years old, and blind. He realized that the time had come for him to give his blessing to his heir, which blessing served as instead of a written will – the custom of today. He therefore instructed Esau, the hunter, to prepare him a special dinner of venison; thus to prepare to receive his blessing.

Isaac had two sons, Esau and Jacob – twins, Esau being the elder by a few moments only. But these twins, contrary to what is usual, were very dissimilar. Esau was hairy and ruddy, full of vigor, athletic, a hunter. Jacob was the reverse of this – smooth-skinned,

dark-complexioned, a tent-man, or home-keeper, as in contrast with a hunter. Jacob seems to have inherited the qualities of his father, Esau more the vivacity of his mother. As temperamental opposites agree best, Isaac loved Esau most; while Rebecca, the mother, loved Jacob best.

The quiet, studious Jacob thought frequently of the great blessing God had promised to his grandfather Abraham, a share in which he apparently had missed by an accident of birth – by a few minutes only. The more he studied, the more he realized the value of that great Promise. Esau, on the contrary, full of animal spirit, thought more of the pleasures of the present life, and considered the Divine Promise as quite secondary and rather visionary.

These two men had passed thirty years of age, we know not how much. Esau was looking forward to his inheritance of the bulk of his father's property. Jacob, humiliated by his misfortune of birth, was downcast. He was fond of lentil soup, and had made some for himself. Just as he was about to partake, his brother Esau arrived on the scene hungry, having just returned from a chase, and begged to have Jacob's soup.

Then Jacob said to Esau, in substance, "You have every advantage. I have nothing but this soup. If you are willing, we will change places. You can have the soup and I will take the advantages." Esau replied, "I am tired to death, anyway. Give me the soup." Jacob answered, "I mean it, though, solemnly. If you swear that you will transfer the birthright to me, we will settle this matter; and the soup will be yours." Careless Esau swore away his birthright for a mess of pottage, and thus signified that he had no particular faith in God or in His promises.

Time passed. Esau married heathen wives when he was forty, and his father Isaac a hundred years old. A little later than this came the denouement – the imparting of the blessing to the one who

bought, to the chagrin and anger of the one who most solemnly sold it.

Rebecca, the mother, had heard Isaac's instruction to Esau, and remembered that the birthright had been sold under oath to Jacob, her favorite. She explained the situation to Jacob and assured him, as his mother, that he would be right in personifying his brother Esau and receiving the blessing as his proxy or representative. She prepared the kind of stew which Isaac preferred, using the skins of kids to cover Jacob's neck and hands, that thus his father might mistake him for Esau. As he had bought all of Esau's rights, she thought it not improper to clothe him with Esau's garments, and instructed him that any blame coming from the deception would be hers. She took the entire responsibility. Jacob carried out the program and got the chief blessing.

Esau came in later with his venison stew, prepared to violate his contract made under oath, and was greatly disappointed to learn that the blessing was gone. It seemed more valuable then than when he had sold it. Although he received an inferior blessing from his father, he had the spirit of murder toward his brother for carrying out the terms and conditions incident to the birthright sale.

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### **EARTHLY LOSS SPIRITUAL GAIN**

The account shows that Jacob's interest in the birthright blessing was not in the temporal or earthly inheritance, but in the spiritual Promise with which he was connected. He left his home and all the property to which he was heir, and went penniless to work for his uncle. Esau might have all the earthly possessions. Jacob carried with him, wherever he went, the birthright privilege of the Promise made to Abraham. This could not be alienated from him. With this he was rich.

St. Paul calls our attention to the fact that all these results were foreknown to God; and that at the birth of these two men it had been specifically declared that the elder should serve the younger. (Romans 9:10-13.) No doubt this Divine prophecy guided Rebecca in opposing and thwarting Isaac's love for Esau, which impelled him to give the blessing to the elder son, notwithstanding the Divine prophecy to the contrary. – Genesis 25:23.

### **JACOB LOVED – ESAU LOVED LESS**

It is not for us to defend Jacob and his mother in their misrepresentation of the facts – in the deception of Isaac. It is not for us to recommend any others to follow his course. Nevertheless, it is proper that we should notice that the Bible distinctly tells us that God's loving favor was with Jacob. "Jacob have I loved." He was loved because of his reverential love for God and the great Oath-bound Promise.

Not a word of condemnation is given to Jacob anywhere in respect to this matter. No teacher in the name of the Lord, therefore, has the right to be wiser than what is written in God's Word. On the contrary, Esau is roundly denounced, and is called profane and wicked, because he would sell his birthright for a mess of pottage, or any other consideration. The love of Jacob for the birthright is held up for our emulation. Esau's carelessness is held up as a warning that if any of us are careless of our birthright, we shall not only lose it, but lose the favor of God. – Hebrews 12:15-17.

### **THE LESSON OF THE LOST BIRTHRIGHT**

The Apostle calls our attention to the fact that the experiences of these two men in the long ago were designed of the Lord to be typical. Abraham's natural seed is indeed to have a blessing, represented by Esau's blessing; but Abraham's Spiritual Seed is to have the greater blessing, typified by Jacob's inheritance. The earthly seed inherit the earthly blessings. The Spiritual Seed give up all their

earthly rights, that they may be possessors of the spiritual promises, which the natural man cares not for.

The Apostle points out that this does not apply merely to the Natural Israelite, but to all who, after having had the privileges and opportunities of becoming joint-heirs with Christ in His Messianic Kingdom, love the pleasures of this world. These are represented as selling their birthright on the spirit plane for a mess of pottage – earthly advantage.

The Abrahamic Promise is still the one, and the only one, held out by the Almighty. Messiah is the Seed of Abraham, through whom all of God's blessings must come. Jesus is the Head and the Church are the members of the Body, as St. Paul points out: "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's Seed, and heirs according to the [Abrahamic] Promise." – Gal. 3:29.

To the Jew first, came the opportunity for constituting this Spiritual Seed; but the vast majority loved and trusted more the things of the present life. The few loved and trusted Jesus and became His followers. Since the door to this "high calling" has been thrown open to the Gentiles, the results have been the same; the majority have loved the present life; the few have appreciated the things unseen as yet.

To the saintly few represented by Jacob, the obtaining of this life-right means self-sacrifice, the loss of earthly favors – the surrender of these to others who love the present world. To others it means the getting of a mess of pottage – earthly advantages of the present time – and the losing of a great prize, which Jesus likened to a "pearl of great price," to obtain which we should be willing to sell all we possess – to obtain a share in Messiah's Kingdom, which shortly is to bless Israel and all the world.

No one can *sell* his birthright until he *has* a birthright. Hence the application of this in antitype is merely to the consecrated people of

God. Only those who have been begotten of the Holy Spirit have a birthright in the highest sense. And only these could sell it for the mess of pottage. The world may strive for its various prizes and pearls, and is measurably justified in so doing, because it has nothing else.

But the spirit-begotten heirs of the Divine Promise became such by promising absolute loyalty to the Lord and **[R5199 : page 77]** to the principles of Justice and Mercy. These must self-sacrificingly continue to walk in the Master's footsteps; else they cannot share with Him the glorious outcome. Only those who attain a share in the Kingdom will have a share in its wonderful work of blessing and uplifting humanity. Let us, then, as the Apostle exhorts, lay aside every weight and every besetting sin, and run with patience the race set before us in the Gospel, looking unto Jesus, the Author of our faith, until He shall become the Finisher of it. – Hebrews 12:1-3.

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