

### Esau Sells His Birthright to Jacob

#### Genesis 25:29-34

Genesis 25:29-34 - *"Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary. <sup>30</sup> And Esau said to Jacob, 'Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary.' Therefore his name was called Edom. <sup>31</sup> But Jacob said, 'Sell me your birthright as of this day.'*

*<sup>32</sup> And Esau said, 'Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?' <sup>33</sup> Then Jacob said, 'Swear to me as of this day.'*

*So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. <sup>34</sup> And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright."*

#### Background Notes

How old were Jacob and Esau when this event took place? We don't know, but probably they were in their teens or early twenties. Jacob, who liked to stay around home, had evidently become a pretty good cook.

One day Esau came in from a long day of hunting, and he was famished. He caught a whiff of the lentil stew that Jacob had just cooked. It smelled **so** good! I wonder if Jacob had planned this, knowing that Esau would be famished when he came in from a day of hunting. In any case, Esau wanted that food so much that he was willing to **sell his birthright** to Jacob - for a bowl of lentil stew!

Jacob and Esau were twins, but Esau was born first, so the birthright belonged to Esau. However, in those days you could transfer the benefits and the responsibilities of the birthright. The Nuzi Tablets, extra-biblical records that date back to patriarchal times, testify to the practice of selling birthrights.

In those days the birthright consisted of three things: 1) a position of supremacy in the family; 2) a double portion of the inheritance (this later became part of the Mosaic Law); 3) the spiritual privileges and responsibilities in the family (and #3 is the significant point here),

Remember - back in patriarchal times there was no priesthood. The priesthood came later, under the Mosaic Law. So the priestly rights, privileges, and pastoral responsibilities within the family were part of the birthright - and that belonged to the firstborn. It was a privileged position and a very responsible position. In addition, the birthright in this particular family carried with it the promise of the Messianic lineage, a very important point here.

Esau could not have cared less about this third aspect of the birthright! He was a man of the moment, and right now he was famished: *“Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?”* (v32). Basically he was saying, “What good is this birthright? Who cares about those spiritual privileges and responsibilities? I’m famished! Just give me that stew!” So Esau sold his birthright to his brother Jacob for a single meal.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Despising the things of God is serious sin.

*“And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright”* (v34). Esau despised his birthright. He held it in contempt. He treated it as worthless. Because of the spiritual aspect to the birthright, this attitude was very serious - in fact, it was serious sin. Hebrews 12:16 warns us not to be like Esau, who for one morsel of food, a single meal, sold his birthright. For this he was called a profane person: *“lest there be any... profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.”*

Despising the things of God is a serious sin. Is it possible that you are an “Esau”? You may say, “No way! I’m not like Esau. I would never despise the things of God.” Well then, what about our priorities? If we would prefer to stay home and watch TV or read the Sunday paper, rather than worshiping God with fellow believers – isn’t that an indication of “looking down” on the things of the Lord? If we’d rather spend more time reading a magazine or a good novel than spending time reading God’s Word, is that not a kind of “looking down” on the things of the Lord?

Now don’t get me wrong, I’m not saying that it’s wrong to read newspapers or magazines or good novels! It’s our **priorities** that are the point. Where are your priorities? Where are my priorities? Is it possible that we are looking down on the things of the Lord?

We may not be fully like Esau, but it is possible that we are “partial Esau’s.” Maybe our priorities need some adjusting and some straightening out. To despise the things of God is a serious sin.

### 2. Scheming for the things of God is a serious mistake.

Jacob didn’t despise the things of God - in fact, Jacob *appreciated* the things of God. Jacob wanted the birthright, and later on he wanted the blessing as well. Jacob was willing to take on the spiritual responsibilities in the family. That’s the good news about Jacob.

But Jacob went about it the wrong way - he **schemed** to obtain the birthright. It’s a serious mistake to scheme for the things of God. All Jacob had to do was wait on God. Before the boys were born, God had clearly declared that the older

would serve the younger. It's possible that Isaac and Rebekah communicated that fact to the twins, but Jacob couldn't wait for God. He rushed ahead of God and schemed to obtain the things he wanted. Because this was a serious mistake, Jacob had to reap the consequences. Jacob had a long way to go in the "school of God." Scheming to obtain the things of God is a serious mistake.

There are many applications of this principle today, but I think an obvious application would be in the area of moneymaking or fund-raising schemes in the church or in Christian ministries. I'm sure every one of you could give me an example of ministries using fund-raising schemes - in fact, most of us probably got at least one fund raising letter from a Christian ministry this past week. Now I'm not saying that all church fund raising is wrong, but if the fundraising involves an unbiblical scheme, it's certainly wrong.

There are agencies (both Christian and non-Christian) that will do fund raising for you. They will guarantee a return because they know how to manipulate people to give! Sadly, some Christian ministries even use these non-Christian agencies. I believe that raising funds in a manipulative way is "scheming for the things of God." That's not "waiting on God" for **His** supply of your need! **We should do God's work in God's way!** Scheming for the things of God is a serious mistake.

I'm preaching a warning to myself. Many of you know that I'm involved in a Bible-teaching radio ministry, "Talks for Growing Christians." A few Christians, most of whom don't even hear the program, are its primary supporters. Here's the point: I know I could scheme to make this radio ministry "break even" - or actually make money! At the end of each program I could give an emotional appeal for support, or offer something to all who would send in a gift this week. I could turn the manipulative crank, and the money would come in. But I don't want to scheme to get the "things of God." Do you? Once you cross that line, where do you stop? To scheme for the things of God is a serious mistake.

## Practical Application

### Will you sell your birthright for a single meal?

Hebrews 12:16 says that Esau sold his birthright for a single meal. For one morsel of food! How foolish could he be? That's really the point of the passage. How foolish to sacrifice spiritual blessing for a brief moment of physical satisfaction. It's foolish - but it's possible for us to do.

It's possible to trade spiritual blessings for momentary physical or material pleasure. King David did it! For one moment of pleasure with Bathsheba, David brought shame on himself, on God's people - and on God! David reaped what he had sowed for the rest of his life. Yes, God "picked up the pieces" in his life, but David experienced life-long sorrow and heartache - and the loss of blessing - all for that "single meal" of pleasure. Will you sell your spiritual birthright for a single meal? Quite a warning for all of us!

When I went to seminary, I was looking forward to studying under a particular professor whom I had come to respect. When I arrived on the campus, I found out that this professor had resigned from the faculty. He had actually been forced to resign for moral reasons! He had an extra-marital affair with the woman who was typing the manuscript for a commentary he had written on one of the Gospels! He left his wife and family and went off with this woman. For that brief earthly pleasure, he removed himself from an area of great spiritual blessing in his own life and in the lives of others. He essentially sold his spiritual birthright for a “single meal.” He didn’t lose his salvation, but he lost out on blessing.

Every Christian is vulnerable, and we can fall victim to strong desires in many different areas, not just in the area of sex. Some Christians trade their blessings, their spiritual blessings, for material gain and earthly wealth. Some Christians sell their spiritual blessings for positions of power, even within the church. Some Christians trade their spiritual blessings for the “perfect” (worldly) retirement set-up – and they lose out on the blessings they could have enjoyed in their senior years!

We are never immune to temptation. Age doesn’t deliver us from this. Will you trade off your spiritual blessings for momentary, short-lived, physical or material benefits?

Will you sell your birthright for a single meal?