

JACOB & ESAU

The Birthright of the First Born

HOW TO READ TOGETHER PREPARING FOR THE NEXT LESSON:

1. Read Aloud

Choose someone to read the passage aloud to the family. Watch for Word Alerts (over).

2. Recount

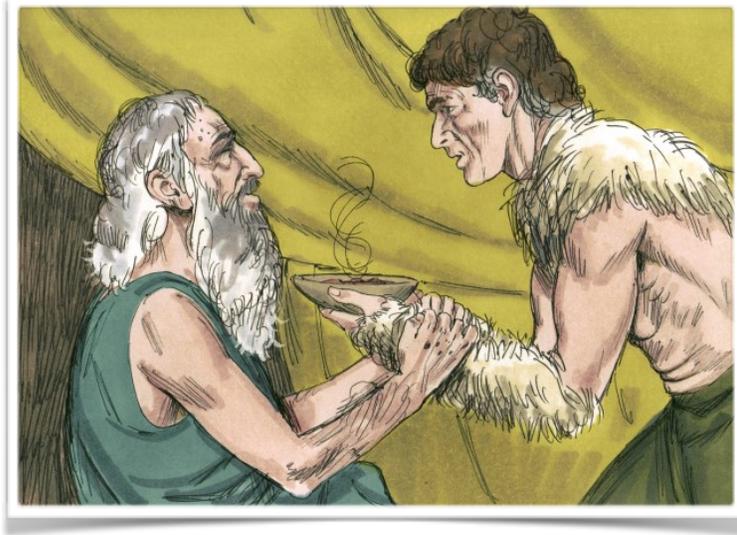
Ask people to explain what they just heard.

3. Ask Questions

What did they think about the story? What does this tell them about God? What does it tell them about human beings, and how we behave with one another and with God?

3. Help Interpret

Offer some of your own insights from the discussion here, and help develop their understanding by asking questions and gently guiding them toward the answers. They might disregard a lecture, but when they discover a connection on their own, it will be truly rooted in their minds.



Bless in the Presence of the Lord

In our last lesson, we saw the birth of Isaac, Abraham's long-promised and long-awaited heir, whose descendants would be the 'great nation' more countless than the stars or the sands on the beach, of which God spoke to Abraham. In this lesson, we see that Isaac has grown old and weak and blind, and is now looking toward his own death.

The story of this birthright is full of deception, and can be very challenging to understand. Both Isaac and his wife Rebekah have favorites among their twin boys: Isaac prefers the scruffy hunter Esau, while Rebekah loves the more peaceable and calm Jacob more. Rebekah pushes Jacob to deceive his father and claim his elder brother's birthright, a cunning treachery that at first glance seems to be an immoral act that God would never support.

In Genesis 25, however, there was a day on which Esau

WORD ALERTS!

As we read through the Bible, we'll notice important words that keep coming up again and again, drawing attention to the connections that God uses to teach us.

When you read with children, you might invite them to clap or ring a bell when they hear one of these references. We want to take note whenever we find a Word Alert in the Scriptures!

- The question of the 'first born' is very central here, and of course Christ will be the 'first born' of Mary. What's more, He is also called in our hymnography the 'first born of the dead' when He resurrects from the dead.
- Isaac is offering his blessing to his sons, but this is no simple blessing – this is in fact the **blessing of Abraham**, which is God's covenant with Abraham that we have been studying in past weeks. This is a profound blessing, an opportunity to take part in the line of the Messiah, and yet Esau rejects it, while Rebekah and Jacob understand this blessing to be invaluable and work hard (although deceitfully) to obtain it.
- Note that God is in control of who receives this blessing, and is not bound by any rules of society. It is **God's will** that is done in these situations.

worked up a great appetite, and Jacob had made some delicious stew. Esau asked for a bowl of it, and Jacob suggested that he trade his birthright for that stew — and Esau readily agreed. This transaction means that Jacob indeed legally holds that birthright, and it also confirms that Esau does not deserve such a holy thing. This birthright is both an earthly inheritance of wealth and influence, and the spiritual inheritance of the promises made to Abraham. The holder of this birthright is to be a father in the line of the 'great nation' that brings Jesus Christ — and Esau would trade it for a bowl of stew, because he is a man driven by his passions rather than by his spirituality.

The Fathers teach that it was indeed the will of God to have Jacob holding the birthright instead of Esau; Jacob was more faithful to God. Esau married quarrelsome foreign women, likely to lead him astray as they worshipped foreign gods, while Jacob patiently waited for a wife of his mother's clan, who would be faithful to the God of Abraham. It is right that Jacob should be next in the line of God's great nation.

Indeed, we Gentiles are like Jacob, for we were not the First Born, we are not sons of the nation of Israel, but God has allowed us to inherit His Kingdom, to become the adopted children of God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

What do we mean by Re-Entry?

On Sunday morning, we gather together for Divine Liturgy, and the priest begins, "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages." He is announcing and blessing the Kingdom of God, which we are entering together in faith and love. The people respond, "Amen," signifying their agreement, their fervent desire to enter into the Kingdom. In Holy Communion, the faithful receive the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. We receive the divine, and it transforms us. We complete the Divine Liturgy and then go out into the world, carrying Christ and the Kingdom within us. Let's think about how are we to re-enter the world; how will we guard the grace that we have received? How will we prepare ourselves to go out?