# Jacob, Esau and the Birthright



**Scripture Reference:** Genesis 25:19-34; 27:1-28 and 28:1-5

**Suggested Theme:** God is honest and true, and we should be too. Deception is wrong and leads to hurt and anger.

**Memory Verse:** “So you must stop telling lies. Tell each other the truth because we all belong to each other in the same body.” Ephesians 4:25, ICB

## Story Overview:

Esau and Jacob were the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah. Esau should have inherited the responsibilities and blessings that come with being the oldest son, but he rashly sold his birthright to his younger brother for a pot of stew. Later, in an elaborate act of deception, Rebekah and her favourite son, Jacob, tricked the elderly and blind Isaac. He was fooled into promising Jacob the family blessing. Jacob escaped his angry brother by travelling to his mother’s people in the city of Haran.

## Background Study:

After the hopeful beginning of Isaac and Rebekah’s marriage, it is painful to see the dysfunction that has eventuated in their family. After twenty years of infertility, Rebekah became pregnant with twins. Even while pregnant with twin boys, Rebekah could feel them fighting within her womb. Rebekah asked God about this.

> “The Lord said to her, “Two nations are in your body. Two groups of people will be taken from you. One group will be stronger than the other. The older will serve the younger.” Genesis 25:23, ICB

(Genesis 25:19-34)
As the oldest, it would have been expected that Esau would receive the “birthright.” This was recognition of the chief position in the family and the inheritance of a double portion of everything a father owned. The incident where Esau rashly “sells” the birthright to Jacob for some stew reveals that Esau did not appreciate the gravity of this blessing and that Jacob had had his eye on it.

(Genesis 27:1-40)
The family blessing was more personal than the birthright. Passing on this blessing would give purpose, honour, and direction for the family’s future. Years before, God had promised to bless Abraham and, subsequently, the world through his descendants (Genesis 12:1-3). Isaac had received a blessing from God ( Genesis 23-24).


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Isaac was old and blind when he decided it was time to pass on the family blessing to Esau. The favouritism that he and Rebekah had each shown their sons (Genesis 26:27-28) had created an environment where lying and deceit had become acceptable. The personal traits of each family member became evident as the event unfolded.

**Isaac**

Earlier in life, it was apparent that he, himself, was not above deception. He lied to the Philistine king, Abimelech, to protect himself (Genesis 26:6-10). He had displayed favouritism in his relationship with his own sons. He and Esau particularly bonded over hunting and the outdoors, and Isaac wanted to make this part of the occasion.

**Rebekah**

Like her husband, she favoured one son over the other. She was controlling and schemed against both her husband and older son so that Jacob would have the blessing instead of Esau.

**Esau**

His earlier flippancy about his birthright and his bad choices in women (Genesis 26:34-35) depict a rather shallow man without a true sense of self.

**Jacob**

Always willing to scheme for what he wanted, Jacob seemed weak and lacking moral character. When his mother devised the plan to deceive Isaac, Jacob's first concern was for how the plan could work rather than being alarmed that the basic concept of lying to and deceiving his father was morally wrong.

(Genesis 27:41-28:5) Ever the schemer, Rebekah protected her favourite son from the wrath of his older brother. She manoeuvres the situation so that Isaac sends Jacob back to Haran and Rebekah's family.

Jacob received the blessing from Isaac. The entire event showed how God works his plans through all kinds of people. He allowed this family to follow their selfish desires because he had always intended for Jacob to receive the blessing. It seems God knew the potential of Esau and the potential of Jacob and knew which one would be most fitted to the hard task of leading the next generations into the future. Jacob will continue to learn many difficult and painful lessons in life, but God will work with him and on him to make him the man he should be.

## Way to Introduce the Story:

Let children take turns being blindfolded. In each round, one blindfolded child should sit in a chair. The other children can take turns standing before the blindfolded person and holding out one hand. The blindfolded person has to guess which person it is by feeling their hand. You could change each round and have the blindfolded person guess identities by feeling an elbow, knee, foot, etc. "In today's story, a blind man tried to recognize his son by feeling his hand."

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## The Story:

God promised Abraham and later his son, Isaac, that a great nation would come from them. They would have many descendants.

Isaac and Rebekah were married for twenty years before they had children. Finally, Rebekah became pregnant. And guess what? She was going to have twins!


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But there was a problem. Rebekah could feel the twins fighting inside of her. She did not like that at all, so she asked God about it.

> “Two nations are in your body. Two groups of people will be taken from you. One group will be stronger than the other. The older will serve the younger.” Genesis 25:23, ICB

When the twins were born, they were very different from one another. The first boy was red and hairy when he was firstborn, and they named him Esau. Isaac liked Esau the best.

The second boy was born right after the first one (he was holding his brother’s heel when he was born!), and his parents named him Jacob. Jacob’s skin was very soft and smooth. Rebekah liked Jacob the best.

Parents should love each of their children and not have favourites. But Isaac and Rebekah were not good parents in this way. As he grew, Esau loved to be outside and was a very good hunter. Isaac loved to eat the tasty meat from the animals Esau caught. Esau was Isaac’s favourite son.

Jacob was quieter and enjoyed working around the home. His mother, Rebekah, loved him best.

One day, Jacob was home cooking some stew. Esau had been out hunting, and when he returned, he was hungry.

“Jacob, give me some of that red stew,” begged Esau. “I’m starved!”

“Not unless you sell me your birthright,” said Jacob.

“Birthright? If I die, my birthright won’t do me any good,” said Esau. “And I’m just about to die! Sure, I will give you my birthright, if you will give me some stew.”

So, after Esau promised to sell his birthright to Jacob, Jacob brought him bean stew, bread, and something to drink. Esau thought he had made a good trade, but really, Jacob got the better deal. Jacob had played a mean trick on his brother.

Because he was the oldest, Esau would have received special treatment when his father died. To have a birthright was a very special privilege and duty. He would be in charge of many things. But Esau did not take this seriously. He gave all of that away for some stew.

Esau had given up his birthright to his younger brother, but something else was very special in the family. The father would give a special blessing to his son. In the blessing, the father would say who would get the most respect and who would be the leader of the family. He would give good wishes for wealth, power, and safety for his son’s future.

When Isaac was very old, he called Esau, his oldest and favourite son, to him and said, “I am going to give you the special family blessing today. Go and hunt for some wild game to cook the tasty food you and I like to eat. We will eat together, and then I will bless you.” So Esau set off to go hunting.

But someone else overheard what Isaac was saying. Remember how we said Esau was Isaac’s favourite son and Jacob was Rebekah’s favourite son? Well, Rebekah did not want Esau to have the blessing. She wanted her favourite son, Jacob, to get the blessing instead of Esau. Rebekah decided to trick (or deceive) her husband.

She called Jacob to her so they could make a plan together. Jacob should have stopped his mother, but he followed the plan. Rebekah told Jacob that they would trick Isaac. They needed to fool him into thinking Jacob was Esau so that he would give him the blessing instead.

Here’s how the plan would work. First, she told Jacob to go and kill two goats so that she could prepare them just the way that Isaac liked. Isaac would eat the goats and think they were the wild game that Esau had hunted.


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Next, they had to make Jacob's smooth skin feel like his hairy brother's. Rebekah put goatskins on Jacob's arms and neck so that Isaac would feel them and think it was hairy Esau. She also put Esau's clothes on Jacob. All of this should fool Isaac because Isaac was old and blind.

So, when Jacob went into his father's tent, his father could not see that it was Jacob. He wasn't sure, so he asked to feel Jacob's hands. When he felt the goat skin, he thought it was Esau's hairy hands. When he tasted the goat meat, he thought it was that of a wild animal Esau had hunted. When he smelled Esau's clothes on Jacob, he really thought it was his oldest son. Isaac had been tricked!

So Isaac gave the blessing to Jacob. This was so important that it could not be removed once the blessing had been spoken. In his blessing, he said,

> "May nations serve you. May peoples bow down to you. May you be master over your brothers. May your mother's sons bow down to you. May everyone who curses you be cursed. And may everyone who blesses you be blessed." Genesis 27:29, ICB

Isaac had just finished giving his blessing to Jacob when Esau came in from hunting. He fixed some tasty food just like his father had asked and took it to his father so that he could receive the blessing.

"Who are you?" asked his father.

Then he realized he had been deceived. "Someone else has already hunted an animal and brought it to me. I blessed him and the blessing cannot be changed." Isaac was very sad and angry. His own son had deceived him.

Esau became very angry and begged his father to bless him, too. "Jacob tricked me two times," Esau cried. First, he took my birthright and has taken my blessing." Esau was so angry that he decided to kill Jacob once his father died.

When Rebekah heard about Esau's plans, she sent Jacob to stay with her brother Laban until Esau calmed down. She told Isaac that Jacob could find a wife there.

Everyone in the family was hurt when Rebekah and Jacob decided to lie and trick Isaac. Tricking someone is called deceit, and the Bible says this about deceit.

> "So then, get rid of all evil and all lying. Do not be a hypocrite. Do not be jealous or speak evil of others. Put all these things out of your life." 1 Peter 2:1, ICB

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## Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

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## Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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**Review:**

- Who were Isaac and Rebekah's sons? (Esau and Jacob)
- How were Esau and Jacob different? (Esau was the oldest, hairy, liked the outdoors and was his father's favourite. Jacob was the younger twin, liked the indoors and was his mother's favourite)
- What was the thing that Esau traded his birthright for? (A bowl of stew)
- To which brother was the family blessing supposed to have gone? (Esau)
- How did Rebekah and Jacob trick Isaac into giving the blessing to Jacob? (They cooked goat meat to taste like wild game, tied goatskin to Jacob's arms and neck to feel like Esau's hairy skin and put Esau's clothes on Jacob. Isaac was blind and fooled into giving Jacob Esau's blessing)
- What did Esau want to do to Jacob when he realized Jacob had stolen his blessing and birthright? (He wanted to kill him)
- What did you learn about people from this story?
- Is being deceitful a godly way to behave?

**Reflection:**

- How do you think Jacob's stew for Esau smelled?
- How hungry would you have to be to give up a birthright?
- If you were Jacob, would you have followed Rebekah's plan to trick Isaac?
- Do you think you would be tricked by Jacob's goatskin and goat meat if you were Isaac?
- How do you think Isaac felt when he realized he'd been tricked by Jacob and Rebekah?
- Have you ever been very angry like Esau was when he lost his birthright and blessing?
- Rebekah and Jacob were deceitful in this story. Deceit is similar to lying. How do you think God feels when we are deceitful or lie?
- What should we do if we are deceitful or lie?

## Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

## Song Suggestions:

- Oh, Be Careful Song


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- Three Wandering Jews Song
- Shake the Devil Off Song
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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## Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

**Activities:**

- Talk about twins. Some sets of twins are identical, which means they look exactly alike. Some sets of twins are fraternal, meaning they are simply siblings and may or may not look alike. Fraternal twins can even be two different sexes.
- Look up "deceit" in a dictionary and a thesaurus. Discuss what it means. Talk about examples that the children understand.
- Look up Bible verses about deceit. Children can choose a verse to copy onto a poster. They can then draw and decorate the poster or illustrate it with examples. Verses might include:
  - Proverbs 12:17
  - John 4:24
  - Ephesians 4:25
  - 1 Peter 2:1
- Write the names of the main characters in today's story on slips of paper (or show their pictures if the children are too young to read). Blindfold one child. Hold up the name of one of the characters so that the other children know which one it is. Let the children give hints to the blindfolded person so they can guess which character it is.
- Help the children learn today's memory verse. Click here for ways to do this.
- Provide cooking supplies and allow the children to make up their own stew. It may be helpful to begin with some dry soup mix for the base and allow the children to choose their own ingredients.



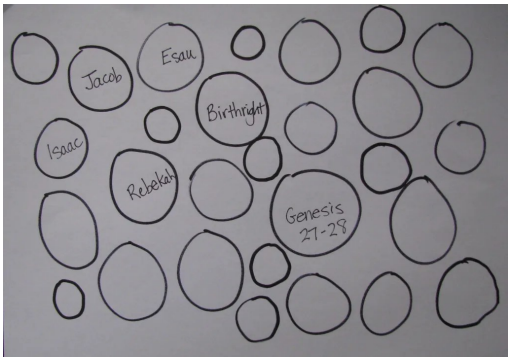
Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable "God's Story" printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

**Crafts:**


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- Write the attributes (hairy, youngest, hunter, mother's favourite, etc.) of each of the brothers on small pieces of paper. Hand these papers out to the children. Draw two figures on the chalkboard/whiteboard. Write "Esau" above one and "Jacob" above the other. Ask children to take turns coming up and writing the attributes on the correct figure (or tacking them on the board with blue-tac or tape).

- Use the learning activity Draw Out an Idea to talk about the characters in this story.




Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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## Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page Jacob and Esau worksheets (Calvary Curriculum)
- Colouring page Isaac blesses Jacob worksheets (Calvary Curriculum)
- Colouring page with text (Ministry Spark)
- Colouring page of a pot of soup (Church House Collection)
- Craft: Soup bowls made from clay (DLTK)
- Other: Visual Aids and good activities (Bible Fun for Kids)
- Other: Lesson ideas (Bible Story Hour)

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