

## Isaac and His Sons, Jacob and Esau

When Abraham's son Isaac became a young man, he married a woman named Rebekah. For a long time, Isaac and Rebekah prayed to God for children and they were blessed with twin boys! They named their boys Esau and Jacob. The twins were very different. Esau had red hair and a lot of hair of his body. He was a hunter and brought many animals home for his family to eat. Jacob lived near home in a tent and cared for his family's sheep. He was fair skinned and wasn't tough and strong like his brother.

Esau was the oldest brother, which meant that someday he would inherit his father's property. Jacob was often jealous of Esau, for he always had the first choice of everything. One day Esau came home from hunting, but he returned without any meat. As he arrived home, he smelled food cooking and saw that Jacob had prepared a stew. It smelled delicious and he asked Jacob to give him something to eat. Jacob saw an opportunity to get something from Esau so He said, "I'll give you my stew if you sell me your birthright!" Jacob was asking Esau to give him the inheritance that would belong to him after Isaac's death. Esau was so hungry that he agreed to sell Jacob his right to all the things he would inherit.

Jacob knew the trade wasn't fair, especially for just a bowl of stew, but he didn't worry about it now. Years later, Isaac began to grow old and weak, and he knew it was time to bless his oldest son Esau to receive his money and property. He called Esau and said: "I am old and will die soon. Go hunt some game and prepare a good dish for me to eat, just as I like it. Bring it to me so I can bless you before I die."

Isaac's wife Rebekah overheard her husband's request. She wanted Jacob to inherit the family property, so she told him what Isaac had said. She also had a plan to get Isaac's blessing for Jacob. She told Jacob to kill two young goats so she could make Isaac's favorite food. Then she put Esau's

clothes on him and put skins from the goats on Jacob's arms, to make them feel hairy like Esau's.

Jacob didn't think the plan would work, but he took the food that his mother made and went to serve the food to his father. Isaac heard him coming and, since he was going blind, he asked: "Who are you?" Jacob lied and said: "I am Esau, your first-born son. Here is the food you asked me to bring to you." Isaac was surprised that Esau had returned so quickly, but Jacob said that the Lord had helped him.

Isaac asked his son to come closer and said aloud, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau," for he felt the hair on them. "Are you really my son Esau?" he asked Isaac, and Jacob said "I am." After he had eaten his food, Isaac said, "Come here, my son and kiss me." Jacob came and kissed his father. Isaac smelled his clothing and it smelled like the wild fields where Esau did his hunting. So Isaac gave his blessing to Jacob, his youngest son.

When Esau returned, he made the stew his father had requested. He brought it to him and asked for his blessing. Isaac said, "Who are you?" and Esau answered, "I am Esau, your first-born son." Isaac shook and told Esau that his blessing had already been given away. Esau cried and asked his father to bless him also, but it was too late. He could only bless Esau to serve his younger brother. Esau was very angry and shouted: "He took my birthright and my blessing. After my father dies, I will kill him." Rebekah warned Jacob that his brother was out to kill him, so Jacob ran away from home and went to live with his uncle Laban, Rebekah's brother. But before he left, his father Isaac repeated his blessing and said: "May God almighty bless you and make you fruitful and give you many children. May he give you the land he gave to Abraham and to his children."

More than twenty years later, Jacob was a wealthy man and decided to return home and share his good fortune with his brother Esau. He sent messengers ahead to tell his brother he was coming home. He told them to let Esau know that he was

a wealthy man and didn't expect anything from his brother. When the messengers returned, they said Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men. Jacob was afraid, so he divided his family and servants with their animals into two groups. If anything happened, at least half of them might be able to escape.

Then Jacob chose many animals from his flocks as a gift for his brother and sent his servants ahead with them to make peace with Esau. When Esau and his men came near, Jacob went out to meet them and bowed seven times to the ground as he drew near to Esau. But Esau ran to meet him, threw his arms around Jacob and kissed him. They both cried with happiness. Esau asked about all the people and animals that Jacob had brought as a gift for Esau. Esau said he didn't need them. But Jacob insisted. At last, after many years, the brothers were reunited, and Jacob went safely to the city of Shechem, in the land of Canaan, and bought a piece of land and settled there.