

GENESIS

Lesson 25 - Chapter 25 Continued

Last week we began the story of the all-important event of the birth of Jacob, who would become the FIRST Israelite.

Let's pause and put this in perspective and watch the progress of the Patriarchs: Abraham....Jacob's grandfather.... began life as a pagan. The world, at the time of Abraham's birth, consisted of only one kind of people: the human race. Other than genealogical and social divisions, all humans were about the same in Yahweh's eyes; the one exception being that the line of Ham.....one of Noach's 3 sons.....was an accursed line. As of Abraham's time there was no division of humanity, there was no set-apart people.

Once God called Abraham to leave his country AND his immediate family, THEN began the process of a divine dividing of the world into TWO groups of people: His people and everybody else. The name we give "God's people"....the name we find in the Bible.....is Hebrew. So, when Abraham obeyed God and moved to the land of Canaan, by DECLARATION did God divide mankind into Hebrews on the one hand, and all else on the other. Decisions by Abraham, and a declaration by God, were the sole factors in making Abraham different, in God's eyes, from all other human beings.

Isaac, son of Abraham, represents the next step in the evolution of the Hebrew people; Isaac was the firstborn Hebrew. Purely by **declaration** was Abraham a Hebrew, but Isaac was a Hebrew by **birth**. Yet, even then, a declaration of God was still involved; for Abraham had another son, Ishmael, which he thought to be his firstborn, and therefore would be the one to carry on the covenants God had made with Abraham. In other words, as far as Abraham was concerned, Ishmael was a Hebrew. And, in the strictest sense, Ishmael WAS a Hebrew until something changed. Does that mess with your heads a little bit? You see, a time came when Yahweh said to Abraham "not so fast, Abraham; just like I divided YOU away from your father and brother, I'm going to divide Ishmael away from his father and brother. Ishmael was to be divided and separated away from his father Abraham and his brother Isaac. The effect is that Ishmael was NOT to continue being Hebrew.....but Isaac was.

So, here's the \$64,000 question: if Ishmael and Isaac **both** had a Hebrew father.....Abraham..... how come only the one, Isaac, is today considered a Hebrew? Why isn't Ishmael just another branch of Hebrews? How come we don't think of Ishmael and all of his descendants....the ones we refer to as Arabs.....instead as Hebrews, too? Well, an important principle gets established here, that EVERY Jew and gentile needs to pay close attention to; so please, give me all of your attention, and put this into the permanent part of our memory banks; while birthright (that is, genealogy, your physical blood lines) establishes your PHYSICAL identity....your flesh and blood identity.....it is the election and declaration of The Lord that establishes your SPIRITUAL identity. Your physical identity and your spiritual identity are two different matters, are they not?

So, the term **Hebrew** BEGAN by denoting much more than simple physical identity; Hebrew ALSO defined a spiritual identity.

Let me put that together for you: by God's design, "Hebrew" was meant to be a term that described **a combination** of physical and spiritual attributes of a person. Further, the life of a Hebrew....physically and spiritually....was to operate under a set of laws and promises that God made with the first Hebrew, Abraham. A Hebrew's earthly life was to revolve around his spiritual life. We call these laws and promises that define this overall life of a Hebrew the Abrahamic Covenant, and later they were expanded and given to Moses, and are now called Torah.

So, even though Isaac was physically of the right stock to be a Hebrew, it still took an act of God.....an election of God....for Him to be **declared** a Hebrew. Think about it: Ishmael was ALSO physically of the right stock to be a Hebrew, but God did NOT grant Ishmael the necessary SPIRITUAL status to be a Hebrew. Therefore, we have with the election of Isaac, and the rejection of Ishmael, an enormous fork in the road. One direction led to the Hebrews, the other AWAY from the Hebrews.

As we start to deal, in Genesis 25, with Isaac's twin sons, Jacob and Esau, we're going to see this process and principle repeated yet again. The issue of who will be chosen as inheritor of the rights of the covenant given to Abraham is the crux of the matter. Put another way, between Jacob and Esau, God would declare His chose to be Hebrew....and the other NOT. Both Jacob and Esau were, by all physical evidence, BORN from their Hebrew father, Isaac. By birth.....if one went PURELY by physical definition.....then it would seem that BOTH were Hebrews. And, in a sense, they both were. But, no: God would again, by declaration, **divide**.

Let us remember that while we could see some physical and genealogical differences between Isaac and Ishmael.....after all, they had different mothers of different nationalities, and so were half-brothers..... it was entirely different for Jacob and Esau because they, of course, had the SAME mother and father. Jacob and Esau were twins..... physically, genealogically, there was NO difference between Jacob and Esau....their DNA was almost identical. So, how is it that Jacob was elected to be a Hebrew and Esau not? It was by DECLARATION ALONE....God's sovereign decision (that's what the word election means).... that God chose Jacob over Esau. Jacob would be a Hebrew; Esau was STRIPPED of his right to be called Hebrew. The ONLY difference between Jacob and Esau was the spiritual difference, and that was brought about purely by the declaration of Yahweh.

So, to better help us define just what a Hebrew is, we can say that a Hebrew is one who has been made a descendant in the line of covenant promises given to Abraham; or in more Bible terminology, a Hebrew is an **inheritor** of the covenant promises as given to Abraham. If a human being is an inheritor of the covenant promises, then that human being is part of God's set-apart people. And, thus, the world was, upon God's covenants with Abraham, divided into two groups: Hebrews, all other human beings. Abraham established the line of covenant promise, at the declaration of God, Abraham's father and brother were excluded. Abraham's son Isaac continued the line of covenant promise, at the declaration of God, and Abraham's other son, Ishmael, was excluded. Isaac's son Jacob would continue the line of covenant

promise, at the declaration of God, and Isaac's other son, Esau, would be excluded.

But, as we'll see in a couple more chapters, from Jacob forward, ALL descendants of Jacob would be called Hebrew.....no more exclusions...and, no more election by declaration of God. Beginning with Jacob's offspring, one was now a Hebrew by law. If one was physically born to a Hebrew, that person was a Hebrew. Period. But, even more, if one who was NOT born a Hebrew.....that is, he was a gentile.....if that gentile wanted to become part of the Hebrew people, it was allowed by means of some rules, some laws, that had been set down by Yahweh.

Are you following me? I certainly hope so.....because this applies to YOU, me, and everyone who lives on this planet! All of what I've been explaining sets up the pattern for HOW once becomes part of God's people.

So, how one comes to be called part of God's set-apart people.....the Hebrews, who eventually came to be called the Israelites..... occurs by means of a number of sequential forks-in-the road. It started with the Abraham fork, then the Isaac fork, and then the Jacob fork. And, it stays that way for about 1800 years. 18 centuries after Jacob, we're going to find yet another fork in the road; it's called the new covenant. And, the new covenant is an Old Testament prophecy about a time when these physical covenants and laws of the Hebrews, called the Torah, would be written, spiritually, on certain men's hearts.

Not ALL men's heart.....just those who were elected and declared by God to be His. And, the way this would happen would be by means of a Messiah. And, this new fork-in-the-road brings us full circle; this fork brings to fruition that promise of the Abrahamic Covenant that "all the families of the Earth will be blessed" in you, Abraham. All doesn't mean gentiles and NOT Jews. All also doesn't mean Jews and NOT gentiles. All means all. Further, just WHO is included under the covenants of the Hebrews ONCE again involves God's election and declaration...and, the key to all this, is the Messiah.

So, this story we're about to dissect here in Genesis 25.....the story of a crucial division, election and separation by the God of Israel.....is one that has so many wonderful nuances and establishes so many Messianic principles; unfortunately, time only permits us to explore a couple of them.

RE-READ GEN. 25: 19 - END

Rivka, wife of Isaac, is worried. Her womb is in absolutely violent upheaval. What is going on in there is NOT normal. These may have been her first children, but she undoubtedly witnessed hundreds of pregnancies and assisted in not just a few births; that's part of what women did. So, she seeks Yahweh for reassurance and to calm her fears. God gives her His answer: two nations live within her, and what she is feeling is a struggle for dominance. Even more, He tells Rebecca that the first one out of the birth canal shall NOT be given the rights and honor as the firstborn....in Hebrew, **Bekhor**.... as was customary: rather it shall be the 2nd one born. This is a theme that is ongoing in the Bible; a theme that separates what SEEMS to be from a physical-earthly sense, from what actually IS from spiritual-heavenly point of view. From a

physical sense, it SEEMED to Abraham that Ishmael, the son of his concubine, Hagar, was his firstborn son.....the son of promise. But, from a spiritual sense, it was Isaac.....to be born miraculously by Sarah....who was to have all the firstborn rights and to be the all-important son of promise.

Here, in Genesis 25, we have a similar thing happen: Rivka is carrying twins. The law is that the first one to be born is the firstborn....the bekhor.... and the 2nd one to be born is more or less subservient to the first. The fact that a firstborn was a twin meant little. They don't divide the inheritance; they don't each get a share of the firstborn inheritance; one is chosen and the other is not. And, this violent struggle in Rivka's womb foretells the coming struggle over just which child will dominate the other. Even more, we find that God has **predetermined** the outcome; neither Isaac nor Rivka are involved in the decision.

In verse 23, Rivka is told that ".....the older will serve the younger". In other words, the **physical** firstborn will not receive the usual and customary rights of the bekhor....the firstborn...instead, the 2nd will be given that right. The eternal importance of this matter is that the **physical** firstborn, Esau, is NOT going to be the inheritor of the covenant promises; instead, the physical 2nd born, Jacob, is going to be the inheritor. Jacob is the bekhor on a **spiritual** level.....he is the firstborn based on divine declaration.

Notice; the physical firstborn of Isaac, who will be Esau, is parallel to Ishmael, the **physical** firstborn of Abraham. The **spiritual** firstborn of Isaac, who will be Jacob, is parallel to Isaac, the **spiritual** firstborn of Abraham, and the future carrier of the covenant promises. So, we have here this ongoing principle and pattern of the Reality of Duality: everything has a spiritual reality and a physical reality that exists simultaneously.

But, this much is also certain: these two separate nations.....one being Jacob and other Esau..... will have enmity for one another.....that is part of the meaning of the phrase "the older shall **serve** the younger".

The twins are born; the first one to be born was Esau; he was of red...or ruddy...complexion, and very hairy...you know, a loveable little fuzzball. Here's where some knowledge of Hebrew comes in handy: the Hebrew word for "hairy" (as used here in this verse) is Se'ar. If that word rings a bell for you, it should: because we'll find out later in Genesis that Esau moved away from Jacob and established his nation in the district called Mt. Seir. This is a word play.....Mt. Seir got its name from Esau being born very Se'ar....hairy. So, Mt. Seir, named for a characteristic of Esau, **literally** means "hairy mountain" or Mt. Hairy.

We're also told that during the birth process, Jacob was holding on to Esau's heel; the idea being that Jacob was trying to keep Esau from being born first.

Now, to better help explain what comes next, we should here understand that Rebecca would not have kept this information that Yahweh gave her about the destinies of her twin sons, to herself; that would have been disloyal and disrespectful to her husband. Rather she would have told him post-haste of what God had informed her (that which ever of the twins came out first was NOT to be declared bekhor....firstborn; rather it was the 2nd to emerge that God

instructed was to have that designation).....after all, there was little more important in a family of that era than who would succeed the father in authority over the clan.....that successor being the bekhor, the firstborn.

Even more, you can be sure Rebecca informed her twin sons, Esau and Jacob, of God's determination that Jacob, and not Esau, would be bekhor. How cruel it would have been to have waited until their maturity to inform them of this all important decree; a decree that mother and father were aware of BEFORE these children were even birthed.

So, it is with this understanding of the entire family's awareness of the younger, Jacob, being destined to have the birthright above the older, Esau, that we must view what happens next.

As the story unfolds, we find that, as is common within families, parents have their favorites. Isaac preferred Esau. Esau was apparently impetuous, brave, skillful with a bow, quite macho.....things dads typically admire in their sons. Jacob was quieter and introspective, more sensitive.....things that mothers typically prefer. Notice our parallel once again with Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael was a favorite of Abraham; Isaac was a favorite with his mother. When Yahweh told Abraham that it was to be the 2nd born, Isaac, that was to obtain the firstborn position currently held by Ishmael, Abraham cried out to God: "oh, if only Ishmael could live in your presence!" Abraham determined he wanted Ishmael as the firstborn; Isaac determined he wanted Esau as the firstborn. Neither would get what they wanted.

And, so we see that a day arrives when Esau has just come in from a hunt, famished, and sees that Jacob has prepared a pot of lentils.....or more literally translated, red stew. Jacob, apparently never having been entirely comfortable with having the rights of the first born assigned to himself, decides he's going to help God out: he's going to get Esau to openly and finally sell his traditional birthright to Jacob.

The impulsive Esau makes a statement in response to Jacob's proposal that begins with "since I'm about to die".....he might as well give his birthright to Jacob, and seals the deal with an oath. The "I'm about to die" statement is not literal.....it's just a saying, something akin to "Who cares?". Of course, since God had long ago settled the issue, in reality Esau had no birthright to sell, for it already belong to Jacob. And, Jacob had no need to resort to treachery to obtain the birthright, because the Lord had already assigned it to him: but neither Jacob nor Esau had the faith to accept it as fact.

We're also given, here, a small piece of information we will find useful in the chapters ahead: Esau is given a nickname.....Edom. Edom means red, and it not only refers to his ruddy hairy body features, but also to this infamous incident at the stew-pot that has just transpired. So, for future reference, remember that Edom and Esau are one in the same. And, therefore, the future nation of Edom, so prevalent from here on in the bible as an ongoing enemy of Israel, will also play a role in end-times; and know that the people of Edom.....the Edom-ites, are simply the descendants of Esau.

Finally, in V34, we're told that Esau despised his birthright.....a very serious biblical condemnation of Esau. I have little doubt that Rivka told Esau, as she undoubtedly did Jacob,

that despite the chronological order of birth, it was Jacob who was to have the firstborn rights. What a hurtful thing for Esau; knowing that, from his point of view, his own mother was telling him....the bechor.....that he would NOT be recognized as the firstborn. How else could it have felt than that his mother was siding with Jacob? This had to have shaped much of Esau's life; making him somewhat bitter, untrusting, and cynical. His father, Isaac, was not a poor man. To think that Esau had no interest in having all the rights and powers of the firstborn, frankly, doesn't make any sense. He probably saw his LOSING of the firstborn rights as an inevitable....though grossly unfair.... event, and so behaved as though it didn't matter in the first place. Kind of rejecting the office of firstborn before it was rejected for him.

Folks, these people we read about in the Bible were just that....people. They had feelings, they had wants and needs, they had quirks, they had shortcomings, they had pride....they were real. When we better understand the circumstances, it's not too hard to put ourselves in their shoes.

OK. Let's backup a bit, and take a look at some circumstances surrounding this event that are not so evident; at least not so evident to gentiles.

First, does anyone find it odd that we have a male, Jacob, doing the cooking here? Clearly, the Scriptures say that Jacob had cooked the stew. Now, cooking was a woman's task, particularly when they were camped or living in villages. Certainly, men who were away from home did some cooking. But, it was traditional and would have been shameful, under normal circumstances, for a young man to be the one doing the cooking. So, was Jacob just a sissy? Had his mother's favoritism turned him into a momma's boy?

Where I'm going is, that when we understand ancient Hebrew culture.....much of which, by the way, has carried over into more modern Hebrew traditions.....when we run across Biblical scenes like of Jacob and Esau and the stew, we can recognize that something out of the ordinary is happening. It is not USUAL that Jacob.....at least 15 years old at this time.....would have been doing the cooking; it just wasn't done.

So, what's going on here? Well, the answer may well lie in one of those beautiful Hebrew traditions that is part of every observant Jewish family today; it is a tradition that goes back to time immemorial and is called "sitting Shiva". It is part of the rites of mourning the dead. So, what has this to do with our story, here? The ancient Hebrew sages are near unanimous that the context for what is playing out between Esau and Jacob is that there has been a death in the family. And, the one who died was Abraham.

Lentil stew or Lentil soup is called the meal of mourning. Lentil soup is a traditional food eaten during the 7-day period of mourning that is called "sitting Shiva". I'll explain that a little more in a minute.

So, think about it: what's the point of the Holy Scripture going on and on about this being a red stew, and then identifying it as "Lentils" in vs. 34? How does it add anything to the context or meaning? What difference does it make that the soup was Lentil? Any good Jew knows that this is indicative of a period of mourning.

But, there's more evidence those who are members of the immediate family are NOT to cook during that seven-day period. Other family members, or friends, are to provide food for those 7 days; or, foods pre-prepared (cooked and preserved before the death of the family member) can be eaten. And, the definition of just WHO makes up the immediate family is important: one's father and mother, sister and brother, son and daughter, or spouse is an immediate family member. Grandchildren are NOT immediate family members for purpose of this part of the mourning rites. Rivka, who normally cooked for the family, would have been prohibited from cooking. Jacob, Abraham's grandchild, was PERMITTED to cook....he was OUTSIDE that circle of immediate family...so, perhaps that's why it was **he** who was cooking the meal of mourning, Lentil stew.

Why Lentils? In fact, we also find that eggs are also considered a food suitable for mourning. What these two food items.....Lentils and eggs.....have in common is that they are round. And, the roundness illustrates the circular nature of life; the cycle of being conceived from nothing, and returning to nothing.....physically speaking, of course. And, it also speaks of one generation dieing off, and the next beginning, in an unending pattern.

It is the Bible, and naturally the Hebrew thought that comes from it, that shows us that history is circular; that history repeats itself. Over and over we see these same patterns that God ordained, established, and wove into the fabric of the Universe repeating. And, naturally, it is secular humanism, and its proud son Darwin Evolutionism, that says....no, no....history is a straight line. It starts from some unknown place in the past, and randomly proceeds to some unknowable future. Every moment of every day is new and there is nothing in the past to compare it to. There are no patterns. Morality evolves. The old becomes obsolete, and the new becomes preeminent. The old becomes replaced by something that destroys the prior pattern and establishes a new one.

The illustration of the Lentil and the egg says otherwise. And, I really like this tradition. We humans NEED physical illustrations of God's spiritual principles. When we put them aside, or think we no longer need them, the result is deception and error.

So, it appears that Abraham had just died, and Jacob was preparing the meal of mourning when Esau shows up from the hunt. He didn't come in to some surprise that his grandfather Abraham had died.....he was well aware before he went out. Rather than be with the family and do his duty to be a mourner and a comforter to his father, in particular, he did what it pleased him to do.....hunt game.

It is no coincidence that when Jacob approached Esau with the offer to trade Esau's birthright for some Lentil stew, Esau responded with the morbid words: ".....Look, I'm about die, what use is my rights of the bekhor?" This was, at least in part, graveyard humor done at a most inappropriate time.

Let's remember.....at this point, Esau was a mid-to-late teen.....an **angry** mid-to-late teen. So, these weren't mature or well thought out words he blurted out; they were impetuous and foolish. Yet, it shows us just what he thought about his exalted position as the bekhor, the firstborn. And, the answer is, not much.

Look: when we talk about the RIGHTS of the firstborn.....which includes getting a double-portion of the family's wealth AND the right to rule over the clan.....it's easy to forget the **responsibilities** that goes hand in hand with those rights. Any straight-thinking parent knows what I'm speaking about. Any executive or manager or leader knows what I'm talking about. Yes, there are rewards and honors that come with the position: but there are duties that, if carried out properly, rise above any amount of reward and personal benefit. Esau knew his grandfather Abraham well, and was equally aware of the great and terrible burden he carried. Esau, of course, knew his father Isaac well, and the tremendous burden of responsibility for the covenants of God that HE carried. Esau wanted no part of it. Without doubt, like many teens, Esau wanted all the fun stuff.....telling people what to do, but nobody telling HIM what to do; he loved the idea of possessing the best place at the table, being wealthy and so on.... but, he did NOT want the responsibilities and duties that went with it.

The great sage Rashi says that another lesson of this incident is how a righteous person views life in general, versus how a wicked person does the same. Jacob, the righteous one's, view of life is, "what am I here to accomplish? What are my duties and my goals?" The wicked one's view, Esau's view, is "eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we may die". Esau was thinking, after contemplating the death of his grandfather, that he didn't want to be tied to all the duties of the firstborn and family patriarch when HIS father, Isaac, died. No way! I just want to enjoy lifeas much as I can.....get all I can.....responsibility is for suckers.

Jacob chose that very moment to challenge Esau, because no one knows another person better, perhaps, than one twin knows another. Jacob knew that Esau was ready to give up his birthright and all the burdensome duties it came with; and the death of his grandfather, and the thinking we all tend to do about our own lives when someone near to us dies, drove him over the edge. The divinely ordained duties that Isaac must have talked about, and Abraham must have talked about, incessantly, were nothing Esau wanted....so great was the importance of carrying on with the line of covenant promise that nothing could be put above it.

Much was contained in verse 27 as to inform us of the character of each young man: it says Esau became a hunter, while Jacob was a quiet man who lived in Tents.

I won't spend long with this, but please take note: only in two places in the Holy Scriptures is a man called a hunter.....that is, in Hebrew he is called a **tsayid**. The first man to be labeled as **a hunter** as a means of identifying his **character** was Nimrod; the only other is Esau. AS the Bible uses it, tsayid is a negative term..... it really means a stone-cold killer. A guy who kills animals for the love of killing, and has little if any conscience in killing a man.

Jacob, on the other hand, is called a "quiet man" in some Bibles.....a "plain man" in others.....and a "peaceful man" in still others. The Hebrew word that is being translated is **tam**. While peaceful or plain is not necessarily incorrect, it misses the point: Jacob and Esau are being contrasted. They are being compared as OPPOSITES. Tam more means blameless, or not having guilt.....it is implied that this blamelessness is being blameless before God. It is another way of saying "righteous". The contrast here is about one who loves killing, versus one who loves life. One who wanders aimlessly, versus one who stays near. One who slaughters the flock, versus the one who shepherds the flock.

The last verse sums up this entire episode and really requires no comment. It says: “Thus Esau showed how little he valued his birthright.”