Hi,

Today’s updates:

* My Sunday class will be the third week of *Biblical Women You Want to Know, but Probably Don’t*. It will be on [my new Facebook page: “Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC”](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour) at 11am CDT Sunday.
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.

It seems to me that as a culture, we are losing our collective impulse control. Here is a classic Bible story about the dangers of doing so.

***Genesis 25:19-34 (The Message)***

**This is the family tree of Isaac son of Abraham: Abraham had Isaac. Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan Aram. She was the sister of Laban the Aramean.**

**Isaac prayed hard to God for his wife because she was barren. God answered his prayer and Rebekah became pregnant. But the children tumbled and kicked inside her so much that she said, “If this is the way it’s going to be, why go on living?” She went to God to find out what was going on. God told her, “Two nations are in your womb, two peoples butting heads while still in your body. One people will overpower the other, and the older will serve the younger.**

**When her time to give birth came, sure enough, there were twins in her womb. The first came out reddish, as if snugly wrapped in a hairy blanket; they named him Esau (Hairy). His brother followed, his fist clutched tight to Esau’s heel; they named him Jacob (Heel). Isaac was sixty years old when they were born.**

**The boys grew up. Esau became an expert hunter, an outdoorsman. Jacob was a quiet man preferring life indoors among the tents. Isaac loved Esau because he loved his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.**

**One day Jacob was cooking a stew. Esau came in from the field, starved. Esau said to Jacob, “Give me some of that red stew—I’m starved!” That’s how he came to be called Edom (Red).**

**Jacob said, “Make me a trade: my stew for your rights as the firstborn.”**

**Esau said, “I’m starving! What good is a birthright if I’m dead?”**

**Jacob said, “First, swear to me.” And he did it. On oath Esau traded away his rights as the firstborn. Jacob gave him bread and the stew of lentils. He ate and drank, got up and left. That’s how Esau shrugged off his rights as the firstborn.**

So here’s the way a staff member once put it: what *would* you do for a Klondike bar? Perhaps sing a song or dance a dance? Would you hand over your car or maybe your house? Even more? Esau does just that for a bowl of stew. What does it reveal to us about Esau? And about Jacob?

*Isaac and Rebekah*

Isaac, Abraham’s son, had been a bachelor for a long time when he married Rebekah. A servant had gone to the ancestral family home to fetch a wife. The servant brought back Rebekah, who was the granddaughter of his uncle; i.e. a cousin. She had left her home and family to come to Isaac, who came to love her. Isaac was forty when he married Rebekah.

Isaac was the son of the promise, the one through whom the covenant with the Lord God must pass. But there was a problem, Isaac and Rebekah had trouble conceiving. A lot of trouble. Nineteen years passed and no baby, no child to whom the covenant would pass.

Isaac needed an heir, so he prayed and he prayed hard. And finally, God granted Isaac’s request. Rebekah conceived. She might have been childless before, but she would soon find out that she was overflowing with blessings.

To Rebekah, the pregnancy mustn’t have felt much like a blessing. It was hard and troubled. She got no peace. Her womb seemed at war with her body. So she too went to God, to find out what was going on inside her.

God revealed to Rebekah that she wasn’t carrying one child but two. Indeed, not just two children but two nations. They would be more than sibling rivals, the twins would be the ancestors of two great but rival nations. Further, God told her that the younger child would have power over the older, for even twins are not born in the same instant.

They named the older twin Esau, for he was covered in red hair. The second-born twin they named Jacob. Esau grew up to be a man’s man, the outdoors type, rough and ready, a skilled hunter; the joy of his father, Isaac. Jacob on the other hand was the quiet, contemplative type, who enjoyed hanging around the tents.

Isaac loved Esau because he seemed to be everything a real man was supposed to be, a skilled hunter and the rest. We’re not told why Rebekah loved Jacob. Perhaps she liked the stay-at-home type. Perhaps it is because of what God told her about the twins. We are never told that she revealed to Isaac God’s message about the twins.

But already, just in these few sentences, we see the beginnings of family divisions that will soon come to full flower.

*How hungry can he be?*

One day, Esau comes rushing in the door. He is famished. He is so starved that he’ll do anything to get something to eat. Jacob has been busy in the kitchen preparing a deliciously smelling red stew. Esau demands some of it.

Jacob is revealed to be an opportunist, as he tests his brother’s desire, demanding in turn a trade. A bowl of stew for Esau’s birthright, i.e., the rights and privileges that belong to the firstborn son. This would include not only the leadership of the family but a double-share of the inheritance, which in this case is a lot of money, for Isaac is wealthy, having been given all that was Abraham’s.

Esau doesn’t seem to give it a second thought. What good is the birthright if Esau is dead from starvation? Seems rather over-dramatic doesn’t it . . . and stupid . . . and impulsive. Jacob adds some legal protections to the transaction by making his brother swear to the transaction . . . and it is a done deal.

Trade one’s birthright for a bowl of stew? How hungry could you be? What kind of brother would pounce on such weakness? Neither twin comes off well in this story. In a way, it only sets the stage for what comes next. For some time later, Jacob will conspire with his mother, Rebekah, to steal the promise of the covenant that Isaac intends to pass on to Esau.

These stories remind me that God is able to use us all to accomplish his purposes. We may not understand or even recognize God at work in our lives, but still God moves us forward toward the kingdom which he promised long ago to Abraham.

*Reflections -- why Jacob and not Esau?*

This question comes up each time I teach this passage. Why Jacob? Why does God make the choice before they are even born? Granted, God knows the men these twins will grow to become, but it becomes quite clear that Jacob has nothing to commend him either. Indeed, merit doesn’t seem to be part of this at all.

Ok . . . so why Jacob and not Esau? Paul comes to this question in his letter to the Romans. He is talking about God’s choice of the Israelites and who actually is an Israelite, that is a child of the covenant. Paul’s point is simple, God chooses whom God chooses. Period. End of story. That’s as far as we can go. God chose Jacob. Paul quotes from Exodus 33:19: “God will mercy on whom he has mercy and compassion on whom he has compassion” (see Romans 9).

Walter Brueggemann asks us to consider that perhaps this isn’t about God preferring one twin over another, but simply another instance of God upsetting expectations, turning upside the world’s normal social conventions. Primogeniture (preference to the first-born son) was well established by this time. Perhaps God is simply signaling again that in God’s kingdom, things work differently than they do in the kingdoms of this world. The first will be last and the last first.

In the end, the question is always, “Can God be trusted?” I’ve learned that the answer is a resounding YES.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott