

## Maintaining Good Health (Part 5)

Food Metaphors; Esau and Jacob

John W. Ritenbaugh

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We have been looking at some of the 700 uses of *eating* in the Bible. This series originally began with the intent of maintaining good health as being a part of our stewardship responsibility to God. However, as I got into the subject, I began to see a great many more avenues that I really felt that I needed to pursue. In all the time I have been in the church—all the sermons that I have prepared in the past—I have never prepared a sermon involved with eating, especially to this breadth and depth that I have given this.

At the same time, I cannot recall anybody else giving any sermons on it either. And I thought, "Wow! This is something we have really neglected." If something appears a couple of times in the Bible, you would think it would be fairly serious—but *700 times eating* appears in some way in the many, many stories and character sketches, and so forth that are given in the Bible. So this series has expanded far beyond my original intention.

I intend, eventually, to get back (at least, somewhat briefly) to my original intention, but not today. There are some other uses of *eating* that are shown in the Bible that I think are very much worth considering. We are going to begin with one of those today (and this will take, maybe, the first one-third of the sermon). That is, when eating is used as a metaphor for some other activity.

A metaphor is a figure of speech in which one object is likened to another by speaking of it as though it were *literally* the other. We use this figure of speech, almost without thinking, in normal conversation when we say things like: "He was a lion in battle." He was not really a lion, but we speak of him as if he really was a lion, because he shows those kinds of characteristics. And so, the lion becomes a metaphor for the way the man was acting in battle.

We say, "He was a bear of a man." And we think of a man who is big and hulking; and when he gives you a hug, he just kind of grabs you in and you become a part of him. We talk about people "drowning in money." Whew! Would that not be fun? Maybe not, as we are going to see a little bit later. But each one of those is an example of a metaphor.

We are going to begin in Deuteronomy 32. And the metaphor that we are going to lead to, actually, has quite a lead in to it. This chapter is the Song of Moses. The metaphor here is really vivid, and maybe somewhat chilling. It is made in relation to those who have made the covenant with God but have turned their backs on their responsibility to Him. Instead, they are practicing idolatry. (We are going to just hop, skip, and jump through here—so that we are able to see the context of this.)

**Deuteronomy 32:9** "For the LORD's portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance."

So that introduces, very clearly, who the subject is here. It is Israel.

**Deuteronomy 32:10** "He found him in a desert land and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him [Notice, that was the wilderness wandering.], He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye."

**Deuteronomy 32:12-13** "So the LORD alone led him, and there was no foreign god with him. He made him to ride in the heights of the earth."

**Deuteronomy 32:15-17** "But Jeshurun ["Jeshurun" is a code name for Israel.] grew fat [became obese] and kicked [i.e., he is rebelling]; you grew fat, you grew thick, you are obese! Then he forsook God who made him, and scornfully esteemed the Rock of his salvation. They provoked Him to jealousy with foreign gods, with abominations they provoked Him to anger. They sacrificed to demons, not to God."

That is giving you a pretty good picture of what is going on here.

**Deuteronomy 32:20** "And He [God] said, 'I will hide My face from them.'

Now, I want you to begin to think of this in terms of the church. Kind of divorce yourself from "Israel," and look at this in a spiritual sense. Think of it in terms of being spoken to the church—especially when you consider the kind of circumstance that the church finds itself in, these last five or seven years.

"I will hide My face from them." Is there any time that you have felt that God is hiding His face from the church—when you think of its condition, as it continues to drift apart?

**Deuteronomy 32:20** "And He said, 'I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end will be.'

"Let's see where they go after that. Let's see what happens," God says.

**Deuteronomy 32:20-21** 'For they are a perverse generation, children in whom is no faith. They have provoked Me to jealousy by what is not God.'

"Children in whom there is *no faith*." Are you aware that the reason that the church split was because our faith dissipated? Faith arises from doctrine. You can prove this from Romans 10, in that section from verses 14-17. Faith arises from doctrine. Doctrine is truth. It is true teaching. And we are made to have faith when we *believe* in those truths and begin *practicing* our lives by those things.

But, when the doctrines are destroyed and replaced with other teachings, the faith changes. Those who believe the false teachings are going to *lose* their faith—perhaps, altogether. And even those who do not completely lose what they have are going to have their faith *damaged*. So much so, that what has

happened to the church? We are no longer unified. We have drifted apart. We are following a very well established pattern. We—the church—are following the pattern that was established in Israel.

**Deuteronomy 32:21** 'They have provoked Me to jealousy by what is not God; they have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols. [That is what false doctrines are. They are vanities—intellectual vanity.] But I will provoke them to jealousy by those who are not a nation; I will move them to anger with a foolish nation.'

Here begins to become a warning that takes us back to Israel once again. God is going to punish Israel by bringing a nation against them. Everybody knows about the Assyrians. And everybody knows how Babylon came against the Jews, and how the Assyrians came (in Isaiah) against the Israelites.

**Deuteronomy 32:22** 'For a fire is kindled in My anger, and shall burn to the lowest hell; it shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains [in a plague].'

**Deuteronomy 32:26** 'I would have said, "I will dash them in pieces, I would make a memory of them to cease from among men."

Do you think that has not happened to the church? Do you think there are not people out there—not in the church, never were in the church—who wonder whatever happened to the Worldwide Church of God? It has disappeared, virtually. That is what He is talking about here. The church has become scattered all over the place. Hardly any of us are recognizable to the world, as we would have been in the Worldwide Church of God.

Just the other day, I went to the bank and I cashed my paycheck. And, of course, my paycheck has "The Church of the Great God" on it (and me, as an employee of The Church of the Great God). And the teller, a lady, looked at it and she said, "The Church of the Great God. I never heard of that." Of course not! But if it had been the Worldwide Church of God, she *might* have

heard of that. This is what God is talking about here. We have lost our name before the world. What kind of a witness can be made when nobody knows you? (That kind of thing.)

**Deuteronomy 32:27** 'Had I not feared the wrath of the enemy, lest their adversaries should misunderstand, lest they should say, "Our hand is high; and it is not the LORD who has done all this."'

This is very interesting because the enemy is eventually going to say, "God hasn't been involved in the way we have treated the church (that is, Israel—those who have made the covenant with God)." They are going to take the credit themselves. But let us drop down to verse 35, where God is speaking again.

**Deuteronomy 32:35** 'Vengeance is Mine, and recompense; their foot shall slip in due time; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things to come hasten upon them.'

Now God is pronouncing judgment against the enemy of the church.

**Deuteronomy 32:36-37** "For the LORD shall judge His people and have compassion on His servants, when He sees that their power is gone, and there is no one remaining, bond or free. [There is nobody to help.] He will say, 'Where are their gods, the rock in which they sought refuge?'

In other words, "Why don't our idols rescue the scattered peoples of the church (or, Israel)?"

**Deuteronomy 32:38-42** 'Who ate the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink offering? Let them rise and help you, and be your refuge. Now see that I, even I, am He, and there is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; nor is there any who can deliver from My hand. For I raise My hand to heaven, and say, "As I live forever. if I whet My glittering sword, and My hand takes hold in judgment, I will render vengeance to My enemies [those who attacked His people, who have made a

covenant with Him], and repay those who hate Me. I will make My arrows drunk with blood, and [Here comes the metaphor.] My sword shall devour flesh, with the blood of the slain and the captives, from the heads of the leaders of the enemy."

His sword shall devour flesh because those who punished His people take credit for what they have done. They should have given the credit to God for what He did in using them as the instrument by which He corrects His people (who have now repented of committing idolatry).

Is there not a proverb that says, "Do not take pleasure when your enemy falls"? I am kind of paraphrasing it; but that is basically what He says. So God punishes them, to teach them that they are nothing more than an instrument in His hands.

Now, the overall lesson that we can get out of this is that *God rules* —and He is serious about bringing us into His Kingdom; and nobody is going to get credit for doing these things except Him. This is going to get more important later in the sermon; but it sets a little bit of a tone that is going to have importance to us later on.

Next we are going to go to Numbers 13. Again, another metaphor in which eating is used in some way. In Deuteronomy 32 there is a sword was devouring. Swords do not devour; but they can, in a metaphor because it is almost as if that is literally what they are doing. Here in Numbers 13 takes place when the twelve spies go into the land. Ten of them come back with an evil report. Now look at the way they describe themselves.

**Numbers 13:32** And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, "The land, through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants. . .

Now when did you ever hear, or see, a land eating up its people? It is a metaphor. It is as though it is literally doing it. In other words, they are prophesying, "If we go into this land, we will be killed. It will be the end of the nation of Israel."

**Numbers 13:32-33** "A land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of a great stature. There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came of the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in their sight."

That is a second metaphor. They were not really grasshoppers. But they felt so weak, so intimidated by what they saw—they forgot about God. They forgot about all that He had done. They forgot about the dividing of the Red Sea. They forgot about the water out of rock. They forgot about the killing of the firstborn and on and on. And they used metaphors to describe their own feelings.

Now we will turn to James 5, and get one out of the New Testament. This metaphor actually ties directly into another one that is very frequently used (not in the New Testament though, but in the Old Testament).

**James 5:1-3** Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. [Did you ever see rust *eating* flesh?] You have heaped up treasure in the last days.

In the Old Testament, the metaphor that is fairly frequently used shows the grave—Sheol—consuming the dead as though the grave opens up its mouth and takes them in. It is another metaphor. But what this metaphor does, here in the book of James, is that it shows what makes the people fodder for the grave, to enable the grave to eat its victims up. Now, what is it? It is their lifestyle. But it is a little bit more than that.

Everybody knows, from their own life today, that rust is the oxidation that takes place, for example, on steel—but all metals oxidize to some degree. Gold oxidizes very slowly, and so it holds its luster for a long, long time. Silver a little bit more rapidly—but not anywhere near as rapidly as iron does, or steel. Copper too will oxidize to some extent; and you see it in that green stuff that it gets all over it. But you see *rust is evidence of decay*. It is evidence of degeneration, of deterioration.

That is what James is talking about here. These rich people are giving *evidence* of spiritual, moral decay. And it is *eating* them up, in the same way that rust destroys things that are iron and steel. Now what is the attitude? It is really an attitude that he is describing here. What kind of attitude goes with the kind of people that he is describing here? It is greed. We might call it "lust," but I think "greed" is more descriptive.

Now, greed is the attitude that is being inferred here through the word "rust," as it fits into the rest of the context. So it is the *greed for wealth* that is pictured as *eating*—almost as if it were a voracious beast—those who pursue wealth in that attitude. So it is a vivid way of picturing the end results of one not directing his life along the path toward God's end. Those who do that will not be in the image of God. The grave is the only alternative. And so those who are all "rusty"—with the immoral character trait of greed are going to find themselves being consumed by the grave.

That is pretty vivid; but that is what metaphors are for. They succinctly and vividly describe something that would otherwise take a great many more words. Look how many words I had to put in here to finally get around to greed being the evidence of deterioration of people morally.

Now, in Romans 11 is a very interesting one. This is one that David used, and Paul quotes it.

**Romans 11:8-9** Just as it is written: "God has given them the spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear, to this very day. [Here comes the metaphor.] And David says: "Let their table become a snare. . .

A table is not a snare, but a table in this context is a snare. It is a trap. And it becomes a prophecy, in David's use of it.

**Romans 11:9-10** "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always."

That gives a picture of slavery—bowing down the back. But what we are looking at here is a table that is piled high with food. And Israelites are



sitting at it, and they are feasting comfortably at their banquet. Now the word "comfort" there is a key to this—because it is their comfort, it is their ease, their *lack of awareness* that makes this applicable to the situation. Their focus is on what is on the table, and because their focus is on the table, it becomes their *ruin*.

Now turn with me back to Deuteronomy 8. Here we are going to look at a companion context that shows this process more completely. This is a warning to Israel—from God, through Moses.

**Deuteronomy 8:10-14** "When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you. Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you this day, lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwelt in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage."

**Deuteronomy 8:17-20** "Then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.' And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the LORD your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroys before you, so you shall perish, because you would not be obedient to the voice of the LORD your God."

Is it not a fact that, when you are not in the midst of a trial, you think of God less frequently—and you are most likely to turn your back on Him? Is it not true that, when you are in the midst of a trial, that you not only seek Him more frequently, but you also do it in a different attitude—much more fervently—when you reach out to Him for help?

So, what David is talking about here (and what Paul quoted, there in Romans 11) is that he is saying, "Let their prosperity become their curse." *The table* is a metaphor for *the prosperity*. But, because of the attitude in the people being focused on their prosperity, "the table" (their prosperity) instead becomes *the trap* by which they are ensnared.

Prosperity has a way, as we say, of turning our heads. It subtly distracts us, and we gradually become caught up in the action (right along with everybody else). As time goes by, the prosperity becomes our security, rather than God being our security. Rather than God being the One that we depend upon, our prosperity becomes what we depend upon. So it becomes our security.

There is a proverb (Proverbs 10:15) that says, "The rich man's wealth is his strong city." And Job, in one of his defenses of himself, said that he had not made gold his hope, or fine gold his confidence "lest I deny God." That is very interesting. In your mind, go back to Romans 11 again. David said, "Let their table be their snare. Let their prosperity be that which they put their hope in. Let their prosperity become that in which they have confidence and security."

There is a very strong tendency to neglect God when things are going well. And we can become secure in the fancied "safety" that comes upon us as unaware as a rabbit walking into a trap. And so it is with "the table" in Romans 11. It represents a whole wasteful, neglectful lifestyle—focused on the nation's prosperity. I do not know whether there has ever been a nation as prosperous as we in the United States have been in the last twenty years. So this is a very strong *warning* from God: **Be careful.**

It is one of those things that sneaks up on a person. The rabbit is not aware of the snare, is he? He has his eye fixed on a meal—that which is attractive to the eye and to the nose. And we can fall into that trap, because we are focused on the wrong thing. That is where the problem lies! There is nothing inherently wrong or evil about wealth.

The metaphor is being used to get us to understand that the pulls of the world and all of its allurements—that which is attractive to the eye, to the taste buds, to all of the senses—are some things that have to be defended against

so that it does not deflect our attention away from the responsibilities of our election by God. Perhaps you remember Jesus saying that no man can serve two masters. The problem with wealth is that it requires management; and very few can correctly balance their way of life, without serving the wrong master.

You have probably all heard the story about how people were questioned about how man could be led astray. It was Satan who came up with the idea—"I would prosper them." It is subtle, but it is effective. So people who cannot master the handling (or the management) of wealth, their prosperity consumes them, because of the distraction.

Now, I do not want to go into that one any further; but I do want to pursue another metaphor that is kind of interesting. It appears in Proverbs 7. We will not go into this chapter in a great deal of detail, but the indulgence of the sexual appetites is pictured in terms of *eating*. And it is the indulgence here that is the problem.

**Proverbs 7:1** My son, keep my words, and treasure my commands within you. . .

**Proverbs 7:5** That they may keep you from the immoral woman, from the seductress who flatters with her words.

Beginning in verse 11, there is a description of the way in which she operates. She uses all of her wiles in order to do this. But in verse 18, it is making reference to things she will do verbally. And she suggests to her victim:

**Proverbs 7:18** Come, let us take our fill of love. . .

Now it does not show up too clearly here in the English; but in the Hebrew it is very clear that she is talking about *eating*. And she has put this illicit sex in such a frame as though it is going to be like imbibing a delicious meal.

**Proverbs 7:18** Let us take our fill of love until the morning. . .

It sounds like the Romans—eating a gluttonous meal all night, purging, do it again, purging, doing it again, and purging. That is what she is suggesting, and it comes up in the form of a gluttonous meal. There is a related passage to this, which is also in chapter 30. I find this one very interesting—much more interesting than the one here.

**Proverbs 30:18-19** There are three things which are too wonderful for me, yes, four which I do not understand: The way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, and the way of a man with a virgin.

The idea that ties all of these things of wonderment together is the word "way." *Way* is being used here in the sense of a course of action. And what the writer is saying is that he sees these things happening, but he does not understand either the means of (1) propulsion or (2) motivation. It is *motivation* that is the word, I feel, that describes this the best. What is it that makes these things go, or "happen," as we would say today?

He is saying, "It is beautiful, but I don't understand how the eagle can so effortlessly take advantage of wind currents." Here is this bird that may weigh 25 pounds, and yet it is floating around up there, gliding around, making little or no movement of the wings to keep itself going. It is just up there. Its wings are held out. It finds a current—and the bird is lifted, and it drifts down. How does the bird know to do that? How does it learn it, without crashing and killing itself before it learns it? That is what he is asking. He says, "This is too wonderful to me." We know it today as instinct. It is something that God built into the bird. It is God, of course, who made it possible; but he is leading to something here. And that is only one thing.

He also says, "How is it that a snake is able to move so fluidly on rocks, without any legs? Now, we could probably describe it today. We would cut the snake apart and see all the little muscles that are working back in forth in there, and enabling the snake to do that. But the writer in Proverbs is wondering out loud—"How can this be? Every other animal needs legs." Even little bugs need legs to get around. But here is the snake, that does not have any legs, and it can go across a pretty smooth surface without ever moving any legs.

And then he wonders, "How is it that such a slight wind can move such a large ship." Now, he could undoubtedly look out there and see the sail; and he knows that it was catching the wind, to be able to do it. But, boy, here is this boat that may weigh many tons; and yet here is this little breeze that is able to move that boat.

There is an alternative here, and that is that he really was not wondering about the air moving the boat; but he was wondering how men can find their way across a trackless sea. No roads, no signs that might say, "This way to Pompeii (or, whatever), so many miles down the road." But he is leading to something.

He said that he could not understand even the best of human sexuality. What is it in a man and a woman that attracts them to each other? He describes it as "the way of a man with a virgin." But it works both ways. He is saying that there is a mystifying beauty about it; but he cannot penetrate it by his mind so that he can explain it to others as to why this should occur. And why is it that one particular boy and one particular girl are attracted to each other? These were things that were beyond him. But what he is leading to is in verse 20.

**Proverbs 30:20** This is the way of an adulterous woman: she eats and wipes her mouth, and says, "I have done no wickedness."

"How can she do that?" he is saying. He is looking here now at another form of sexuality. He cannot understand how somebody can turn away from something so beautiful (as mentioned in the previous verse) and engage in prostitution—and treat it with such indifference that it is as though it is nothing more than eating a common meal. He is asking, "What has happened to the mind?"

She is not eating. She is plying her trade. That is what the prostitute is doing. And she is brazenly manipulating the victim for her own ends. She is therefore pictured as devouring him—somewhat like a black-widow spider—and thinking of it as being of no more consequence than *eating* lunch.

What he cannot understand is the drive that allows the indifference of the eating woman and the cooperative defenselessness of the man who allows

himself to be used this way. He cannot understand either one—who would give up what God has so beautifully and lovingly created a man and a woman to be for one another, and step into this perversion. Now, for the purpose of this sermon, the metaphor is *eating*. The woman is "eating" this man up, and the man is allowing it to be done. So they are both guilty.

Right here the sermon is going to take a bit of a turn. You will recall that many foundational principles are given in the book of Genesis. And on several occasions (at least 6, 7, or 8 times) *eating* is involved somewhere in the course of the event—and from which a foundational principle that applies to us, even today, can be extracted. That is a signal that, even apart from eating being a physical necessity, it in some ways reveals people's character, their attitude, and their personality.

In Genesis, we are confronted with at least four occasions in which sin and eating is involved. And in each case, a clear statement is made about the character of the people involved. One is very obvious, because it happens in the third chapter of Genesis; but we are going to skip by that one. Another one involves Jacob and Rebekah's deception of Isaac; and another one involves Esau's rejection of his birthright.

We are going to spend a bit of time looking at Esau, because he paints such a clear picture of an unconverted person and because his choosing to *eat* a stew at the wrong time reveals a significant character flaw that everyone of us share to some degree. This is why it is in the Book. It does not just apply to Esau. It applies to every one of us. And sin and *eating* is the venue.

We are going to look at the other ones, as well. We are going to look at the contrast that is there.

We are especially going to look at one that is a good example, and I think that you will find that one very interesting. So turn with me now to Genesis 25. Here, Isaac and Rebekah were childless.

**Genesis 25:21-23** Now Isaac pleaded with the LORD for his wife, because she was barren, and the LORD granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived. But the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If all is well, why am I like this?" So she went to

inquire of the LORD. And the LORD said unto her: "Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger."

God's revelation to Rebekah regarding the struggling twins was of two nations and two types of people. It means two kinds, two styles. It is indicating a rivalry is going to exist between these two, at least partly because they are so different from one another.

The struggling that was already going on in her womb was a precursor of what was to continue after they were born. It was going to have a significant impact on the history of Israel; and of course, this means Isaac's and Rebekah's descendants.

**Genesis 25:27** So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field. . .

What does the Bible mean by "a skillful hunter, a man of the field"? As the story unfolds, it is very clear that there is a powerful black mark against Esau. Yet I have no doubt that, if you begin to study into this man a little bit more deeply, almost everybody's first impression between the two (Jacob and Esau)—they would choose Esau as their friend and companion, rather than Jacob. "Man of the field" describes him as a man of physical vigor. He was virile, an outdoorsman. Actually, the word gives the impression of a frontiersman. He was an explorer. He was a "Davy Crockett" type of individual. I think that we would find him to be frank, to be impulsive, to be even generous and chivalrous. But also, at the same time, he was careless and sensuous.

From within the story, I think that it is very clear that Isaac turned to Esau almost instinctively. If Isaac wanted anything done, Esau was the man who could do it. And as Isaac aged, he leaned increasingly on Esau's strength. He seems to have been a warmhearted man, who sincerely loved his father; and he treated Isaac in a gentle way. He was quick to respond to virtually anything that Isaac wanted.

In Genesis 33, the context is when Jacob's twenty years of working with Laban were finished; and he was on his way back to the land of Canaan. You know that Jacob was afraid of Esau and what would happen whenever they met. He was afraid that Esau would attack. And, sure enough, when he saw him off in the distance, Esau seemingly was approaching with three hundred armed men. He was coming there with a small army. But what kind of a reaction do we find from Esau?

**Genesis 33:4** But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.

Then, a little bit later, Jacob offered him what amounted to quite a pile of money. Esau's reaction is in verse 9.

**Genesis 33:9** But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have to yourself."

Now, Jacob pressed on him; and eventually Esau did take it. But these verses tend to show a man who was generous and magnanimous—even to someone who had defrauded him, like Jacob had done, out of an extremely valuable possession. His temperament seems to be a great deal more mercurial than Jacob's. He was a man who would quickly flare into anger, and then it also would subside pretty quickly—so that it was often difficult for him to hold a grudge. He seems to be lovable, impulsive, physically strong, easy going, but he was also somewhat of an airhead. He was careless and lacking in strong principles.

**Genesis 25:29-34** Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary. And Esau said to Jacob, "Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary." Therefore was his name called Edom [which means "red"]. But Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright as of this day." And Esau said, "Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?" Then Jacob said, "Swear to me as of this day." So he swore to him, and sold his



birthright to Jacob. And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

The major flaw in Esau's character is shown in this context that involves *eating*. Unfortunately, far too many of us are like him. Esau was a man who could not see two blocks down a straight road on a crystal clear day, as we might say—because he was a man who was living only for the immediate present. He either had no vision, or his personality demanded instant gratification. The things that had value to him were those that he could have immediately. Now, let us reiterate what he says in verses 32 and 34. Notice how this is pointed out.

**Genesis 25:32** And Esau said, "Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright me?" ["I can't eat it!"]

**Genesis 25:34** And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils [Notice this description.]; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

I wonder if it got into your mind that this is very similar to the prostitute that the writer of Proverbs was describing there, who thought no more of prostitution than as if she was *eating* a meal. "I have done no evil," she said.

"What good is this thing?" Esau said. And he ate it, rose up, and went his way; and God says, "He *despised* his birthright." That is a strong word, this word "despise." It means to be scornful. It means to treat with contempt. Now notice what Paul says about Esau, in Hebrews 12.

**Hebrews 12:16** Lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.

The word "profane" is very interesting. It is a word that came out of paganism. Not out of Christianity, and not out of Hebrew—it came out of Greek paganism. The profanity here was not verbal profanity. It means that Esau was *far from the temple*. That is what it literally means. Where was the Temple? It was the place of God. Esau was far from God. A nice fellow

(warm, friendly, vigorous, fun loving, a joker, generous)—but he was far from God.

This word profane is describing the overall quality of his life! He demonstrated his profanity by treating something hallowed, that is, the birthright, as if it was common. He was unconcerned about God. He was unconcerned about God and the future. This word "profane" (together with that section there in Genesis 25) is describing the conduct, the behavior, and the attitudes of *a worldly person*. The carnal person—the unconverted person—is not concerned about the things of God.

This does not mean that they are unconcerned about religion. It means that they are unconcerned about *the truths of God*, and so they will ignore them. Let me give you an example from our recent history. The Worldwide Church of God has junked many of the doctrines that were given to us—the hallowed things of God. They treated them profanely, and inserted (put into the church) those things that were *unholy*. Now they say that the law of God is done away and that gives them justification for the conduct of their lives. They do not have to worry about the law.

But I will tell you something. You do not see Worldwide Church of God members who will, willingly, go out there and murder somebody. Do you not think that they would agree with you that it is not wise to lie? To steal? Well, what is happening here? You see there is one law that they are willingly ignoring and rejecting. It is the Sabbath law—the law that also contains the holy days within it. And so, even though they say, "Well, we don't have to obey the law," they by and large keep the law. But they still give evidence of their profanity by failing to keep the Sabbath, which they are gradually getting rid of.

Now this is the way it was with Esau. He was not a vile person. He was a fun-loving person to be around. He was generous. And I think that usually, most of the time, a kind man—magnanimous. But in the eyes of God he was profane, because he was not really interested in the things of God. This is also vividly shown up in Esau's choice of wives. He married, as we would say today, "out of the church." And, as it says, this was a continual source of

pain to Isaac and Rebekah. But Esau gave evidence of his *unconversion* through *eating*. And it led, you see, and gave indication of something far deeper.

Let us begin to apply this a little bit more to us (before we go on to Jacob). Unlike Esau, the Christian has to live in the present. He has to deal with life's problems as they come to him, but always with the future in mind. And it is *the future* that modifies his behavior to be in conformity with the will of God that he understands—rather than his immediate need.

But Esau's worldliness is demonstrated in God's Word through the medium of eating. Eating was something that he desired at the moment. And it was tremendously more important to him, at the time, than an *extremely* valuable gift from God! So the hallowed thing—the birthright—was pushed aside for a bowl of soup. He was unwilling to make the sacrifice.

If you have not done something like this in your relationship with God—where you have pushed aside, in some way, the hallowed things of God in order to get an immediate gratification from something in this world—you are perfect. I will almost guarantee you that this is at the base of almost every sin. It is evidence of our carnality that still remains.

Esau became a very wealthy man, but his death is not even mentioned in the Bible. And that is usually an indication of something ominous. So I wonder, of course, how much satisfying immediate cravings and yearnings—perhaps even for food—has become a stumbling block to *our* pleasing God.

Now back to Genesis 25.

**Genesis 25:27** But Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents.

Jacob is described as "a mild man." Unlike Esau, it means that his temperament was virtually devoid of peaks and valleys. There were not any mountains there. There were not any "Grand Canyons." He was a pretty steady individual. So most modern translations translate that word *quiet*. Other scriptures also show Jacob to be a physically strong, robust person. But, at the same time, he was quiet, reflective, pastoral, even timid, steady going, orderly, and contemplative.

I think you will find it interesting that each parent favored the son whose characteristics were most unlike him or her. The quiet and peacemaking Isaac rejoices in the backwoods frontiersman in the adventurous Esau. If you know anything at all from the Bible about Rebekah, you will find that she was vigorous—a "take charge" person. And she found an outlet for her tenderness in the quiet and reflective Jacob—who, apparently, constantly needed to be "stroked" by his mother.

We are not going to go into the entire story, but Genesis 27 shows Jacob in conjunction with his mother, Rebekah, using *food*, and clothing, and taking advantage of Isaac's blindness to deceive him. Other scriptures also show him to be craftily deceiving Laban, his father-in-law.

So the Bible shows a clear contrast of expressions of personality between Esau and Jacob. Jacob (rather than taking advantage of his physical strength in the same way that Esau does) was persevering and almost dogged in his tenacity. He preferred to use clever deceit and inventive strategies in achieving his ambitions.

There can be no doubt that Jacob was creative. He was a man who *did* look ahead. He did not merely live for the moment. He was always planning on how he could get the upper hand, the best of a deal, and always come out in the end as though he was on top. But he was also clearly not above lying to get what he wanted. He was persistent and persevering; and, over the long haul of a lifetime, he became by far the better man.

The story of these two sons is very much like the myth of the race between the tortoise and the hare. Jacob was the tortoise, and through much plodding persistence *succeeded* while the more colorful hare, Esau, *failed*—in short, because Esau beat himself. Jacob too was his own worse enemy; but he never despired, or turned his back, on the hallowed things. In fact, he attempted and succeeded in getting them through sin.

Now, with the help of God and His calling, Jacob was able to overcome. And, in the end, he did go down as one of the great men in the history of Israel. In the end, he was not labeled as "worldly," like his twin; but he was truly a man of faith, like his father and his grandfather before him.

Let us go to Genesis 24. This is a good story about *eating*. This is the story of Eliezer. He is not named in this chapter; but this seems to be the Eliezer, who appears in Genesis 15. He was Abraham's steward—the top man over Abraham's holdings. And Eliezer was sent to find a wife for Isaac. Now, notice what it says about Eliezer. He was one terrific employee.

**Genesis 24:32-33** Then the man [Eliezer] came to the house. And he unloaded his camels, and provided straw and feed for the camels, and water to wash his feet, and the feet of the men who were with him. Food was set meat before him to eat, but he said, "I will not eat until I have told about my errand." And he said, "Speak on."

**Genesis 24:50-54** Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, "The thing comes from the LORD; we cannot speak to you either bad or good. Here is Rebekah before you; take her and go, and let her be your master's son's wife, as the LORD has spoken." And it came to pass, when Abraham's servant heard their words, he worshipped the LORD, bowing himself to the earth. Then the servant brought out jewelry of silver, jewelry of gold, and clothing, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave precious things to her brother and to her mother. And he and the men who were with him ate and drank and stayed all night. Then they rose in the morning, and he said, "Send me away to my master."

This is given, right in the book of Genesis, in sharp contrast to what will happen later with Jacob and Esau—because Abraham's servant would allow *nothing*, not even good food and warm hospitality, to stand in the way of his completing of his mission first. You get the work done first! Then you take care of yourself.

This, of course, is followed by other fine examples. How about the time that Satan tempted Jesus with *food*. Jesus did as Abraham's servant did: First things first. And He refused to eat.

How about Jesus in John 4 when He was talking to the woman at the well, and the apostles came back and found Him there? They urged Him strongly

to eat. And He said, "I have bread to eat that you know not of." And He said, "I must finish the work first." In other words, "Seek you first the Kingdom of God, and then these things will be added to us."

One of the major things that we can learn from these four episodes is that our most severe temptations and trials are going to be found in common, everyday, events. We might like to fancifully picture ourselves as giving our life for Christ before a firing squad, or maybe being sawn in two (as Isaiah is reputed to have been), or perhaps holding fast to our faith while imprisoned in a concentration camp. But that has not happened to very many people. Most of the temptations and tests occur in the midst of every day, commonplace, events—like *eating*, conducting our business affairs, and relating within a family or a community.

Now, Jacob had vision; and he looked ahead. Esau may also have looked ahead, but the immediate was still more important to him. He could not control himself, to patiently wait on the Lord, because he did not value highly the things of God and therefore lacked proper vision. Like I said, he became a wealthy man; and I do not think it was all inherited. I think that the example of Jacob shows that Isaac and Rebekah made those two young men pursue their own wealth. And they did it.

Very much hinges on what it is that we give honor to—what it is that we consider to be valuable. Esau despised his birthright. Jacob, as crafty and deceitful as he was, did not really despise things. He did not have the same attitude. He did not have the same approach as Esau did.

Now, these same factors are at work in our lives as well; and we need to consider these two men. So much time in God's Word is given over to them that there is very much that we can learn from them.

What is it that *you honor*? What is it that *you* hold to be of high regard in your life? That is going to pretty much determine what your vision in life is going to be, and what it is that you are going to push yourself to accomplish. Because it will force you to give your time and your thinking over to it.

In David's case, he describes the "table" and the "prosperity" as getting the attention of people; and it becomes their snare, because their vision goes no

further than the prosperity that has been so generously given to them by God. And it becomes their snare. With Esau, it was the immediate gratification of the pain, the pangs of hunger that were in his tummy. For others, it could be sex—the desires that surge through the body at the sight of a beautiful woman, or a handsome man.

Most of the time, Jacob controlled himself—but not always. There is an interesting section, which I will not go into at this time. I will give you the scripture, however; and I will give you the key to understanding them.

**I Peter 3:7** Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor [place a value upon] to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

For a man and a woman to be successfully married, and to have the kind of marriage that God intends, one of the responsibilities of a man within the marriage is to *give honor* to his wife. That is, to *value her highly*—more highly than any other woman on the face of the earth. That is his responsibility. And that will produce, energize, motivate the love that he is going to give to her—the sacrifices that he is going to give for her benefit. But he has to place the value on her. And if he does not place a high value, he will not do it—any more than Esau could give up a meal. Esau placed more value on the meal than he did on the birthright. We are wed in "holy matrimony." It is a holy thing, of God.

**I Peter 1:19** [You were redeemed] with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

**I Peter 2:6** Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes in Him will by no means be put to shame."

That same word honor is here translated *precious*. And that is the way a man has to look at his wife—precious. Physically, he places more value on her than any other thing. She is precious to him.

And anybody knows that anyone who has precious things—like jewels—what do you do with jewels that are precious to you? You do not throw them out on the highway. You do not lay them down on the porch, where people can come along and get them. You do not step on them. You put them in the safest place in your house. And you wear them with careful regard.

Even God says that He is going to put *His precious jewels* where they are going to be safe. Well, the things of God were not "precious" to Esau; but they became "precious" to Jacob. That was the difference between the two men. And that is why it does not say that Jacob despised his birthright—because, even in his carnality, he recognized the value. And though he went after them carnally, he was already showing in his life what was eventually going to drive him to become the great man of faith that he became—because he *overcame*.

Now there is more to this, which we will pursue the next time. Jacob had *an advantage* over Esau. The advantage was that *God called him*, and He did not call Esau. Physically, Esau was the better man. In the heart, Jacob put him to shame—eventually.

The point in all of this is that *we* have the same *advantage* over the world as Jacob had over Esau. What are we going to do with it? What are we doing with it? Will we become an overcomer, like Jacob? Or will we fall by the wayside, as Esau did? Will we choose to act as if God had not even given *the call*—had not even elected us? And will we come to despise the holy things of God, and end up profane *far from the temple*?