

What Is Your Lentil Soup?

by Staff

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"Thus Esau despised his birthright."

—Genesis 25:34

Not long ago, a section of Scripture became the subject of a great deal of meditation and study. It was stimulated by a conversation with a friend whom I had known when attending a former church fellowship. When the church began to split among the various splinter groups, he became frustrated and left. He is not attending anywhere now.

As I listened to him talk, it became apparent where his concerns and interests were—all in material things. He is more concerned about worldly pursuits than the will of God. He now works on the Sabbath and makes enough to have a new pickup, new jet skis, and a fairly new house, bought just a few years ago. It made me think that he was despising his calling in much the same way Esau despised his birthright.

So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

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 his name was called Edom. 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. (Genesis 25:27-34)

Because of that conversation, I became intrigued about this section of Scripture. How did Esau come to be of a mind that he could sell his birthright so easily? Can we, like my old friend, follow the same path but in a spiritual sense? What must we do to cherish rather than despise our far more glorious inheritance?

Esau's Squandered Inheritance

What Esau despised was no small thing. Even if we disregard the earlier promises given to Abraham and Isaac of descendants as numerous as the sand of the seashore, the Promised Land of Canaan, royal dynasties, and the gates of their enemies, Esau stood to inherit a literal fortune. As we have learned over the years, the birthright contained a two-fold promise. Herbert Armstrong called them the promises of race and grace, that is, physical promises and spiritual promises. We can see this in summary in Genesis 12:1-3:

Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who

bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

What a wonderful inheritance for Abraham's descendants! God promises a national homeland, national greatness (power and prosperity), and national prestige. Abraham's descendants would ultimately be a force for good on the planet, especially because from Israel would come the Messiah.

If we consider just what Esau would inherit when Isaac died, it still was quite a huge amount of wealth. In Genesis 24:35, Abraham's servant says to Rebekah's family, "The Lord has blessed my master greatly, and he has become great; and He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female servants, and camels and donkeys." Just a chapter later, Moses records, "And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac," except for "gifts" that he bestowed on his other sons by his concubines (Genesis 25:5-6).

The birthright was customarily passed down from father to eldest son. Being Isaac's eldest son (verse 25), Esau would have stood to gain quite a lot, at least in the way of wealth. A bowl of lentils hardly compares to "flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female servants, and camels and donkeys"! How could he have despised his awesome inheritance so easily?

Esau's Real Treasure

What was Esau's problem? He did not treasure his inheritance! Jesus tells us in His Sermon on the Mount, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). People usually only sell something when they value something else more. Esau did not place a high-enough value on the birthright, so he sold it for a pittance.

Genesis 25:27-29 helps us to zero in on what Esau treasured: "And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field. . . . And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game. . . . [A]nd Esau came in from the field, and he was weary." Each of these short sentences tells us how much Esau treasured hunting. When a person is known to be skillful in some area, it can be assumed that he spent large amounts of time and energy honing his craft. That Isaac loved to eat the results of Esau's hunts validated the younger man in his love of hunting. Finally, when a man wearies himself by doing a task with all of his might, it points to where his interests lie—what he loves doing.

The Interlinear Bible renders Genesis 25:27 as, "And Esau became a man knowing hunting, a man of the field." *Field* is *sadeh* is translated as "country," "field," "ground," "land," or "soil." *Vine's* comments, "This word often represents the 'open field' where the animals roam wild." This verse could be read, "Esau was . . . a man of the wild," indicating where he felt most comfortable. He treasured his time out in the wild, and he had dedicated his life to pursuing the chase. By treasuring this "wild" existence over his birthright, Esau displayed how irresponsible he was toward it.

Would we want to bequeath our wealth to a child who was not preparing himself to govern it? It would be similar to the prodigal son taking his inheritance and squandering it (Luke 15:11-13). He, like Esau, was not disciplined and trained to govern it. If most of Esau's time was spent out in the wild, how would he have been able to tackle the responsibilities of governing flocks and herds, gold and silver, male and female servants, donkeys and camels, as well as being his family's head and leader?

Perhaps he should have stayed in the camp like Jacob so he would not have lost the vision of a wonderful time to come contained in his inheritance. Jacob obviously valued it, although he obtained it by trickery and deceit. He also showed himself capable of governing it, as he seemed to know plenty about managing flocks and herds, as Genesis 29-30 bear out. Laban prospered greatly from Jacob's expertise, and Jacob then prospered himself.

In Genesis 25:29, Esau came in from the field "weary." Some versions render it "faint." I can relate to this situation, having grown up hunting and fishing. In younger days, I would rather hunt than eat, and I often did. I remember coming home from a hunting trip on shaky legs, ready to eat anything, even if I did not like it. Esau came home in this condition and did his thinking and reasoning in this weakened state. Instead of reasoning with his head, he let his stomach decide.

His flesh was doing all the "thinking," as we see in his response to Jacob's opening offer: "And Esau said, 'Behold I am going to die; and what good is this birthright to me?'" (verse 32). Was he really so famished that he was going to die? Would he have said this had he been more involved with his inheritance and working with it?

If he had taken just a moment to think about his inheritance and what was involved, he would never have made such a rash decision. This could not have been the only food in the camp of a very wealthy man like Isaac; it was merely the first food he came to. Esau, the favorite of his father, could easily have gone to his father and told him what Jacob had tried to do *and* received food to satisfy his hunger. But he did not want to wait—he wanted immediate gratification of his fleshly desires. He thought he had to have it right away.

It is worthwhile to note that Esau sold his birthright when he came in from hunting, *and* had his blessing stolen from him when he went out to hunt (Genesis 27:5). He lost his entire inheritance while doing what he liked to do the most—being out in the wilderness hunting. While there is nothing wrong with hunting, there is a lesson in Esau's single-minded pursuit of his physical desires.

Our Inheritance

The apostle Paul writes in Romans 15:4, "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning." The Bible records not just the good examples, but also the bad, so that we will avoid their pitfalls. Many people find it easy to become caught up in their work, the cares of the world, and their trials, rather than being focused on what is truly important. It can become very easy to neglect our present calling and the wonderful inheritance we have before us (Hebrews 2:3).

In Matthew 6:33, Jesus exhorts us to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," and whatever our Father knows we need He will give us. We have to make the Kingdom of God—our inheritance (Matthew 25:34)—the primary goal of our "hunt." Like Esau, we need to find pleasure in seeking it and hone our skills to become better at it. We need to be so fixated on the pursuit of our goal that we are willing to go without food and rest to attain it.

Notice a few scriptures that describe the inheritance awaiting us:

» **Matthew 5:5:** Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

» **Matthew 19:29:** And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.

» **II Corinthians 6:18:** I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.

» **James 2:5:** Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

» **Revelation 2:7, 26; 3:21:** To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God. . . . I will give power over the nations. . . . I will grant to sit with Me on My throne.

» **Revelation 5:9-10:** . . . You . . . have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.

» **Revelation 21:7:** He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.

These are just a few of the scriptures dealing with our inheritance. This is what God wants us to treasure. He wants us to put such a high value on it that nothing ever becomes more important.

Are we pursuing or practicing anything in our lives right now that will leave us in such a weakened condition, physically and spiritually, that to get immediate relief we would be willing to sell our priceless inheritance for something no more valuable than a bowl of lentils? Are we reasoning through our flesh as Esau did?

Are we—in any way—saying, "What profit shall this inheritance be to me?" by living for the here-and-now; by telling ourselves that we have to have this thing now; by giving in to the pulls of the flesh; by selling out tomorrow for a little satisfaction, good times, or boost to our ego today? Do we frequently find ourselves thinking, "I'll just do it this time but never again"?

If we are, we are in serious danger of sharing Esau's bitter disappointment (Genesis 27:30-40; Hebrews 12:14-17).

Where Is Our Treasure?

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works." (Matthew 16:24-27)

Our Savior is trying to explain the relative values of our physical lives and what we can humanly accomplish to what awaits us in what is commonly called the afterlife. In short, there is no comparison!

Notice the Bible's consistency on the value of human life apart from God:

» **Ecclesiastes 1:2-4:** "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun? One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but the earth abides forever.

» **Job 14:1-2:** Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and fades away; he flees like a shadow and does not continue.

» **Psalms 90:10:** The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

» **Isaiah 40:6-8:** All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.

» **James 4:14:** For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.

» **I John 2:17:** And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

The physical life we would live now is a bowl of lentils compared with eternal life. It is nothing more than a vapor, a breath, a shadow. The passing pleasures and cares of the world will only gratify and satisfy the immediate desires. If our only interest is the immediate gratification that the world has to offer, we are indeed saying, "What profit is the Kingdom of God to me now?" Like Esau, we will despise our inheritance and go our way apart from God.

Our inheritance is the Kingdom of God. By seeking it and His righteousness first, we are telling God that we place high value on it, that we want it, that we want to be like Him and think like Him, and that we can be trusted to take care of His estate and to live and reign with Christ.

Jesus promises in Revelation 3:11-12:

Behold, I come quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.

If we are seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, this is what our future will be—and it all hinges on what we treasure.

