

# What Is Your Bowl Of Lentil Stew?

by Staff

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*"Thus Esau despised his birthright." —Genesis 25:34*

*The hunt has not gone well. Esau has been on his belly stalking antelope since the pre-dawn hours without success. Now the afternoon is wearing on. Sweat mixed with grime oozes down his hairy face, chest and back. Small cuts on his arms and legs are burning, attracting biting flies.*

*He looks up at the searing, hot sun, wishing for even a breath of wind, but the air is still. His flat waterskin reminds him he has not had a drink or a bite to eat for most of a day now. He is so tired, so hungry, he feels as if he surely will not last the rest of the day.*

*Food. Water. Got to have some. Now.*

*Esau's legs ache as he stumbles down a ravine and climbs up the other side. Each labored step brings him closer to home camp. The look of dejection and failure etched on his sunburned face told the painful story.*

*What is this? His eyes brighten as he sniffs the air. With each stride, the welcome, invigorating aroma of his brother Jacob's famous lentil stew grows stronger, more inviting. Nobody makes lentil stew as Jacob does! Esau is in luck! Surely, Jacob will freely share some of his dinner with his starving twin brother.*

We know the rest of this story. God graphically recounts it for us in Genesis 25. In verse 34, the story concludes, "And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. *Thus Esau despised his birthright.*"

We all shake our heads in disbelief when we think about the well-known story of Esau selling his birthright for a measly bowl of lentil stew. How could he do such a thing? But are we any better today? Paul reminds us that the stories God includes in the Old Testament are there to help us avoid making the same mistakes (I Corinthians 10:11-12).

We have another advantage: Esau was not converted, and we are. Through the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit, we have help he never had. We can use this godly insight and power to learn and grow in the way of living that will please God.

## **The Birthright**

What did Esau give up? Of course, we understand that God had prophesied that the older would serve the younger. Perhaps Jacob was aware of this and was trying to "help God" work out His foreordained providence. Whatever the case, until this point the birthright was Esau's. Albert Barnes comments: "In after times the right of primogeniture consisted in a double portion of the father's goods (Deut 21:17), and a certain rank as the patriarch and priest of the house on the death of the father." God had already promised vast lands and wealth to the descendants of Abraham who came through the birthright son (Genesis 26:1-5).

Imagine for a second that Esau could have foreseen all of North America, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, vast sections of Europe, and parts of the Middle East. Would he have had a greater appreciation for the birthright then? Possibly.

However, Esau could not imagine the unimaginable wealth, power, military might, political impact, and world leadership his descendants could have. This is not even considering the potential for a far greater spiritual inheritance—the blessing (see Genesis 27:1-29)—that accompanies the birthright. These benefits were not real to him; he could not touch them. They were too far in the future; they were not present at the moment. The only thing that was real to him was his need to eat some lentil stew. Right now.

Esau's impulsive, unholy, live-in-the-now lifestyle was about to cost him and his descendants dearly. As God says, he despised his birthright.

God has called us to a fabulous, unfathomable birthright. Our birthright, as firstfruits of God, makes Esau's birthright seem trivial. If we cannot or will not realize what God has offered us, we can let such great a prize slip away as tragically as Esau spurned his birthright (Hebrews 2:1; 12:14-17). If we do not value our birthright more than anything in this universe, we can sell it for our own equivalent of a bowl of lentil stew.

### **Our Opportunity**

In our culture, because we do not deal with patriarchal inheritances, it is difficult to understand "birthright." Since we live in an individual-oriented society, perhaps we can grasp the concept of "opportunity" more readily.

Advertisers inundate us with offers to learn about a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity." It usually ends up in a meeting where a motivational speaker tries to recruit us for another network-marketing "opportunity." Or, it may be a chance to buy a franchise of a promising new chain of restaurants or stores. After a few of such pitches, we can become jaded to the fact that God truly offers us an incredible "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity" to end all others.

Indeed, most of humanity from the days of Adam will *never* be given the opportunities God offers us. Our birthright is a *once-in-eternity opportunity*, offered by One who cannot lie!

What is our fantastic opportunity? Not many will rise in the first resurrection, the small first harvest of God's children. Yet, those who attain to this resurrection will receive promises *never again to be offered or repeated*. We could be the very Bride of Christ, if we do not despise our calling. We could work intimately with the King of Kings as a leader and ruler of several cities of our own in a glorious Millennial world, if we do not sell out for our "bowl of lentils." We could be crowned with a diadem designed by the Master Designer with our new name inscribed on it, if we do not become blotted out of the Book of Life because of rebellion against God. God has called us to eternal life full of joyful, pleasurable experiences for all eternity (Psalm 16:11).

God says, "The meek inherit the whole earth" (Psalm 37:11; Matthew 5:5), but He does not stop there. He has already told us that we are not to inherit just some land here on earth, but we are co-heirs with Jesus, slated to inherit and rule over everything (Hebrews 2:8)! Drive out into the country

one clear night and get far away from city lights. Now look at the starry expanse above. Those stars, nebulae, and galaxies could be ours—or we could give them up for the temporary pleasure of sin that lasts for a moment now.

We could hear our Master announce, "Well done, good and faithful servant," or we could hear, "Depart from Me, I have never known you." The choice is largely ours at this point. God calls us His children, and therefore we are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ of everything God has and everything God is (Romans 8:16-17)!

So how are we doing with God's once-in-an-eternity offer? Are we showing by our actions that we are treasuring it or despising it?

When people recognize a true opportunity, they give up everything else to be sure they get it. Jesus says a man would give up everything he has to obtain a pearl of great price (Matthew 13:45-46). Paul says many run the race, but most are not doing what it takes to win. He says he is racing after an incorruptible crown, keeping his passions well controlled, lest in the end, he be just another castaway and lose out (I Corinthians 9:24-27).

Inheriting birthrights sometimes means having to sacrifice profoundly and give up the pleasures and desires of the here and now, as Moses did (Hebrews 11:24-27). Moses took the long view, "for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible" (verse 27). We have to see God in all this and recognize what He is handing to us. Then, we humbly accept it and hang on to it for all its worth!

### **Our Bowl of Lentils Identified**

So, what is our particular "bowl of lentils"? For what would we give up everything God has offered us? For what *are we* giving up our fabulous birthright? What sinful pattern of living could be keeping us from inheriting all things? Is it worth it?

We would like to say, "Nothing," but actions speak louder than words. *Our behavior reveals our beliefs.* If we are acting in a way that despises our birthright, we are showing that our beliefs are no different from Esau's. In fact, if we are participating in behavior contrary to God's standards, that behavior has become our bowl of lentils.

Again, what have we been putting ahead of the promises we could inherit? Our answer identifies our present bowl of lentils.

Esau wanted to be satisfied immediately; he did not want to wait. He wanted the pleasures and satisfactions of the flesh fulfilled instantly. What good was a birthright if it did not satisfy his incredible hunger and thirst right now?

Anything, any sin, any behavior, any thought pattern, any god we place before the Holy One—anything that would keep us from receiving our birthright—is our bowl of lentils. For most of us, these are ingrained patterns of life that we must overcome. Some have been able to hide and camouflage these bowls of lentils from others. It does not matter. God sees all (Hebrews 4:13).

We could be working so hard laboring for the meat that perishes that we ignore and neglect the spiritual food and promises God has offered us. We could be working so hard at building a relationship with a boss that we do not spend the time building our relationship with the real Master.

Perhaps it is sinful worry, the cares of this life, that have pulled us off center. Or, it could be the pleasures of this life, the vanities of this age, or unconquered sins. Any of these could be our bowl of lentil stew that could lead God to conclude we are despising our birthright too.

What are some typical bowls of lentils? Galatians 5:19-21, Paul's list of the "works of the flesh" is a good place to start. He concludes by saying, "[T]hose who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (verse 21).

Are we letting covetousness become a bowl of lentils? Have we chosen the god of "success" in place of the true God (Mark 4:18-19)?

Does anything each day come ahead of seeking Him and walking with Him? Are there sins of the flesh, of sex, of hate, of worry, of envy that keep us from seeking our birthright diligently?

How about the Sabbath and holy days? Are we keeping them holy?

The point is clear. Each of us knows what our bowl of lentils is.

We can learn from Esau. He should have gone hungry instead of selling out a fabulous future for literal beans. There will be *many* times when we will have that same decision: despise the birthright—or sacrifice, wait, endure, overcome, and put up with hardship. We have to make sure we choose properly: life (Deuteronomy 30:15-20).

No matter how temporarily enjoyable and satisfying any sin is in that moment, it cannot begin to measure up to the eternal rewards of God's birthright promises. Inheriting our birthright will not be easy. God wants to know beyond any doubt that we value it. That means we will be tested on this point repeatedly. It will take endurance, sacrifice, and keeping our focus on what is eternal and truly valuable (II Corinthians 4:17-18).

## **The Good News**

Jesus was also tried and tested in every point. After fasting for forty days, He certainly could understand Esau's hunger, but Jesus waited. Jesus focused on God and the glory set before Him. Jesus looked past the present moment and its hardship.

Talk about having a mindset of and focus on the one true goal! Jesus' first recorded words, as a mere twelve-year-old, are, "Why is it that you sought Me? Did you not know I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke 2:49).

While being crucified, He looks past His present torture and anguish to what lies ahead. Hebrews 12:2 says, ". . . looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, *who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross*, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Jesus' last recorded words before He died? "It is finished. Father, 'into Your hands I commend My spirit'" (John 19:30; Luke 23:46). First words to last words—He focused entirely on His mission and His birthright.

The good news? Jesus has overcome the world, the flesh, and Satan (John 16:33). Satan had nothing in Him (John 14:30). He now lives in us by the Holy Spirit, and "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (I John 4:4). We are assured of good fruit and victory if we abide in Him (John 15:5). We have all the help we ever need if we just use it. Jesus in us can give us the victory over the lures of our bowls of lentils.

Imagine what generations after us will think of us if we fail to grasp this concept! Imagine their conversations, sermonettes, and future articles about those of us who could have been in the first resurrection, but decided to give it up. For what? A mere bowl of lentils!

Any sin, weakness, false god, lethargy—anything that we put ahead of the eternal rewards God has in store for us—will be seen by future generations as nothing more than a modern-day bowl of lentils. They will not talk about Esau's attitude. They will talk about ours, if we let so great a prize slip through our fingers! What is more tragic is that we have the Holy Spirit to help us. Esau had no such help.

People have made the wrong choice for millennia. If we cannot see our bowl of lentil stew, we need to ask God to gently show us, and then ask Him to forgive us for despising the glorious birthright He wants to give us. Ask God to help us let nothing draw us away even remotely from Him and His promises.

When all is said and done, we will say with Paul:

The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed. (Romans 8:16-18)

Let us walk away from our bowls of lentil stew, no matter how enticing the aroma—no matter how much the flesh cries out to be satisfied now! We can resist the temptations to lose faith, to lose trust in God when He does not seem to answer our every whim right now. God's promises are worth the restraint now, the suffering, pain, hunger, anguish, and the temporary wait.

Turn from that steaming bowl of lentil stew and look to the promises and the indescribable opportunities that lie just ahead!