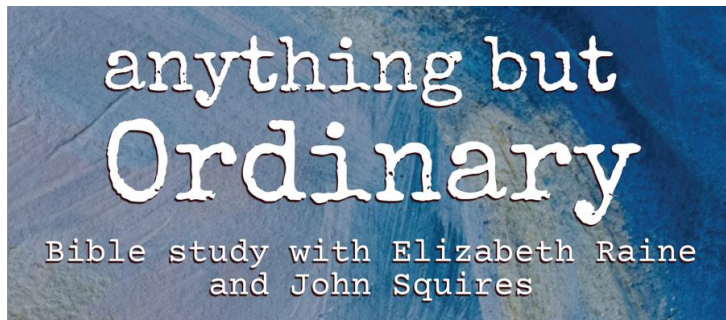




Bible study with Elizabeth Raine
and John Squires

9 July

Pentecost 15
Gen. 25:19-34

A betrayal out of the ordinary
(Jacob steals the birthright of Esau)

With deep gratitude, O God,
we receive the Scriptures
in which your Word is proclaimed.
**May we read them seriously,
preach from them diligently,
and share in the life of faith;**
may we be signs of the Gospel,
through our obedience
to the Christ who is proclaimed
in these words. **Amen.**

Please read Genesis 25 before the study, if you are able:

The questions we may discuss are listed on the following pages.

(for context) 23:2 Sarah died at Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron), and Abraham went to mourn for Sarah. 24: 67 Isaac ... took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

25:1 Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. 2 She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. 11 After the death of Abraham God blessed his son Isaac. Isaac settled at Beer-lahai-roi.

25:12 These are the descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's slave-girl, bore to Abraham. 13 These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, named in the order of their birth: Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael; and Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, 14 Mishma, Dumah, Massa, 15 Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah.

25:19 These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham was the father of Isaac, 20 and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean.

21 Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived. 22 The children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is to be this way, why do I live?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. 23 And the LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other,

the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger."

24 When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. 25 The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. 26 Afterward his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

27 When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. 28 Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.

29 Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. 30 Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!" (Therefore he was called Edom.) 31 Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." 32 Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" 33 Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. 34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Esau (v.25) means "hairy" or "rough"

Jacob (v.26) means "he supplants"
or "he takes by the heel"

Edom (v.30) means "red"

Israel (later, at 32:28) means

"the one who strives with God"

Questions on Genesis 25

1 Barren women in the Hebrew Bible

The rabbis note that there are seven significant “barren women” in the Hebrew Bible. Can you name them?

How do people today view “a woman who has not borne a child”? Is there a stigma involved? Or not?

2 Twins in the Bible

Where else in the Bible do we find twins?

3 Names in this story

Names are important – see explanations above; and note that both Jacob and Esau later have their names changed.

What do you think the names allocated to Jacob and Esau have to say to later generations of Israelites? Why might these names have been important?

4 A later change of name (we will come back to this when we look at Genesis 32)

5 Gender stereotypes: Rebekah in a patriarchal world

Last week we saw the leading role that Rebekah took in her marriage to Isaac. This week, in the final scene in which Rebekah appears, we see her at work in relation to her twin sons. She works it so that Isaac blesses Jacob rather than Esau. Esau was the first to emerge from the womb and thus the expected recipient of the paternal blessing. But Jacob is designated as heir to the ancestral lineage, which will mean his becoming progenitor of all Israel. This is orchestrated by Rebekah. Through clever manipulation, whereby Isaac is deceived, she achieves her purpose and controls the family destiny.

Thinking more about the prominent role of Rebekah, and remembering that the ancient world was a strongly patriarchal society: what do you think it means, that stories such as this were included in the ancient saga of Israel?

6 Gender stereotypes: Jacob and Esau

When the children are born, there is a clear difference in their characters (vv.25–27). Esau assumes the traits perceived to be normative for males; he was “a hairy man” (or “a rough fellow”) who hunted in the fields, while Jacob is described as a quiet man “living in tents”; tents (the indoors of the day) were traditionally associated more with women than men. Esau the outdoorsman was his father’s favourite; Jacob the indoor boy was his mother’s favourite (v.28).

What kinds of stereotypical behaviours are attached to these two different personalities? How do we operate by gender stereotypes today? What harms can this cause? What role does the church have in addressing this area in society?

How does the church express the wide variety of humanity that we are? What are the blessings that this brings? What are the problems that this can lead to?

John’s blog on Genesis 25:

<https://johntsquires.com/2023/07/10/twins-gen-25-pentecost-7a/>

John’s blog on the nature of the stories in Genesis

<https://johntsquires.com/2021/05/27/how-can-we-preach-on-passages-in-the-bible-that-are-myths/>