

Jimmy Goes to Sunday School

By Ward Ricker

Episode 5 – Jacob & Esau

Aaron pulled at Jimmy's shirt sleeve. "Come along. It will be alright. No one is going to hurt you."

"But you heard that story last week about that guy Abraham trying to kill his own son. The kid was probably about our age. And god told him to do it! Shit!"

"Come on! Pastor Parsons came to your house and talked to you and your parents, right?"

"Yeah."

"And he assured everyone that no one in the church will ever harm you, right?"

"Yeah."

"My parents go to this church. Everything's going to be okay," Aaron pleaded.

"Does your dad listen to god like that guy Abraham did?" Jimmy asked with his eyes wide.

"Dad hasn't tried to kill me yet," Aaron replied

"Well, if you see him piling wood on top of a donkey, you'd better run like hell!" Jimmy advised him.

With a little more prodding, Aaron convinced Jimmy to come into the Sunday School class where Mrs. Peabody was beginning the lesson.

"Well, last week we talked about Abraham, children," she began. "Today we are going to talk about two of Abraham's grandchildren. You all remember that Abraham had a son named Isaac, right?"

The other children nodded. Jimmy thought, "Yeah, one who barely survived it. Maybe his older brother was lucky that Abraham booted him out. Get away from that killer dad of his!" However, Jimmy let the teacher continue without interruption.

Well, Isaac married a beautiful woman named Rebecca. For a long time, though, Rebecca was unable to have any children, but Isaac prayed to god to let her have children. Then Rebecca got pregnant with two baby boys—twins! However, these two boys started fighting when they were still in the womb."

"Talk about a rough pregnancy!" Jimmy thought, but let her continue.

"God told Rebecca," Mrs. Peabody continued, "that the older son would serve the younger. This was unusual, because it was normal in those times for the oldest son to end up as the leader in the family. When it came time to give birth, the first baby came out all red and hairy, and they called its name 'Esau'. Then the second one came out and they named him 'Jacob'.

"Well, Esau grew up to be a great hunter, and Isaac, his father, loved him, because he loved to eat the meat from the animals that he brought home. One day, however, Esau hunted all day long and didn't catch anything. When he got home he was very hungry, and he found Jacob making pottage, a food that Esau liked, so he asked him if he would give him some of his pottage because he was very hungry and hadn't caught anything to cook.

"Jacob, though, said to him, 'I will give you my pottage if you give me your birthright.' Now, the birthright was a very important thing. That was the older brother's right to the bigger portion of their inheritance, that is, the larger part of what their father left behind when he died, so the birthright was a very valuable and very important thing to have.

"Esau, though, thought to himself, 'Well, what good is my birthright going to do me if I die from hunger?' so Esau agree to sell his birthright to his younger brother Jacob in exchange for some pottage. This helped fulfill what god had said when he told Rebecca that the older brother would serve the younger. Can you believe a man would sell his birthright for a bowl of food, children?"

Some of the children shook their heads. Jimmy, though, responded, "What kind of brother would cheat his brother out of his birthright, and only offer him a bowl of pottage in return? He must have been a really mean brother!"

"Oh no, Jimmy. You don't get it. You see, god had chosen to create his great nation from Jacob's descendants. This was part of god's plan."

"You mean Jacob is the one that god liked—the one who cheated his brother?"

"You mustn't look at it that way, Jimmy." Jimmy could see that Mrs. Peabody was starting to get upset again. "God had planned to create a special nation, and Jacob was the one that he was going to do it through, so god was just arranging things to work out as he had planned."

"By siding with the blackmailer?" Jimmy asked.

Mrs. Peabody was unhappy with Jimmy's question, and continued on without answering. "So years went by, and when Isaac got to be very old, it was time to pronounce his blessing upon his oldest child. This was very important, because whichever son received his blessing would prosper."

Jimmy was going to ask if Isaac's words were somehow magic, but he decided to forgo the question. He did have another question to ask, though. "What if the oldest child was a girl?"

"Oh no, Jimmy. Girls didn't receive the blessing or the birthright. It was always the oldest boy in the household."

Jimmy looked back at the girls in the back row and stuck his tongue out at them.

"Jimmy," Mrs. Peabody exclaimed, "that wasn't very nice. You should apologize!"

"Did god apologize to all the older girls that had to give up their blessings and birthrights to their younger brothers?"

"Jimmy, that's the devil speaking again!" Mrs. Peabody's face was red again. "Now, I want you to apologize to those girls right now!"

"I'm sorry," Jimmy said, looking back at the girls. Then when Mrs. Peabody looked away, he smiled and stuck out his tongue at them again.

"So," said Mrs. Peabody, "since Esau was the oldest of the two boys, that is, he was the one to come out first when they were born, Isaac was going to give the blessing to him. He spoke to Esau and said, 'Go hunt a wild deer and make some of that venison that I love so much, and then I will give you your blessing.' So Esau went out hunting to please his father.

"However, Isaac was now blind, and Rebecca heard what Isaac had said to Esau. Now, Rebecca liked Jacob better than Esau, so she said to Jacob, 'Go out to the flock of goats and choose two young ones, and I will make a nice, tasty dish that will taste just like Esau's venison. You can bring it to him, and, since he is blind and can't see you, he will think you are Esau and will pronounce the blessing on you instead.'"

Continuing her story, Mrs. Peabody said, "'But Jacob protested, 'Esau is a hairy man, and my skin is smooth. If dad feels my skin he will know that I am lying to him, and he will curse me, rather than bless me.'"

"'You just go get the two goats,' Rebecca replied. 'I know what I'm doing.'"

"So Jacob got the goats, and Rebecca cooked up some nice stew that would taste like the one that Esau made from venison. She then took some of the goat's skin and wrapped it around Jacob's arms and found one of Esau's coats and put that on him, as well. 'Now,' she said, 'if Isaac tries to feel you, he will feel the hairy goat skins and will think that they are Esau's hairy arms, and if he tries to smell you, he will smell Esau's coat and think that you are him. Then he will bless you, rather than Esau.'"

"Well, everything went just as Rebecca planned, and when he tasted the delicious stew, felt the skins on Jacobs arms and smelled the coat that he was wearing, Isaac was convinced that it was Esau. When he asked how he had found the deer so quickly, Jacob said, 'Your god brought it to me.'"

“So, believing that Jacob was Esau, Isaac said, “May god provide you with the fat of the land and with plenty of wine and corn. Let people serve you and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may they bow down to you.’

Impressed that Jimmy was listening so quietly and attentively, Mrs. Peabody continued. “Then Jacob left his father, and as soon as he did, Esau returned with a deer and cooked it up for his father to eat, but when he want to give it to him, Isaac asked, ‘Who are you?’

“When Esau answered, ‘I am Esau,” Isaac asked, ‘Well, who was it then who was just here and gave me venison to eat and I have already blessed?’

“‘Oh no,’ cried Esau. ‘My brother has already taken my birthright, and now he has stolen my blessing also. Do you not also have a blessing for me?’

“‘I’m sorry, my son,’ replied Isaac. “You brother has taken away your blessing, and he will truly be blessed.”

At this point, Mrs. Peabody interrupted her story long enough to look at Jimmy with a smile and remark, “Jimmy. I’m glad to see you quiet and attentive now and listening to the stories from god’s word. This makes god very happy.”

“Oh yes,” Jimmy responded. “I am quite enjoying learning from Jacob’s example how I should treat my own brother.”

Mrs. Peabody’s smile turned into a bit of a glare, and she turned to the rest of the class and continued the story. “Well, Esau was really unhappy with his brother then, and even threatened to kill him, so, when Rebecca heard this, she said to Jacob, ‘Listen, your brother is threatening to kill you, so you’d better get out of here and go stay with my brother Laban who lives in Haran until Esau gets over being mad.’

“So Esau left his family and went to Haran. On the way, he stopped to sleep, and he had a dream in which he saw a ladder with its top up to heaven and with angels of god going up and down on it. God was at the top of the ladder and called to Jacob and said, ‘I am the god of your father Isaac and your grandfather Abraham. The land where you are lying and to the east, west, north and south I am giving to your descendants. I will be with you and bring you back to this land.”

“When Jacob woke up from his vision he set up a stone to mark the place and named it Bethel, and he said, ‘If god is with me and takes care of me so that I come to my father’s home again in peace, then my father’s god will be my god, this stone that I have set up will be his house, and I will give a tenth of everything that I have to god.’

“After Jacob left that spot he came to Haran and stopped at a well to ask where to find Laban. A person at the well pointed to a woman approaching with some sheep and said, ‘Here is his daughter, Rachel, coming to the well now,’ so Jacob helped Rachel water the sheep and told him who he was. She went and got her father and brought him to meet Jacob.

“Jacob stayed with Laban for a month working for him, and Laban asked him, ‘What should I pay you for working for me?’

“Well, Laban had two daughters, Rachel, the one Jacob met at the well, and an older one named Leah. Jacob loved Rachel, because she was very beautiful, so he said, I will work for you for seven years if I can marry your daughter Rachel.”

“Laban said to him, ‘It is better to give her to you than to give her to some other man that I wouldn’t like as well,’ and so he agreed, and Jacob worked for him for the next seven years.”

This sounded like a very strange arrangement to Jimmy. He was quite sure his dad hadn’t worked for seven years to marry his mom. He also didn’t know what to make of a man being able to give his daughter to someone, as if she was a piece of merchandise, so he asked, “Laban gave his daughter away? Can a person give someone away like they owned them? Was his daughter a slave?”

“Oh no, Jimmy, she wasn’t a slave,” Mrs. Peabody assured him. “She was his daughter. That just meant that he let Jacob marry his daughter. Even today, when people get married it is common for

the bride's father to say that he is giving away his daughter. It's just an expression. It means that he is recognizing that it is her husband that will now be responsible for taking care of her, rather than her father."

"Oh, so he didn't really own her? The Bible doesn't really mean it when it says that he gave her away?"

"Well, it means it in the sense that it was intended, Jimmy. You have to understand things according to the way god meant them."

"And you know how god meant them?" Jimmy asked.

"Well, Jimmy, lots of people before me have studied these things and figured out just what god meant by them, so I am trusting their understanding."

"So, did Rachel want to marry Jacob," Jimmy asked.

"Well, I'm sure she did, or her father probably wouldn't have given her ... ah ... let her be married to Jacob."

"So the Bible doesn't say whether she wanted to marry Jacob?"

"No, it doesn't exactly say so, but I'm sure we can assume...."

"So the Bible cares about what Jacob wanted, but not about what Rachel wanted?"

"No, Jimmy. It's just that it doesn't happen to tell us explicitly in this story, that's all. I'm sure that Rachel loved Jacob, too, and wanted to marry him. Just because it doesn't specifically tell us...."

"So how often does the Bible tell about a woman who wanted to marry a man, and the man's father gave the man to her to marry, because she loved him?"

"Oh, father's don't give their sons away; they give their daughters away. That's just the way it works."

"But you said they don't really give them away; it's just an expression. So doesn't the Bible ever say that a man gave his son away when it meant that the he allowed his son to be married to the girl?"

"No, Jimmy, that's not the way it works, but we really must be getting on with the story if we're going to finish."

"I see," said Jimmy and listened to her continue.

"So after seven years Laban had a big party to celebrate his daughter getting married to Jacob. After the marriage and the party, Jacob took his bride home with him. But the next morning, when Jacob woke up, he found that it wasn't Rachel with him, but it was Leah, instead. Well, as you can imagine, Jacob was really upset, and he went to Laban and said, 'I agreed to work for you for seven years if you gave me Rachel to marry, but you have deceived me and given me her sister Leah, instead. This isn't what we agreed to.'"

Jimmy was going to let her continue, but this was just too puzzling for him. "You mean he ... ahh, ... did what married people do, and he didn't even know who he was doing it with? Was he blind?"

"Well, no, Jimmy," Mrs. Peabody explained. "Jacob wasn't blind, but back in those days when a woman got married she wore a veil and stayed dressed in her wedding clothes until the wedding night was over, so Jacob didn't get to see her face. This was very dishonest on the part of Laban."

"And Leah agreed to this?" Jimmy asked.

"Well, I don't know, Jimmy," Mrs. Peabody admitted. "We aren't told what Leah had to say."

"I had a feeling that was what you were going to say," Jimmy muttered.

"What was that?" Mrs. Peabody asked.

"Oh," Jimmy said, "I was just saying that poor old Jacob spent the night with a woman and he didn't even know who she was!" And Jimmy started laughing out loud.

"Well, Jimmy," Mrs. Peabody spoke to him sternly, "Jacob didn't think it was very funny at all, and he went to Laban and protested, 'This isn't what we agreed to,' so Laban told him that in his country it was the law that the oldest daughter had to marry first. He then told Jacob that if he worked another seven years he could then have Rachel as his wife, too."

“Two wives!” Jimmy wondered. “If I follow god can I have two wives when I grow up?”

“No, Jimmy, you cannot,” Mrs. Peabody informed him.

“Well, it was alright for Jacob, wasn’t it? Why isn’t it for me?”

“This only happened because Laban tricked Jacob, Jimmy. It wasn’t right of him to do that.”

“So if someone tricks me, then I can have two wives?” Jimmy asked with a big smile.

Mrs. Peabody was really mad now. Her face turned red and she yelled at Jimmy, “Look, Jimmy. You’re here to learn about god’s word, not to ask all your devil-inspired questions. This is very naughty, and there is no place for the devil’s antics in this classroom. You need to listen quietly and respect god’s word and not ask the devil’s questions every time you get a chance.”

Jimmy quieted down, and Mrs. Peabody finished the Bible story. “Well, children, Jacob loved Rachel so much that he worked for Laban for another seven years, and Laban gave his daughter Rachel to him to marry.”

Jimmy was thinking of asking Mrs. Peabody whether if he went to Sunday School for the next seven years they would give him a wife to marry, but at this point the buzzer sounded for Sunday School to let out, and the kids got up and left, while Mrs. Peabody tried to figure out how to get Jimmy to stay home next week.