

Cindy Bassett

# The Bible Corner



## The deception of Esau

It was still dark when Jacob went out to tend to his father's herds. Even so, Jacob's twin brother, Esau was already long gone. Esau was in the habit of going hunting before the sun was even up, when darkness provided a good cover and the hunting was easy. He had trained himself to listen for the slightest sound of an animal's movement. But Esau had another reason for his early morning departure. He liked to arrive back home early and take it easy for the rest of the day, while his more ambitious brother was still working.

Later that morning, Jacob was making soup when Esau returned from hunting. "What are you preparing there?" Esau asked eagerly.

"Your favorite — lentil soup," Jacob replied.

"Are you going to let me starve or can I have some?" Esau queried.

"And what will you give me in return?" Jacob asked, for an idea had struck him.

"Anything, you have but to ask," Esau said laughingly. "Just hurry and feed me."

"Then swear that I can have your birthright," Jacob said quickly. Although Jacob had been born only minutes later than his twin brother, Esau was considered the eldest. This status afforded him a considerable inheritance when Isaac, his father, died. But more than the possessions, Jacob wanted his father's blessing, which passed to Esau as his right.

"What good is a birthright to me if I die from starvation?" Esau said, shrugging. "OK, I swear; you can have it. Now give me the soup!"

Esau didn't give his foolish decision another thought. He was not the sort of person who placed a high value on family traditions. A few years later, his parents were saddened over Esau's decision to marry two pagan women.

But eventually, Esau's hasty decision would change his life. One day some years later, Isaac called Esau and said, "I am old and know that I will die soon. Go out now and bring me back some of that tasty venison for a stew. After you have prepared it, bring it here to me, for it is time for you to receive the blessing of the first-born."

Rebekah, his mother, overheard this conversation and went to her favorite son, Jacob. "It is you who deserve this blessing," she said. "Come, I have a plan."

"Esau sold me his birthright years ago for a bowl of soup, but now I am not certain I can take it from him," Jacob protested. "Besides, even though father is nearly blind, he will not be so easily deceived."

"Esau cares nothing about the one true God," his mother cried bitterly. "His marriages brought shame on this family! Now hurry and do as I tell you: Go and kill two young goats from the flock and bring them

here to me."

"Mother," Jacob called as he returned with the goats. "Have you forgotten that Esau is a hairy man and that my arms are smooth? One touch and father will discover the ruse."

Rebekah ignored Jacob's protests and went about preparing the meal. When she had finished, she carefully fastened the animal skins around Jacob's arms and neck. She brought some of Esau's clothing for Jacob to wear, and the deception was complete.

"Are you satisfied now, my son?" his mother asked. "Go to your father at once."

"Father?" Jacob called softly as he carried the meal into the room.

"What, back so soon?" Isaac asked. "How is it that you were able to accomplish the task so quickly?"

"It was God who placed the animal directly in my path," Jacob responded.

"Come closer," Isaac said, motioning. After he had run his hands slowly up and down Jacob's arms, Isaac said half to himself, "It is the smell and feel of Esau, but the voice of Jacob?" When he hesitated, Jacob trembled. "All right," his father said, "I will eat, and then I will give you my blessing."

The treachery was done. Jacob received the blessing and hastily left the room. Just then Esau returned from hunting, but Isaac had fallen asleep.

A short time later, Esau awakened him. "Father," he said, shaking Isaac gently. "I am here for your blessing as the first-born son."

"What?" Isaac asked, confused. "But I have already given my blessing?"

"Whom did you bless, father?" Esau cried.

"It must have been Jacob," Isaac replied. "You brother has stolen your blessing!"

"It's not fair! I am the eldest, father," Esau protested. "Bless me, too."

"What is left for me to give you?" Isaac said quietly. "I have made Jacob your master; you are to be his servant."

Esau's outrage against Jacob was so great that he vowed to kill his brother as soon as his father died. When Rebekah learned of his plan, she sent Jacob to live with her brother, Laban, far away in Haran.

"You must stay there, Jacob, until it is safe to return here," she warned. "I'll send for you."

"But mother," Jacob protested, "what good is my inheritance if I have lost my family and all that is dear to me in life? It was wrong to steal from Esau, and now I must pay for my mistake." And he went sadly on his way.

Scripture reference: Genesis, chapters 25 and 27.

Father Albert Shamon

# A Word for Sunday



## A new 'pentateuch'

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 18:15-20; (R1) Ezechiel 33:7-9; (R2) Romans 13:8-10.

Matthew arranged his chronicle of Jesus' ministry into five booklets, to indicate in a subtle way that Jesus is the new Moses, who fulfills the law of the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch.

Each of Matthew's booklets has two parts: 1) a narrative section telling of Jesus' deeds and 2) a discourse on His teachings. The narrative section of booklet four (chapters 14-17) is over. We now come to the discourse section, chapter 18.

In chapter 18, Matthew takes several of our Lord's sayings, spoken at different times, and arranges them to offer guidelines to the Church as it grapples with status seeking (ambition), scandal, lapses (straying sheep), reconciliation and forgiveness.

The fourth book of Moses is the Book of Numbers, so called because it records two censuses of the Hebrew people (chapters 1 and 26). Matthew's fourth booklet, chapter 18, is also a book of numbers. The material gathered here involves numerical phrases galore: *one such child, two hands or two feet, and one eye* (vv. 5-9), *a hundred sheep and one of them, ninety-nine and a single one* (vv. 10-14), *two of you, two or three* (vv. 15-20), *seven, seventy times seven, ten thousand talents, a hundred denarii* (vv. 21-35).

The law of Moses decreed, "Though you may have to reprove your fellow man, do not incur sin because of him" (Leviticus 19:17). That law was addressed "to the whole Israelite community" (Leviticus 19:1).

The Church is the new Israel, including both Jew and Gentile. Because the Church is people, it will have sinners. Sunday's Gospel deals with the action of the Church toward one who has sinned.

The first step, as Moses decreed, is to win the sinner back by private discussion — numbers again, one-on-one. If that fails, another portion of the Mosaic Law would be invoked — namely, to summon another; two or three on one (Deuteronomy 19:15). Should that fail, then nothing is left to do but to cut the member off from the Church — excommunicate him. Excommunication is shock therapy, a final attempt to jolt some sense into the offender's head — to win him back to the Church.

Painful as the process might be, it is cushioned by the knowledge that it is Jesus who confers the authority to include or exclude members of the community — the power to bind and loose.

Since power, it is said, corrupts, and ab-

solute power corrupts absolutely, Matthew adds two other sayings of our Lord. One regards prayer, and the other presence.

Authority should be exercised only after prayer. And such prayer will be effective because God is present in community prayer in a special way. The awareness of His approval in such community decisions balances the pain caused by having to cut off an unrepentant member.

How much pain our Holy Father must suffer when he is compelled to remove theologians from teaching posts! Yet the Holy Father has no choice. "I have appointed you — Peter — watchman for the house of Israel. If . . . you do not speak out to dissuade the wicked man from his way . . . I will hold you responsible" (R1).

The entire message of the Ezechiel passage is one of responsibility. The watchman — he who wields the power of the keys — must speak out. Silence merits only condemnations. But once Peter has spoken, then responsibility shifts to the listeners; they must heed the message or suffer the consequences.

Often mothers have come to me about wayward sons and daughters. "I've tried to bring them up right, Father," the mothers say. "But now, they have given up the faith" or ". . . are living with someone outside of wedlock." And the parents' anguish over this, suffer and often feel great guilt.

To these mothers, I always quote Ezechiel. I remind them that as long as they have tried by prayer, example and love to guide their young ones, then at adolescence the responsibility shifts to the adolescent.

Here are excerpts from a letter a mother wrote to her grown-up son: "My job as mother is finished. Since you were born, I have done my best to do what was right for you. I've not always been successful, but I always tried. I've loved you with everything that is within me. You cannot understand the depths of my love . . ."

"As of now, you are free! You may reject God or accept Him as you choose. You'll have to answer only to Him anyway. I don't say this in bitterness. I still care what happens to you. I'll pray for you daily. If you seek my advice, I'll give it. But the responsibility now shifts from my shoulders to yours. You are a man now, entitled to make your own decisions. I have confidence in you . . . God bless you. Love, Mother?"

In all our lives, there comes a time when we alone shall be held accountable for our actions — no other may shoulder the burden.

### Diocese offering prayer cards for Marian-Year celebrations

The diocesan Liturgy Office is offering 5,000 copies of a prayer card for the Marian Year. The special cards are available free of charge to parishes and groups planning Marian devotions, and may be distributed to participants as remembrances of the celebrations. To obtain prayer cards, call the Liturgy Office, (716) 328-3210. Requests will be granted as long as the supply lasts.

## HOUSE OF GUITARS

We received 24 correct entries identifying Duran Duran's song: "Hungry Like A Wolf."



The winner was Katelyn McGuire from Our Lady of Mercy High School

## MUSIC TRIVIA

### This week's question:

Fill in the missing lyric from the following song: "New moon on Monday and a \_\_\_\_\_ through the night."

A:

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_  
 Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_  
 School \_\_\_\_\_

### Rules:

Each week, the Courier-Journal, in conjunction with the House of Guitars will feature a Music Trivia contest. All you have to do to enter is answer the question, fill in your name and address and the school you attend (if applicable), cut out the coupon, and send it in to the Courier-Journal. If more than one correct entry is received, a drawing will be held and one winning entry will be drawn.

If yours is the winning entry, you will be mailed a coupon for a free album or tape of your choice redeemable at the House of Guitars, 645 Titus Ave. All entries must be received within seven days of this paper's issue date. Winning names and answers will be printed the week following each drawing.

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