

Big Hairy Hands

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Here's a news flash: Brothers don't always get along. While it usually doesn't come to murder, like it did with Cain and Abel, the battles can get pretty rough—especially when they compete for their parents' love and attention. And if each parent has his or her own favorite son, those competitions can get pretty nasty.

That's how it was with the twins Jacob and Esau. Esau was born first but Jacob came out right behind, holding onto his twin's ankle. The two looked nothing alike—Esau was big and hairy while Jacob wasn't. Esau was a hunter while Jacob was more of a mother's boy. Neither wanted much to do with the other.

But one day their father Isaac got old and decided it was time to give Esau—his favorite son—the traditional father's blessing, which Jews believed would determine a son's future success. However, mother Rebecca had other ideas...

Some Old Testament stories sound a little like soap operas and others a little more like sitcoms.

This one's a little of both! It comes from Genesis 27:1-28:9.

Esau had gotten older but he was still a wild child.

He did silly things like marry not one but TWO of the local Canaanite girls,
which caused all kinds of problems with his father and mother.

Esau just didn't seem like the kind of man who could receive
the blessings God had promised to Abraham!

Still, he was Isaac's favorite son
so when Isaac realized he was nearing the end of his life
he decided to bless Esau anyway.

"Son," he said, "I'm getting old. I don't see so well anymore
so it's time for you to take over the family.
Go catch some game and make me some of that stew I like.
After I eat, I'll give you my blessing."

However, his mother Rebecca overheard them
and as soon as Esau left with his bow and arrows, she went to Jacob.

"Esau doesn't deserve your father's blessing," she told him,
"so here's what I want you to do:

Go to our flocks and pick out two nice young goats.
Bring them to me and I'll fix your father's favorite stew.
When you take it to your father, he'll give YOU his blessing instead of Esau."

But Jacob said, "Mother, get real. My father isn't that stupid!

Even if his eyesight is bad, he's not going to think I'm Esau.

All he needs is one touch to know I'm not my hairy brother.

And once he realizes I tried to trick him, I'll get a curse instead of a blessing!"

But Rebecca said, "You just leave that to me, honey.

Now go get those goats!"

So Jacob did as his mother told him.

And while the stew cooked, she used the goatskins
to make some gloves that covered his hands and forearms.
Then she fitted a piece of the skin over his neck and shoulders
and made Jacob put on some of Esau's clothes.
Finally she gave him a big bowl of stew with some fresh bread
and sent him to Isaac.

Jacob entered Isaac's tent and cheerfully called out, "Father!"

Isaac said, "Who is it, Esau or Jacob?"

And Jacob said, "Why, it's me, Esau.

I've brought you some stew, just like you wanted,
so you can give me your blessing."

"That was fast! How did you find the game so soon, son?" Isaac asked.

And Jacob said, "The Lord just led me right to it!"

THAT made Isaac suspicious. Esau didn't talk like that!

So he said, "Come here, son; let me touch you."

When Jacob knelt down before him,

Isaac touched his hands and said to himself,

"The voice is Jacob's, but those are Esau's hands."

Still he asked, "Are you really Esau?"

And when Jacob said he was, Isaac said,

"Then bring me my food and after I eat, I'll bless you."

After Isaac ate, he said, "Come and kiss me, son."

As Jacob bent over to kiss him, Isaac pulled him close

and took a deep breath so he could smell Jacob's clothes.

Then, convinced that Jacob was indeed Esau, he blessed him:

"My son, may the Lord bless your fields and vineyards.

May many nations become your servants.

May you be the master of all your brothers.

May all who curse you be cursed and all who bless you be blessed."

But even as Isaac gave his blessing to Jacob,

Esau was returning from his hunt!

He went into his tent, prepared the game he had caught,

made his father's favorite stew,

and then took it to Isaac's tent.

"I'm back, Father," he called, "and I've brought your favorite stew.

Hurry up and eat so you can bless me!"

Then Isaac started to tremble. "Who are you?"

Esau laughed and said, "Why, I'm Esau of course."

"Then who just brought me my favorite stew? Who did I just bless?"

Suddenly Esau realized what had happened.

He dropped to his knees and said, "Father, bless me too! Please!"

But Isaac said, "Your brother tricked me.

I've already made Jacob your master and all of his brothers his slaves.

And I've guaranteed him an abundance of grain and wine.

I have nothing left to give you."

"But Father, there must be SOMETHING you can give me?"

So Isaac thought for a moment, then he said,

"You will live off the land and what it yields, and you will live by your sword.

You will serve your brother for a time, but in time you will break free."

Esau was so angry that he decided to kill Jacob as soon as his father died.

But Rebecca found out, so she told Jacob to leave home

and go live with his uncle Laban until it was safe to return.

Esau already hated her for what she'd done; she didn't want to lose Jacob too!

So she worked out a plan: She took Jacob to Isaac and told her husband

that she didn't want Jacob to marry any of the local girls, like Esau had.

And Isaac agreed. He told Jacob to marry one of Laban's daughters.

Then he gave Jacob one last blessing:

"May your descendants be as numerous as many nations,

and may you receive all the promises

the Lord made to your grandfather Abraham."

And Jacob went to live with his uncle Laban.

In time, Isaac's blessings made both of his sons very happy.

And many years later Jacob and Esau made peace with each other...

but in the meantime, Esau did what any angry son would do.

Once he realized that his parents didn't like the local Canaanite girls,

he went out and married another one.

I guess some things never change.