

of his two daughters and of his wife and forced them to leave.

When they were all outside the city gate, the messengers from heaven said, "Now run for your lives. Do not even look behind you. Do not linger anywhere along the way until you have reached the edge of the plain. Then hide somewhere on the mountainside."

By the time the sun had risen, before Lot and his wife and daughters had reached the mountain, God began raining fire and brimstone upon the city of Sodom and upon all the other cities of the plain. All the people there and every growing plant and animal were destroyed.

As Lot's wife was fleeing with her husband, she became curious to see what was happening. Forgetting the warning, she turned and looked back. Immediately she was turned into a pillar of salt. But Lot and his two daughters remembered and obeyed the warning of the messengers. They hurried on until they reached the foot of the mountain, and there they hid themselves in a cave until the awful fire had spent itself.

In the meantime Abraham had been wakeful and anxious all through the night. Rising early, he climbed the hill above his tent and looked eastward toward Sodom. He saw heavy clouds of smoke rising high in the air as far as he could see. The whole wide plain beyond the Jordan was like one huge burning furnace. Abraham felt sick at heart, but he tried to believe that the judge of all the earth had done right.

The Hardest Test of All

[Genesis 22:1-19]

Abraham's loyalty to God was to be tested again more severely than ever before. "Abraham! Abraham!" called the familiar voice.

"Here am I, Lord!" Abraham replied.

"Take your son, Isaac, whom you love, and go the three days' journey to Mount Moriah, and offer him there as a sacrifice."

from Sophia Lyon Fahs, *The Old Story of Salvation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955).

Shocked, heartbroken, yet afraid not to obey, Abraham arose early the next morning, determined to do as God had commanded no matter what it cost. He awakened two of his servants and Isaac, his only son. He chopped the needed wood and saddled his donkey, and all four started off together toward the mountain. On the third morning, they could see it far off in the distance.

Later in the day, when near their journey's end, Abraham said to his two servants, "Stay here with the donkey, while the boy and I go on. We will make our sacrifice and then come back to you."

Abraham gave Isaac the wood to carry, while he himself carried the firebrand and the knife, and they both went on together.

Isaac was puzzled. "My father," he said, "you have the fire and I have the wood, but where is the lamb for the offering?"

"God will provide the lamb, my son," said Abraham bravely. They walked on together.

On reaching a fitting place on the mountain's top, they gathered stones and built an altar, and Abraham laid the wood upon it. Then he seized his own son and bound him with cords and laid him on the wood. He reached for the knife and was holding it up above his head, ready to strike, when he heard the familiar voice call, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Here I am."

"Do not lay your hand upon the boy. Do not hurt him in any way. I have done this to test your obedience. Now I know you will do whatever I say, for you have not held back your son, your only son, from me."

Abraham dropped his knife and looked around. To his surprise he saw a ram caught by its horns in a nearby thicket. He immediately unbound Isaac. He pulled the ram out of the thicket and killed it as a sacrifice to God in place of his son.

"God did provide the lamb, my son," he said. "I shall always remember this mountain as the place where God provided."

Again Abraham heard the familiar voice. "Because you have

done this, and have not withheld your only son, I give you my promise. Your descendants shall be in number as the stars in the sky or as the numbers of grains of sand on the seashore. In blessing you and yours, I shall bless all the peoples of the world."

Isaac's Twin Sons

[Genesis 25:19-34; 27:41-45]

Isaac grew to manhood, married, and had twin sons. The first to come from his mother's womb was Esau, and the second they named Jacob. Esau grew to be a skilled hunter, while Jacob became a shepherd and one who worked about the tent with his mother. Esau was his father's favorite, partly because the old man enjoyed the venison Esau's hunting brought to the family table. But Mother Rebekah loved Jacob more.

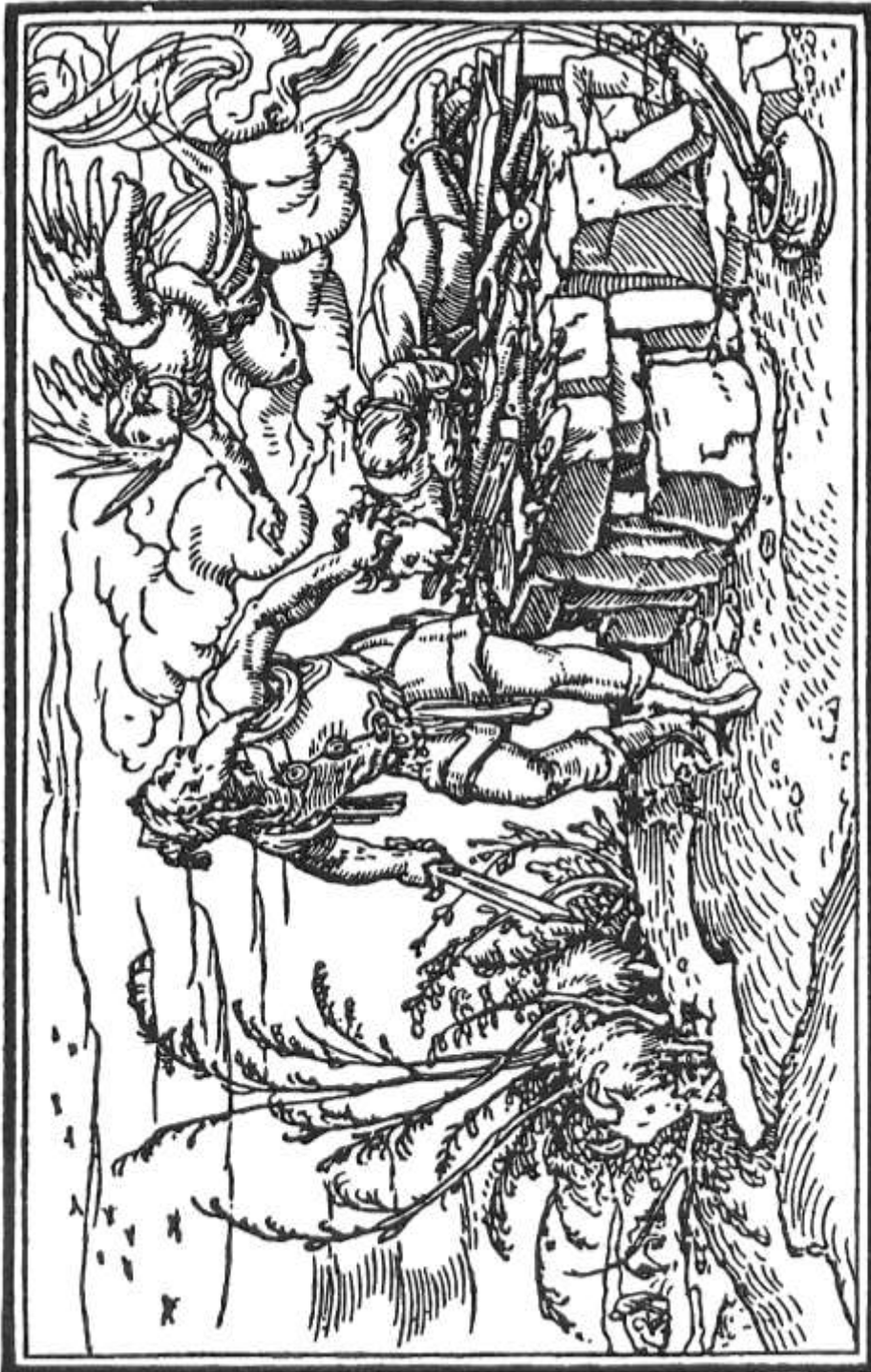
Esau, being the older of the two boys, was entitled to the family possessions on his father's death. That is to say, the birthright belonged to Esau by law. If Esau had been a man who found favor with God, he would have become the ancestor of God's "chosen people." But Esau did not please God. He had married two women, natives of the land of Canaan, who worshiped idols, and they had led him into wrong-doing.

One day as Jacob was preparing a dish of lentil soup, Esau came in from his hunt, feeling faint and hungry. "Please, Jacob," he said, "give me some of that lentil soup you are preparing, for I am faint."

Jacob saw his chance to win an advantage over his brother. "I will trade the soup for your birthright," he said sharply.

Esau hesitated. The birthright meant everything to him. "But," he thought to himself, "I am really at the point of death. What good will the birthright do me if I die?"

"Promise me first that the birthright shall be mine," repeated Jacob coldly, and waited. Finally Esau promised.



"Abraham! Do not lay your hand upon the boy."