

Genesis 25:19-34 – Esau and Jacob
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Genesis 25 begins the second act of the book of Genesis: the life of Jacob. Isaac is important, and he was a man of God, but the patriarchal story is meant to focus on Abraham, Jacob and Joseph. Genesis 25 moves from Abraham's death (when Isaac was 75) to the birth of his sons (when he was 60). Because he was born first, Esau was the Heir to the Promise (Esau – "Rough"; Edom – "Red" (Adam)). Jacob was the one who wanted the promise (Jacob – "Heel catcher"). Scriptures say that Esau was a man of the field; which may be a comparison to the world. Jacob was a "plain" (literally "integrity") man, or also a man of peace. Thus we have our two men, the man of the world and the man of integrity.

The story of the trade for the birthright seems almost trivial at first, but it is anything but trivial. In exchanging the birthright, Esau committed a very great evil. Scriptures tell us that in that moment God rejected Esau. Later we will read about Jacob deceiving his father for the blessing, but the scriptures are trying to tell us that in all these things Jacob did not cheat Esau; Esau insulted God. This story is important in the New Testament for setting the stage for two important ideas.

The Story of the Nation of Israel in Romans 9:10-13

"Jacob I loved, Esau I hated" (Malachi 1:2-3) are the words Paul quotes in describing God's view of Israel the nation. This peculiar people, who were the descendants of the man Jacob, failed utterly to live up to the character of their father. Instead, they behaved as Esau, despising their birthright again and again until it was removed from them. Jacob and Esau serve as types: Jacob as those who want the Lord's blessing, and Esau as the physical nation of Israel that despises God's providence. In Isaiah 65:1-2 (also quoted by Paul in Romans 10:19-20) God makes it clear that He will pass His great blessings on to another nation (one created from all nations) because of Israel's obstinate heart.

The Story of the Christian Who Falls Away in Hebrews 12:14-17

Hebrews 12 uses Esau as another type for us. There it begins with a call for us to seek peace (consider Jacob as the man of peace) and sanctification. It also calls us to reject being the man of the earth (*"root springs up"*), whose fate is defilement. In particular, the Hebrew writer calls Esau the "Godless person" who had received the great blessing of God but then traded it for something else. That something else is the world (1 John 2:15-16). Esau is the model of a fallen Christian, the one who trades eternal life for a brief pleasure, and who is despised by God for rejecting Him. This is the great them of Hebrews; the one who neglects (Heb. 2:3) to cherish his salvation not only loses it, but is particularly despised by God (Hebrews 6:4, Hebrews 10:26-29).

Jacob and Esau are the type of two people; one who has God's blessing, and one who desires it. It is the story of the man of the world vs. the man of integrity. Jacob emerges as God's man, winner of God's promise. Esau becomes the type of the "loser", losing everything.