

PART THIRTY-SEVEN

THE STORY OF ISAAC; THE TWINS AND THE BIRTHRIGHT

(Gen. 25:19-34)

1. Introduction

Having concluded the account of all that needed to be known about Ishmael and his progeny, the inspired historian now turns to the main theme of the Bible, that is, the history of the Messianic Line as continued through Isaac. "The collateral branch is again put first and then dismissed" (TPCC, 52). V. 19 of this section marks the opening of another chapter in the story of the unfolding of God's Eternal Purpose.

We are pleased to introduce this Volume (IV) with the following excerpt verbatim (SIBG, 254): "REFLECTIONS—Before I part with Abraham, the celebrated patriarch, let me, in him, contemplate Jesus the everlasting Father. How astonishing his meekness—his kindness to men—his intimacy with, fear of, obedience to, and trust in his God! He is the chosen favorite of JEHOVAH—the father and covenant-head of innumerable millions of saved men. To him all the promises relative to the evangelical and eternal state of his church were originally made. All obedient at his Father's call, he left his native abodes of bliss, and became 'a stranger and sojourner on earth,' not having where to lay his head. At his Father's call, he offered himself an acceptable sacrifice to God; by his all-prevalent intercession, and supernatural influence, he offers men salvation from sin and from the hand of their enemies; and, after long patience, he wins untold disciples in the Jewish and Gospel church. In his visible family are many professors, children of the bond-woman, the covenant of works, who, in the issue, are like Ishmael, or the modern Jews, whose unbelief brings them to misery and woe; others are chil-

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dren of the free-woman, the covenant of grace, and are, like Isaac, begotten to God because of their faith in Christ. Now let me observe, how invigorating is a strong faith in God's promise; for God delights to add abundant blessings to such as, by courageous believing, give him the glory of his power and faithfulness. Often the best of men have little remarkable fellowship with God in old age, but must live even to the end by faith, and not by sight; while wicked families are loaded with temporal mercies for the sake of their pious progenitors. Promised events are often ushered in by the most discouraging appearances; and mercies must be long prayed and waited for ere they be granted. It is good when husbands and wives unite their supplications; for to spread our griefs before a throne of grace is the greatest and surest relief. How often much trouble and vexation attend what is too eagerly desired! But how tender is God, in fixing the temporal, and even eternal, states of persons according to their faith! And how early are children known by their doings! Yet in their education great care is to be taken in consulting their tempers and dispositions. Parents frequently expose themselves to future troubles by their partial regard to children. But why should we set our hearts on them, or any other worldly comfort, when we must so quickly leave them by death? At that time it should be the concern of parents so to dispose of their effects, that there may be no disputes after they are gone; and such deserve to have most assigned them as are likely to make the best use of it. How often the wisest worldlings act the most foolish part, while 'the Lord preserveth the simple!' How marvelously God overruleth the sins of men, to the accomplishment of his purpose or the advancement of his glory! How dreadful, when men, even those who have had a religious education, gratify their sensual appetites at the expense of the temporal and eternal ruin of themselves and their seed; and when God

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permits them to be afterwards hardened in their sin, and standing monuments of that affecting truth, that numbers of the descendants of God's children are sometimes left out of his church, and unacquainted with their parents' blessings!" (John Brown, D.D., LL.D.)

2. *Review*

It will be recalled that Isaac, the son of Abraham and Sarah, was born in the south country (the Negeb), doubtless at or near Beersheba (Gen. 21:14, 31), when his father was 100 years old and his mother about ninety (17:17, 21:5). When the divine Promise was made to Abraham that Sarah should bear a son, after she had passed the age of childbearing, Abraham laughed, with some degree of incredulousness, it should seem, although some commentators hold that it was joyous laughter (17:17-19). When the Promise was reiterated later, by a heavenly Visitant, at this time Sarah, who was eavesdropping, "laughed within herself" with laughter that bespoke sheer incredulity, for which she was promptly reprimanded by the Visitant (18:9-15). Then when the Child of the Promise was born, Sarah joyfully confessed that God had prepared this laughter for her and her friends (21:6). To memorialize these events and the faithfulness of God, Abraham named the boy Isaac ("laughing one," "one laughs"). Isaac was circumcised on the eighth day (21:4), and as the Child of Promise he had higher privileges than Ishmael had, Abraham's son by the handmaid, Hagar (17:19-21, 21:12, 25:5-6). Later, to exhibit (prove) Abraham's faith, God commanded him to offer Isaac as a burnt offering. "Isaac was then a youth (22:6), perhaps 25 years old, as Josephus says, but he filially acquiesced in the purpose of his father. When Abraham had laid him upon the altar, and thus shown his readiness to give all that he possessed to God, the angel of the Lord forbade the sacrifice and accepted a ram instead, thus testifying against child-sacrifices practised by

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the Canaanites and many other idolatrous peoples, and teaching to all men that human sacrifices are an abomination to the Lord (22:1-18)," (DDB, 337). This was an unparalleled demonstration of personal faith on Abraham's part. Tradition puts the offering on Mount Moriah in the Old City of Jerusalem—present site of the Dome of the Rock. "Abraham left the servants and walked in silence to the hilltop. Isaac carried the wood and Abraham the knife. After a time the boy asked his father, 'Where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?' Abraham replied that God would see to it. As Dr. Speiser puts it, 'The boy must by now have sensed the truth. The short and simple sentence, *And the two of them walked on together*, covers what is perhaps the most poignant and eloquent silence in all literature.' At the last moment—but only at the last moment—an angel stayed Abraham as he raised his knife to destroy his son and all his hopes. The awful ordeal was over" (ELBT, 98).

Abraham, now well advanced in years, bought for its full value from Ephron the Hittite the Cave of Machpelah, near the oak of Mamre, with the field in which it stood, and there he buried Sarah. Here Abraham himself was buried by his two sons, Isaac and Ishmael; also were buried there later, Isaac and Rebekah, his wife, and Jacob and his wife Leah. Abraham's last care was for the marriage of his son Isaac to a woman of his own kindred, to avoid a possible alliance with one of the daughters of the Canaanites. He sent the aged steward of his house, Eliezer, formerly of Damascus, on the long journey to Haran, in Mesopotamia, where Nahor, Abraham's brother, had settled. Providentially, at the end of the journey, a sign from God indicated that the person he sought was a maiden named Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel, son of Nahor. "The whole narrative is a vivid picture of pastoral life, and of the simple customs then used in making a marriage contract, not without characteristic touches of the ten-

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dency to avarice in the family of Bethuel, and particularly in his son Laban (Gen. 24:30). The scene of Isaac's meeting with Rebekah seems to exhibit his character as that of quiet pious contemplation (24:63). Isaac was forty years old when he married, and his residence was by *Beer-la-bai-roi* (the well of *La-bai-roi*) in the extreme south of Palestine (Gen. 25:62, 26:11, 20) (OTH, 89). "The courtship of Rebekah is one of the highlights of the sagas of the Patriarchs" (HBD, 603). "The story of the wooing of Rebekah is a literary masterpiece. Its sketch of the faithful, trusted steward, of the modest, brave, beautiful maiden and of the peace-loving husband is inimitable. It is almost like a drama, each successive scene standing out with vividness. It has much archaeological value, also, in its mention of early marriage customs, of the organization of the patriarch's household, and of many social usages. Religiously it suggests the providential oversight of God, who directed every detail. Chapter twenty-four of Genesis with chapters eighteen and twenty-two are worth reading frequently" (HH, 39). To Isaac Abraham gave the bulk of his great wealth, and died, apparently at Beersheba, "in a good old age, an old man, and full of years" (25:8). His age at death was 175 (25:7). His sons Isaac and Ishmael met at his funeral and buried him in the Cave of Machpelah (25:1-10). Ishmael survived him just 50 years, and died at the age of 137 (25:17). Thus the Saga of Abraham came to its end. Shall we not firmly believe that his pilgrimage of faith was crowned with a glorious fulfilment in that City to which he was really journeying—"the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God"? (Heb. 11:10, Gal. 4:26, Rev. 21:2).

Isaac continued to live in the south country (24:62). "In disposition he was retiring and contemplative; affectionate also, and felt his mother's death deeply" (DDB, 337). (Cf. Gen. 24:63, 67). But after all, this seeming

tendency toward introversion may have been lack of strength of character: it should be noted how susceptible he was to Rebekah's machinations. His life was the longest of those of the Patriarchs: he married at the age of 40, and died at 180 (25:20, 35:28); yet though the longest, it has been described rightly as the least eventful. In comparison with the careers of Abraham, Jacob and Joseph, that of Isaac manifests the earmark of mediocrity.

3. *The Birth of the Twins* (25:19-26)

19 *And these are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham begat Isaac: 20 and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Syrian, to be his wife. 21 And Isaac entreated Jehovah for his wife, because she was barren: and Jehovah was entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. 22 And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, wherefore do I live? And she went to inquire of Jehovah. 23 And Jehovah said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, And two peoples shall be separated from thy bowels: And the one people shall be stronger than the other people; And the elder shall serve the younger. 24 And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. 25 And the first came forth red, all over like a hairy garment; and they called his name Esau. 26 And after that came forth his brother, and his hand had hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them.*

V. 19—the usual formula for introducing a new section: see under *toledoth* (in the index).

A *Second Delay in the Fulfilment of the Messianic Promise* occurs here, vv. 19-21. In Abraham's case, the

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delay continued until some time after Sarah had passed the age of childbearing; in the case of Isaac and Rebekah, it continued through the first twenty years after their marriage. During this time Isaac was "entreating" Yahweh, because his wife continued to be "barren." Again, in this continuing "test" (proof) of his faith, Isaac followed in the steps of his father: he maintained implicit faith in God. And he kept on speaking to God about the matter. ("God's delays are not necessarily refusals"). With this prolonged barrenness of Rebekah we might well compare the cases of Sarah, and Rachel (29:31), the mothers of Samson (Judg. 13:2), Samuel (1 Sam. 1:2), and John the Baptizer (Luke 1:7). "The protracted sterility of the mothers of the patriarchs, and other leading men amongst the Hebrew people, was a providential arrangement, designed to exercise faith and patience, to stimulate prayer, to inspire a conviction that the children born under extraordinary circumstances were gifts of God's grace, and specially to foreshadow the miraculous birth of the Savior" (CECG, 188).

The Pre-natal Struggle of the Twins (vv. 22-23). When the conception actually occurred and Rebekah felt the twins struggling in her womb, "she went to inquire of Yahweh." According to Abraham Ibn Ezra, her complaint, "wherefore do I live?"—literally, "why then am I?"—meant, Why in view of my longing for children must my pain be so great? Immediately there was an answer from God. How was this divine answer communicated? Some modern interpreters would have it that there was a sanctuary at hand, where there was an altar at which such "oracular" utterances were received. Some will say that Rebekah resorted to a native Philistine shrine at Gerar, others that "presumably this sanctuary was at Beersheba" (26:33; cf. Exo. 33:7-11). We see no valid reason for such an assumption. "The opinion . . . that she repaired to a native Philistine shrine at Gerar, supported by the

tithes of all Monotheists in that district, is inconsistent with her relation to Jehovah, the covenanted God of the Hebrews; and the hypothesis that in the family place of worship at Beersheba there might have been an oracle, is equally at variance with the usages of that early period. A great many conjectures have been made as to the mode of her consultation—some, as Luther, supposing that she would apply to Shem; others, to Melchizedek or to Abraham (20:7), who was still living. But she could not inquire either by shrine or by prophets (Exod. 18:15; 1 Sam. 9:9, 28:6; 2 Ki. 3:11), for both of these belong to the institutions of the theocracy. The only solution of the difficulty is, that Rebekah had prayed earnestly for light and direction, and that she had received an answer to her prayers in the way usual in the patriarchal age—in a vision or a dream” (CECG, 188-9). It is significant that the Divine communication here follows the form of the speech of the “angel of Jehovah” to Hagar (16:10-12) in that both are couched in parallelisms. “Whether communicated directly to herself, or spoken through the medium of a prophet, the Divine response to her interrogation assumed an antistrophic and poetical form, in which she was informed that her unborn sons were to be founders of two mighty nations, who, ‘unequal in power, should be divided in rivalry and antagonism from their youth’” (PCG, 317).

The struggling of the twins in Rebekah’s womb presaged that they and their posterity would live at variance with one another, and differ greatly in their religion, customs, laws, etc. The Edomites (Idumeans), descended from Esau, were at first the stronger people (ch. 36), but the Israelites, sprung from Jacob, under David (2 Sam. 8:14), again under Amaziah (2 Chron. 25:11, 12), and finally under John Hyrcanus, about 126 B.C., subdued them. Indeed Hyrcanus subjugated them completely and put them under a Jewish governor (Josephus, *Antiq.* 13,

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9, 1). (*Idumea*, "pertaining to Edom," was the name used by the Greeks and Romans in slightly different spelling, for the country of Edom). As a matter of fact, Jacob's obtaining the birthright and the blessing (25:29-34; 27:29, 37, 40) rendered him and his posterity superior to Esau and his Edomite seed.

The Birth and Naming of the Twins (vv. 24-26). The first to come forth from the womb was named *Esau* which means "hairy"; the name *Edom*, which was given to Esau and which became the name of his descendants, the Edomites, means "red." (Cf. v. 30, 36:1-8). "That redness and hair marked the present strength of Esau's body, and the savage and cruel disposition of him and his posterity (27-11, 40, 41; Obad. 10; Ezek. 25:12, 35:1-9)." Rashi derives *Esau* from *Asab* ("he made") and so translates the name, "completely made," meaning that he was developed with hair like a child several years old (SC, 141). "And after that came forth his brother, and his hand had hold of Esau's heel." "Jacob took hold of his heel, as if he would have drawn him back, so that himself might have been born first, or as if he would overthrow and suppress him, as he afterwards did, v. 33, ch. 27. And rightly was he named *Jacob*, a *heel-holder*, or *supplanter*, on that account, ch. 27:36" (SIBG, 254). "Popular etymologies: Esau is red, *admoni*, his other name being Edom, v. 30, 36:1, 8; he is like a mantle of hair, *se'ar*, and is destined to dwell in the land of Se'ir, Numb. 24:18. According to this passage, Jacob *Ya'aqob*, gets his name from gripping the heel (*'aqeb*) of his twin, but in Gen. 27:36 and Hos. 12:3-4 the name means that the child has supplanted (*'aqab*) his brother. In fact, however, the probable meaning of the name (abbreviated from *Ya'aqob-El*) is 'May Yahweh protect!'" (JB, 43, n.). Skinner (ICCG, 359-360) on v. 25: "tawny or red-haired is a play on the name Edom; similarly, *all over like a mantle of hair* is a play on Se'ir the country of the Edomites."

Mount Seir is the range of mountains extending southward from the Dead Sea, east of the rift known as the Arabah, almost to the Gulf of Aqabah. Mount Seir is first mentioned in Scripture as being inhabited by the "Horites" (Gen. 14:6); these were the Hurrians, non-Semites, who, between 1750 and 1600 B.C. invaded N. Mesopotamia from the eastern highlands and spread over Palestine and Syria. They are a people now well-known from the cuneiform tablets from ancient Nuzi and other sites. The mention of Esau's removal to Mount Seir follows immediately the account of Isaac's death and burial (35:27-29, 36:1-9). The Israelites were forbidden to enter this region, as Jehovah had given it to Esau for a possession (Deut. 2:1-12; cf. Josh. 24:4). Chieftains of the Horites were called "the children of Seir in the land of Edom" (Gen. 36:20-30; cf. Ezek., ch. 35, esp. v. 15; also 1 Chron. 4:42, 2 Chron. 20:10, 22-23). Esau is represented as having dispossessed the Horites of Mount Seir (Gen. 32:3, 36:20ff.; Deut. 2:1-29, Josh. 24:4). Undoubtedly these various passages indicate the fusion of cultures that almost always followed invasion or infiltration of an inhabited area by a different people: the tendency of the invaders to adopt many of the customs and laws of the people whom they dispossessed is an oft-repeated fact of history. We have noted heretofore the influence of Hurrian culture in the events related in Genesis in the lives of the patriarchs; we shall see this influence again in the story of Jacob and Esau *in re* the disposition of the birthright. (See Speiser, ABG, 194-197). Other interesting facts of the history of Seir are recorded in the Old Testament. We read, for example, that Simeonites pushed out the Amalekites who had hidden in Seir (1 Chron. 4:42-43). The majesty of God was associated with the awesome grandeur of Mt. Seir (Deut. 33:2, Judg. 5:4). King Amaziah of Judah (c. 800-783 B.C.) went to "the Valley of Salt, and smote of the children of Seir ten thousand," and then proceeded to

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pay homage to their gods (2 Chron. 25:11-24). Isaiah tells us that his words, "Watchman, what of the night?" came out of Seir (Isa. 21:11).

4. *The Prophetic Communication* (v. 23)

Before proceeding with our study we must underscore here the very heart and core of the Divine communication to Rebekah. It is embodied in the last sentence: "And the elder shall serve the younger."

This has been interpreted by Calvinistic theologians to mean that God's choice of Jacob over Esau in the Messianic development was completely arbitrary on His part. For example, note the following statement: "Isaac's family is a further example of divine election, v. 23, even seemingly arbitrary. The choice, before birth, of Jacob over Esau indeed concerned national status, not salvation, Mal. 1:2-4; but it illustrates God's bestowal of saving faith, a matter of pure race, irrespective of human worthiness, Rom. 9:10-13" (OHH, 43). Cf. TPCC, 52: "The younger son is again chosen, for God's will, which, though not understood by us, is supreme (Eph. 1:5, 9, 11)." Kraeling (BA, 81) sees here "an underlying substratum of national history mirrored in the basic idea that Esau (Edom) was outstripped by Jacob (Israel)." It was only natural, however, that Edom as the elder people, "should have had the more glorious history." He suggests, therefore, that *three parallel explanations* are offered, in the over-all story we are now considering, why it did not happen that way: "1) God willed it so, and predicted it even before the ancestral brothers were born (Gen. 25:23); 2) Esau sold his birthright (Gen. 25:29-34); 3) Jacob rather than Esau obtained the history-moulding blessing of the dying Isaac (Gen. 27:27f.)" We see no reason for these more or less labored attempts to explain the Divine communication to Rebekah about the varying fortunes of her twins, when, as a matter of fact, if verse 23 is taken simply as *prophetic*, all difficulties seem to vanish. The

communication was to this effect: two sons were to be born, namely Esau and Jacob, and they were to become the progenitors of two peoples; moreover, the nation sired by the elder son was to "serve" the nation to be sired by the younger son. The word of Yahweh here had reference, not to individuals, but to nations (peoples): this fact is accepted by practically all Biblical scholars. Esau never served Jacob in his entire life; on the contrary, it was Jacob who gave gifts to Esau at the time of their reconciliation (Gen., ch. 33). The meaning of the passage is that God, as He had both perfect right and reason to do, had selected Jacob, and not Esau, to become the ancestor of Messiah. The statement, "the elder shall serve the younger," was simply a prophetic announcement that at a future time the Edomites (descendants of Esau) should become servants of the Israelites (descendants of Jacob): the prophecy is clearly fulfilled in 2 Sam. 8:14. The Apostle Paul, in Rom. 9:12-13, combines two different Scriptures. The first, it will be noted is Gen. 25:23, the verse we are now considering. But the second is found in Mal. 1:2-3, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." This statement was uttered several hundred years after both Jacob and Esau had long been dead. It referred to the two nations or peoples: it simply points out the fact that the Edomites suffered divine retribution because of their sins (cf. Gen. 32:3, ch. 36; Num. 20:14-21; Isa. 34:5-8; Obad. 1:21, etc.).

Did God arbitrarily select Jacob instead of Esau to become the ancestor of Messiah? Of course not. The individual human being is *predestined to be free*. By virtue of having been created in the image of God, he has the power of choice, that is, within certain limits, of course, particularly within the limits of his acquaintanceship. (One could hardly choose anything of which one has no knowledge. Could a Hottentot who has never heard of ice, ever choose to go skating?). It follows, therefore,

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that the totality of man's free acts constitutes God's foreknowledge. Strictly speaking, God's knowledge embraces—in a single thought—all the events of the space-time world; hence, He can hardly be said to *foreknow*, but rather, speaking precisely, to *know*. If it be objected that foreknowledge in God implies fixity, we answer that the argument still holds, that the fixity is determined by man's free acts and not by arbitrary divine foreordination. To hold that God necessitates everything that man does, including his acceptance or rejection of redemption, is to make God responsible for everything that happens, both good and evil. This is not only unscriptural—it is an affront to the Almighty. (Cf. Ezek. 18:32, Jn. 5:40, 1 Tim. 2:4, Jas. 1:13, 2 Pet. 3:9). Foreordination in Scripture has reference to the details of the Plan of Redemption, not to the eternal destiny of the individual. The elect are the "whosoever will's," the non-elect, the "Whosoever won't's." (Rev. 22:17).

In Rom. 9:11, we are told expressly that God did choose before their birth which of the two sons of Isaac should carry forward the Messianic Line; hence, election in this instance was specifically "not of works, but of him that calleth." Nevertheless, from the viewpoint of subsequent history, it did turn out to be one of works (works of faith, cf. Jas. 2:14-26) in the sense that their respective acts proved the one ancestor (Jacob) to be more worthy of God's favor than the other (Esau). Hence, in view of the fact that men are *predestined to be free*, surely we are right in holding that this superior quality of Jacob's character was foreknown by God from the beginning. Although it may appear at first glance that the choice was an arbitrary one, our human hindsight certainly supports God's foresight in making it. Of course, Jacob's character was not anything to brag about, especially in the early years of his life, but from his experience at Peniel, he

seems to have emerged a changed man with a changed name, Israel (32:22-32); certainly it was of nobler quality than that of Esau, as proved especially by their different attitudes toward divine institutions—rights and responsibilities—such as those of primogeniture (Exo. 13:11-16, Deut. 21:17). Hence the Divine election in this case was not arbitrary in any sense, but justly based on the Divine knowledge of the basic righteousness of Jacob by way of contrast with the sheer secularism (“profanity”) of Esau. (We may rightly compare, with the antics of Esau, the unspiritual attitude of church leaders—the “clergy”—and church members toward the ordinance of Christian baptism. Think how this institution has been changed, perverted, belittled, ignored, and even repudiated by the professional “theologians” throughout the entire Christian era!).

“It is important to observe that God chose Jacob, the younger, to be over his brother Esau before they were born. Before the children were born, neither having done anything good or bad, it was God’s declared purpose that the older should serve the younger (Rom. 9:10-13, Gen. 25:23). Subsequent events may lead us to condemn Jacob for his fraudulent methods of obtaining the family blessing. But that which Jacob sought was his by divine decree. Certainly God was within His sovereign right to make this choice. And assuredly the characters of Jacob and Esau that subsequently emerged showed God’s wisdom and foreknowledge in choosing Jacob” (Smith-Fields, OTH, 92-93). Let us not forget, however, that the choice was *not* an arbitrary one, but a choice emanating from the divine foreknowledge of the worthiness of Jacob above Esau, as demonstrated by what they did—the choices they made—in real life. *How can God use any man effectively who has little or no respect for His ordinances?* (The birth of Jacob and Esau took place before Abraham died. Abraham

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was 160 years old, and Isaac sixty, at the time the twins were born, Gen. 21:5, 25:26, 25:7). (See my *Genesis*, II, pp. 237-264).

5. *Esau the Profane* (25:27-34).

27 *And the boys grew: and Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents.* 28 *Now Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: and Rebekah loved Jacob.* 29 *And Jacob boiled pottage: and Esau came in from the field, and he was faint: 30 and Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom.* 31 *And Jacob said, Sell me first thy birthright.* 32 *And Esau said, Behold, I am about to die: and what profit shall the birthright do to me?* 33 *And Jacob said, Swear to me first; and he sware unto him; and he sold his birthright unto Jacob.* 34 *And Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: so Esau despised his birthright.*

V. 27—In due time the twins were born. Esau grew up to become “a skilful hunter, a man of the field.” And Jacob “was a quiet man, dwelling in tents.” From the very first these boys were opposites in character, manners, and habits. The older was a man of the field, leading a roving, unsettled kind of life; the younger preferred a quiet domestic life, dwelling in tents, attending to his father’s flocks and herds. Esau becomes experienced in hunting, as opposed to Jacob who is a man “of simple tastes, quiet, retiring.” “The over-all contrast, then, is between the aggressive hunter and the reflective seminomad” (Speiser, ABG, 195). “Jacob was ambitious and persevering, capable of persistence in selfish scheming or in nobler service; the latter, although frank and generous, was shallow and unappreciative of the best things. In the long

run God can do more with the former type of men" (Sanders, HH. 39). Thus it will be seen that the descriptions of the two boys are clearly antithetical. This contrast, moreover, persisted through the centuries between their respective progenies, the Israelites and the Edomites. As previously noted, the latter were inveterate enemies of the former, thus authenticating God's pronouncement through Malachi, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (Mal. 1:1, cf. again Rom. 9:13).

V. 28. "Now Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison." "Isaac, himself so sedate, loves the wild, wandering hunter, because he supplies him with pleasures which his own quiet habits do not reach" (MG, 368). "And Rebekah loved Jacob." "Rebekah becomes attached to the gentle, industrious shepherd, who satisfies those social and spiritual tendencies in which she is more dependent than Isaac," and thus "the children please their parents according as they supply what is wanting in themselves. Esau is destructive of game; Jacob is constructive of cattle" (MG, 368). "Persons of quiet and retiring disposition, like Isaac, are often fascinated by those of more sparkling and energetic temperament, such as Esau; mothers, on the other hand, are mostly drawn towards children that are gentle in disposition and homekeeping in habit" (PCG, 320).

In those days, we are told, it was not an uncommon thing for the huntsman to come half-starved to the shepherd's tent and ask for some food. In these circumstances the "man of the field" was pretty largely at the mercy of the tent-dweller. This seems to have been the condition in which Esau found himself, and when he scented the "pottage" which Jacob was boiling in his tent, he rushed inside and shouted, "Feed me some of that red stuff, I pray, for I am faint with hunger." "Jacob *stewed something*: an intentionally indefinite description, the nature of the dish being reserved for v. 34" (ICCG, 361). "Let me gulp

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some of that red stuff there," cried Esau, "some of that red seasoning," literally, "some of that red red . . ."—in his excitement Esau seems to have forgotten the name of the dish. "*Therefore was his name called Edom,*" that is, "because he had eaten the soup which was of a red brown color (*adom*)—another play on words" (JB, 43). "The name Edom, signifying *red*, at once marked his origin and color, and his excessive lust after the red pottage, and his selling his birthright to obtain it" (SIBG, 254). "Both marks characterize his sensual, hard nature" (Lange, CDHCG, 499). "It quite accords with the Oriental taste to fasten upon certain incidents in the life, or upon peculiar traits in the character, of individuals, as the foundation of a new name or soubriquet. The Arabians are particularly addicted to this habit. So are all people in an early state of society; and there is no ground to wonder, therefore, at the names of Isaac's sons being suggested by circumstances attending their birth, apparently of a trivial nature, especially as no fault can be found with them on etymological grounds" (CECG, 190). "Therefore his name was called Edom. There is no discrepancy in ascribing the same name both to his complexion and the color of the lentile broth. The propriety of a name may surely be marked by different circumstances. Nor is it unnatural to suppose that such occasions should occur in the course of life. Jacob, too, has the name given to him from the circumstances of his birth, here confirmed" (A. Gosman, Lange, *ibid.*, 500).

It is not surprising to read that Jacob took advantage of this opportunity to drive what we might properly call a "hard bargain." Jacob said, "Sell me first thy birthright," v. 31. Esau answered, in substance, "Oh well, I am about to die of hunger," or perhaps, "I am risking my life daily in the hunt," etc., "of what use would the birthright be in any case?" (A good example of rationaliza-

tion). "Jacob said, Swear to me first; and he swore unto him; and he sold his birthright unto Jacob," v. 33. As it turned out, there was no hard bargain at all; there was not even any haggling on Esau's part; with jaunty nonchalance, he tossed away, as if it were not worthy of his concern, the most precious privilege that God conferred on the firstborn—the right of primogeniture, the birthright.

What was the birthright? That is, what did it include?

"The birthright was of little practical importance when there was an only son. Isaac was Abraham's only true heir, Ishmael not being of the seed of promise. Thus Isaac was the only one in the line of promise and the natural heir of his father's possessions. But Isaac's wife bore him two sons, Esau and Jacob. Now the birthright assumed greater significance. Esau, as the firstborn, should have been the one through whom the people of God descended. But he foolishly sold that birthright for carnal considerations and lost it to Jacob. Jacob claimed the privileges of the birthright and from him came the twelve tribes of Israel. The firstborn received a double portion of the inheritance (cf. Deut. 21:16-17), and, at least before the establishment of the Aaronic priesthood, the firstborn in each family exercised the priestly prerogatives in the home after his father's death" (HSB, 42). "This birthright entailed upon the possessor a double portion of the paternal inheritance (Deut. 21:16-17); a claim to his father's principal blessing, and to the promise of Canaan, and a peculiar relation to God therein. . . . Altogether this is a most painful narrative. One does not know whether most to condemn the folly and recklessness of Esau, bartering his birthright for a mess of pottage; or the unbrotherly spirit and grasping selfishness of Jacob, refusing to a fainting brother a mouthful of food until he had given him all he possessed" (SIBG, 254).

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The birthright in this instance was of extraordinary significance. Esau's "impatience was natural, for food is not readily procured in an Eastern tent, and takes time to prepare. Jacob seized the occasion to obtain Esau's birthright as the price of the meal; and Esau consented with a levity which is marked by the closing words of the narrative: 'thus Esau *despised* his birthright.' For this the Apostle calls him 'a *profane* person, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright,' and marks him as the pattern of those who sacrifice eternity for a moment's sensual enjoyment (Heb. 12:16). The justice of this judgment appears from what the birthright was, which he sold at such a price. If he had received the birthright, he would have been the head of the family, its prophet, priest and king; and no man can renounce such privileges, except as a sacrifice required by God, without 'despising' God who gave them. But more than this: he would have been the head of the *chosen* family; on him devolved the blessing of Abraham, that 'in his seed all families of the earth should be blessed'; and, in despising his birthright, he put himself out of the sacred family, and so became a '*profane* person.' His sin must not be overlooked in our indignation at the fraud of Jacob, which . . . brought its own retribution as well as its own gain" (OTH, 93). Disregard for positive divine ordinances (such as the birthright and the paternal blessing, in patriarchal times) is known in Scripture as *profanity* (from *pro*, "before" or "outside," and *fanum*, "temple," hence unholy); consequently this is the vilest insult that can be perpetrated against God—a fact which the sophisticated, the "respectable," the worldly wise of humankind are usually too biased to understand or too proud in their own conceit to be willing to admit. This is the charge leveled against Esau: his profanity was such that he blithely and unconcernedly sold his birthright for a bowl of beans (Heb. 12:16, "mess of meat"). And this general irreligiousness of the paternal character

seems to have passed down to his offspring (Num. 20:14, 21; Judg. 11:16-17; 2 Sam. 8:14; Ps. 137:7; Ezek. 25:12-14, 35:1-15; Amos 9:11-12; Joel 3:19; Obad. 1-20; 1 Tim. 1:9).

Note the oath, v. 33. "An oath is prostituted when it is exacted and given to confirm an improper and sinful contract; and a person is chargeable with additional guilt when, after entering into a sinful engagement, he precipitately confirms it by an oath. This is what Esau did: he despised or cared little about it in comparison of present gratification to his appetite: he threw away his religious privileges for a trifle; and hence he is stigmatized by the apostle as a 'profane person' (Heb. 12:16, cf. Phil. 3:19). 'There was never any meat, except the forbidden fruit, so dearly bought as the broth of Jacob' (Bishop Hall). That Esau deserved to be superseded in his honors, in consequence of his irreligious character, cannot be denied nor doubted; for it is principally or solely on this transaction that the charge of profanity is founded. But what was justice on the part of God was cruelty on the part of Jacob, who had no right to make Esau the instrument of his own degradation and ruin. Besides, it was impolitic as well as wrong. For he might have concluded that, if God had not ordained him to possess the envied honors, he could never obtain them; and, on the other hand, if it was the decree of Providence, a way would be opened for his obtaining them in due time. Jacob's heart was right, but he sought to secure good ends by bad means" (CECG, 190). Lange (CDHCG, 500): "If Jacob's demand of an oath evinced ungenerous suspicion, Esau's giving of an oath showed a low sense of honor."

The pottage of lentils. "The red lentil is still a favorite article of food in the east; it is a small kind, the seeds of which, after being decorticated, are commonly sold in the bazaars of India. Dr. Robinson, who partook of lentils, says that he found them very palatable and could

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well conceive that to a weary hunter, faint with hunger, they would be quite a dainty (*Bib. Res.* I, 246). Kitto also says that he has often partaken of red pottage, prepared by seething the lentils in water, and then adding a little suet to give them a flavor, and that he found it better food than a stranger would imagine; 'the mess,' he adds, 'had the redness which gained for it the name of *adom*' (*Pict. Bib.*, Gen. 25:30, 34.)" (OTH, Smith-Fields, 93, n.). This *pottage* brewed by Jacob was a soup, we are told, made of a decoction of lentils or small beans, called '*adas*, which were and are extensively grown in Egypt, Syria, and Palestine (cf. 2 Sam. 17:28, 23:11). (They were also included in Ezekiel's recipe for bread-making in an emergency, Ezek. 4:9). "It is probable that Jacob made use of Egyptian beans, which he had procured as a dainty; for Esau was a stranger to it; and hence he said, 'Feed me, I pray thee, with that red, red (thing).' The Hebrew 'red,' includes the idea of a brown or chocolate color. This lentil soup is very palatable, particularly when accompanied with melted butter and pepper; and to the weary hunter, faint through hunger, the odor of the smoking dish must have been irresistibly tempting" (CECG, 189).

V. 34. Esau "*did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way.*" A rather pathetic description of a character and life given over, one might say exclusively, to sensual self-satisfaction; yet a life that is paralleled millions and millions of times in practically every generation! Dr. Chappell, in one of his books of sermons on Old Testament characters, writes of Esau under the caption, "The Story of a Fine Animal." The title is especially fitting.

6. *Interesting Appraisals of the Characters of Esau and Jacob.*

Speiser (ABG, 195): "Esau is depicted as an uncouth glutton: he speaks of 'swallowing, gulping down,' instead of eating, or the like." Skinner (ICCG, 362): "Esau's

answer reveals the sensual nature of the man: the remoter good is sacrificed to the passing necessity of the moment, which his ravenous appetite leads him to exaggerate. . . . The climax of the story is Esau's unconcern, even when he discovers that he has bartered the birthright for such a trifle as a dish of lentil soup . . . if Esau was defrauded, he was defrauded of that which he was incapable of appreciating." Again, *ibid.*, the name *Edom* is 'a memento of the never-to-be-forgotten greed and stupidity of the ancestor' (Gunkel)."

Murphy (CG, 369-370): "Jacob was no doubt aware of the prediction communicated to his mother (v. 23), that the elder should serve the younger. A quiet man like him would not otherwise have thought of reversing the order of nature and custom. In after times the right of primogeniture consisted in a double portion of the father's goods (Deut. 21:17), and a certain rank as the patriarch and priest of the house on the death of the father. But in the case of Isaac there was the far higher dignity of chief of the chosen family and heir of the promised blessing, with all the immediate and ultimate temporal and eternal benefits therein included. Knowing all this, Jacob is willing to purchase the birthright as the most peaceful way of bringing about that supremacy which was destined for him. He is therefore cautious and prudent, even conciliating in his proposal. He availed himself of a weak moment to accomplish by consent what was to come. Yet he lays no necessity on Esau, but leaves him to his own free choice. We must therefore beware of blaming him for endeavoring to win his brother's concurrence in a thing that was already settled in the purpose of God. His chief error lay in attempting to anticipate the arrangements of Providence. Esau is strangely ready to dispose of his birthright for a trivial present gratification. He might have obtained other means of recruiting nature equally suitable, but he will sacrifice anything for the desire of

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the moment. Any higher import of the right he was prepared to sell so cheap seems to have escaped his view, if it had ever occurred to his mind. Jacob, however, is deeply in earnest. He will bring this matter within the range of heavenly influence. He will have God solemnly invoked as a witness to the transfer. Even this does not startle Esau. There is not a word about the price. It is plain that Esau's thoughts were altogether of 'the morsel of meat.' He swears unto Jacob. He then ate and drank, and rose up and went his way, as the sacred writer graphically describes his reckless course. Most truly did he despise his birthright. His mind did not rise to higher or further things. Such was the boyhood of these wondrous twins."

Leupold (EG, 712, 713): "Fact of the matter is, Jacob's character is one of the hardest to understand; it is complicated; it has many folds and convolutions. But in this particular incident the Scriptural point of view must be maintained: *Esau* was primarily to blame . . . Jacob was really a spiritually minded man with appreciation of spiritual values and with distinct spiritual ambitions. Especially in the matter of carrying on the line of promise from which the Savior would come did Jacob have ambitions. The aspirations apparently, however, were begotten by the divine word of promise (v. 23). Yahweh had destined Jacob to pre-eminence. Jacob gladly accepted the choice and aspired to attain the treasure promised. His eagerness was commendable. His choice of means in arriving at the desired end was not always above reproach. He felt he had to help the good Lord along occasionally. He was not fully confident of God's methods for arriving at the goal. He felt the need of occasionally inserting a bit of assistance of his own. Such an attitude was one of mistrust: confidence in human ingenuity rather than in divine dependability—in one word—unbelief. But his spiritual aggressiveness was by no means to be despised, nor was it wrong. Approaching this incident with these facts in

mind, we seem compelled to assume one thing in order to understand Jacob's request. It appears, namely, that the subject of the birthright . . . had been under consideration between the brothers on a previous occasion. It would also seem that Esau had made some derogatory remark about its value, or had even spoken about his own readiness to part with the privilege. Otherwise we can hardly believe that Jacob would have made this special request without further motivation, or that Esau would have consented to the bargain without more ado. This, indeed, puts Jacob into a more favorable light, but so does our text (v. 34). Indeed, there is left on Jacob's part a measure of shrewd calculation in so timing his request that he catches Esau at a disadvantage, a form of cunning which we must condemn without reservation. Yet the act does not call for such strong criticism as: he was 'ruthlessly taking advantage of his brother, watching and waiting till he was sure of his victim.' (Dods)." Again, (*ibid.*, 715): "The last part of the chapter, vs. 27-34, seems to us to come under a head such as Spiritual Aggressiveness, or even, The Right Goal but the Wrong Way. In any case, it should especially be borne in mind that the one censured by the text is Esau not Jacob."

Incidentally, there are commentators, Leupold included, who hold that the material blessings of the covenant may not have been fully revealed as far back as Jacob's time. According to Mosaic law of a later date the right of the firstborn involved a double portion of the father's inheritance (Deut. 21:17) and supremacy of a kind not wholly defined over his brethren and his father's house (Gen. 27:29, cf. 49:3). It would be well to note in this connection also the *deference* manifested by Jacob to Esau after the former's return from Mesopotamia (cf. 33:1-12).

Again, it is now known that under Hurrian law—a likely source of some of the patriarchal customs—the elder son "could be designated as such by the testator contrary

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to the actual order of birth," that is, inheritance could be "regulated by a father's pronouncement irrespective of chronological precedence" (Speiser, ABG, 195, 213). "Selling inheritance rights far under value, has a Hurrian parallel: in Nuzi a brother transferred rights to a whole grove for only three sheep, apparently under duress" (OHH, 43). The rigidity of the details of primogeniture seems not to have been firmly established until after the organization of the Theocracy.

Marcus Dods (EBG, 261-265): "It has been pointed out that the weakness in Esau's character which makes him so striking a contrast to his brother is his inconstancy. Constancy, persistence, dogged tenacity is certainly the striking feature of Jacob's character. He could wait and bide his time; he could retain one purpose year after year till it was accomplished. The very motto of his life was, 'I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me.' (Gen. 32:26). He watched for Esau's weak moment, and took advantage of it. He served fourteen years for the woman he loved, and no hardship quenched his love. Nay, when a whole lifetime intervened, and he lay dying in Egypt, his constant heart still turned to Rachel, as if he had parted with her but yesterday. In contrast with this tenacious, constant character stands Esau, led by impulse, betrayed by appetite, everything by turns and nothing long. Today despising his birthright, tomorrow breaking his heart for its loss; today vowing he will murder his brother, tomorrow falling on his neck and kissing him; a man you cannot reckon upon, and of too shallow a nature for anything to root itself deeply in. . . . Esau came in hungry from hunting, from dawn to dusk he had been taxing his strength to the utmost, too eagerly absorbed to notice his distance from home or his hunger; it is only when he begins to return depressed by the ill-luck of the day, and with nothing now to stimulate him, that he feels faint; and when at last he reaches his father's tents, and

the savory smell of Jacob's lentils greets him, his ravenous appetite becomes an intolerable craving, and he begs Jacob to give him some of his food. Had Jacob done so with brotherly feeling there would have been nothing to record. But Jacob had long been watching for an opportunity to win his brother's birthright, and though no one could have supposed that an heir to even a little property would sell it in order to get a meal five minutes sooner than he could otherwise get it, Jacob had taken his brother's measure to a nicety, and was confident that present appetite would in Esau completely extinguish every other thought.

"Which brother presents the more repulsive spectacle of the two in this selling of the birthright it is hard to say. Who does not feel contempt for the great, strong man, declaring he will die if he is required to wait five minutes till his own supper is prepared; forgetting, in the craving of his appetite, every consideration of a worthy kind; oblivious of everything but his hunger and his food; crying, like a great baby, Feed me with that red! So it is always with the man who has fallen under the power of sensual appetite. He is always going to die if it is not immediately gratified. He *must* have his appetite satisfied. . . . But the treacherous and self-seeking craft of the other brother is as repulsive; the cold-blooded, calculating spirit that can hold every appetite in check, that can cleave to one purpose for a lifetime, and, without scruple, take advantage of a twin-brother's weakness. Jacob knows his brother thoroughly, and all his knowledge he uses to betray him. He knows he will speedily repent of his bargain, so he makes him swear he will abide by it. It is a relentless purpose he carries out—he deliberately and unhesitatingly sacrifices his brother to himself. Still, in two respects, Jacob is the superior one. He can appreciate the birthright in his father's family, and he has constancy. Esau might be a pleasant companion, brighter and more vivacious than Jacob on a day's hunting; free and open-handed,

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and not implacable; and yet such people are not satisfactory friends. Often the most attractive people have similar inconstancy; they have a superficial vivacity, and brilliance, and charm, and good nature, which invite a friendship they do not deserve. . . .

"But Esau's despising of his birthright is that which stamps the man and makes him interesting to each generation. No one can read the simple account of his reckless act without feeling how justly we are called upon to 'look diligently lest there be among us any profane person as Esau, who, for one morsel of meat, sold his birthright.' Had the birthright been something to eat, Esau would not have sold it. What an exhibition of human nature! What an exposure of our childish folly and the infatuation of appetite! For Esau has company in his fall. We are all stricken by his shame. . . . Born the sons of God, made in His image, introduced to a birthright angels might covet, we yet prefer to rank with the beasts of the field, and let our souls starve if only our bodies be well tended and cared for. . . . Not once as Esau, but again and again, we barter peace of conscience and fellowship with God and the hope of holiness, for what is, in simple fact, no more than a bowl of pottage." (It is interesting to note the somewhat different picture of Esau that we find in chapter 33).

"Esau is an example of how a man with a bad reputation can be more attractive than another who has managed to acquire a good one. In the O.T. estimates Esau has a black mark, while his brother Jacob has all the marks of favor. Jacob is listed as a prince in Israel, and the father of the twelve tribes of the chosen people; but the Edomites, whom the Jews hated, were called sons of Esau. Yet notwithstanding all that, in the choice of a companion as between Esau and Jacob, almost anyone would have chosen Esau." Among the assets on the "plus side of the ledger" the following might be named: (1) his physical vigor.

"Esau was rough but he was virile, and his old father Isaac turned to him instinctively because he knew that if there was anything he wanted done, Esau could do it; and as he grew old he leaned increasingly on Esau's strength." (2) He was a warmhearted man. "Evidently he loved his father, as his father loved him. When Isaac was old and blind, the rough Esau was gentle with him and quick to respond to everything he wanted. . . . If Esau was careless about the particular advantages of the birthright, he was not careless about his father's blessing. He wanted that, whatever else was lost." (3) He was not the kind of man who could hold a grudge. Cf. the reconciliation with Jacob on the latter's return from Paddan-Aram (ch. 33, esp. v. 4). What, then, was Esau's basic fault? "He was a man who lived only in the immediate moment, and by the light only of what was obvious. . . . He showed that he did not care enough for life's great possibilities to pay the price of present discipline. He must have what he wanted when he wanted it, and the consequences could go hang. That was the critical weakness of Esau and that was his condemnation. He lost tomorrow because he snatched so greedily at today. Consider his descendants in every generation, including ours: the young men who cannot let any long-range dedication stand in the way of appetite; the frivolous girl who says of something trivial, 'I'll die if I do not get it'; the mature people for whom comfort always comes first and for whom anything like religious responsibility is ruled out if it is hard; the men in public office who will sell a birthright of great ideals to satisfy immediate clamor. Attractive traits will not save such people from ultimate dishonor" (IBG, 665-667).

7. *Summarizations*

"Esau was a wild, savage kind of man, spending most of his time in hunting, learning the art of war, and the like (cf. 10:9, 16:12). Jacob was a sincere, mild, plain-

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dealing man, keeping much at home, attending to his household affairs, and to his father's flocks and herds (cf. 6:9, 46:34). The early development of different propensities in Esau and Jacob is very remarkable, and the visible causes of their respective characters may be traced to the dispositions and partialities of the parents. Isaac loves venison, and first to please his father, and then to gratify his own acquired habits, Esau becomes a *cunning hunter*. Rebekah loves domestic retirement, finds her comfort in the society of her infant Jacob, and forms his future character on the model of her own. These things are to be carefully observed: (1) How early, and insensibly, some part of the character of a father or mother may be propagated in their children. (2) The consequent importance of well considering all the habits in which a child is indulged or encouraged, as part, and often the most influential part, of its education. (3) The danger of parental partialities, from which, in this remarkable instance, many of the future troubles of Isaac and Rebekah, and Esau and Jacob, arose" (SIBG, 254).

"The story of Esau's life may be written in four parts: (1) the sale of his birthright to Jacob for the mess of pottage (25:27-34), which indicated that he despised his birthright and was willing to barter it away for a small consideration; (2) the marriages of Esau which were consummated with women who were not related to his father's family, except for Mahalath who was his third wife and whom he married to placate his parents; (3) his failure to secure the patriarchal blessing just prior to the death of his father Isaac; (4) the re-establishment of brotherly relations with Jacob, and his departure from Canaan for Seir. Esau was careless, motivated by animal appetites, and revengeful after the blessing was stolen from him by Jacob" (HSB, 42). (Cf. Gen. 26:34-35, 28:6-9; 27:18-41, 33:1-18).

GENESIS

FOR MEDITATION AND SERMONIZING

Esau the Profane

Gen. 25:34, Heb. 12:16-17

Much has been improperly inferred and said about Esau, from variant points of view. The notion especially that he bears "the broad seal of God's reprobation" is certainly dishonoring to God. "Surely such forget, that by representing him as hated of God and predestined to woe, with all feeling minds they must enlist pity for his wretchedness, and sympathy on account of his doom. Thus reasoning, God has been greatly dishonored, and, in opposition to His solemn asseveration, he has been declared a respecter of persons" (MSS, 315). (See discussion of Gen. 25:23, Mal. 1:2-3, Rom. 9:10-13 above). The simple fact is that God's disapprobation of Esau was based on His known (or "foreknown") profaneness of Esau's character. This profaneness certainly was not predestinated.

1. *Note the characteristics of Esau's profane barter.* As the firstborn he possessed many privileges: we find it difficult not to accept the fact that these privileges existed in patriarchal times (cf. again Deut. 21:15-17). These included (1) temporal privileges: pre-eminence of authority in the patriarchal family, and a double portion of the paternal estate; and in this case (2) *spiritual* privileges, viz., the descent of the priesthood in the family, from the firstborn (even before the Law), the genealogy of the Messiah through his seed, the peculiar and precious promises associated with the paternal *blessing* which took the form of a prophecy. All this Esau bartered for just one mess of pottage.

2. How is this profanity to be accounted for? (1) On the basis of his inconsideration. He did not weigh the matter, but acted hastily. (2) As a result of his vo-

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racious appetite. This was so strong he could not control it until food was prepared. (3) Especially as a consequence of his utter depreciation of divine ordinances. "He was a worldly and carnal man." He lived in the here and the immediate *now*. "He was deficient alike in personal piety towards God, and filial piety towards his father: the two are often wedded." Consider the Biblical examples of men and women of his ilk. E.g., Gehazi, Elisha's servant, who, as a penalty for his avarice and lying about a talent of silver and two changes of raiment, and thus bringing the prophetic office into contempt, became afflicted with leprosy (2 Ki. 5:20-27). Or, Ananias and Sapphira, who, retaining a portion of the price they had received for a piece of property, lied to the Holy Spirit about it (Acts 5:1-11). (They lied to the Holy Spirit by lying to the Apostle Peter who was inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit). And what shall we say of Judas who, for thirty pieces of silver, betrayed the Son of God into the hands of His enemies (Matt. 27:3-10, Acts 1:15-20); and of Herod, who for daring to receive the flattering adulation of the crowd, was "eaten of worms" (Acts 12:20-23). These all were surely bad bargains, equally with that of Esau. Are not millions in our day living the life Esau lived, and hence acting with equal profaneness? Those who sell themselves for vanity: note the outrageous adornments—the long sideburns, the thick beards, the foppish mustaches, the silly contention between the mini-skirters and the midi-skirters, the subservience to the fashions of the moment—what "they" say and what "they" do—the strict conformists, the slaves of passing fads who fool themselves into thinking they are just being "free." Those who sacrifice truth, honesty, goodness, for the sake of money. Those who sacrifice themselves on the altars of pleasure. Those who barter their souls for riotous liv-

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ing. In many instances, these "bargains" are worse than that of Esau. He did obtain a good—a meal; he had his hunger alleviated. But think how often the sinner receives evil, and evil only, for the fearful price he pays!

In the first place, Esau is a fine animal, "a strong, upstanding husky fellow who makes a pleasing impression upon any crowd in which he chances to be." "He is possessed of a charming physical courage and daring. I do not think Esau would count for a straw on a moral stand, but physically he was unafraid." "In the next place he is generous and open-handed and open-hearted. . . . He is a breezy Bohemian type of man. He has a way of putting all his goods in the showcase and thus often winning an applause that is not his due." (There are many in our day who seem to think that practising a vice *openly* gives it a special kind of virtue). "Now if you are a reader of modern fiction you have possibly been struck with the fondness of many of our present-day authors for the type of character that Esau represents. Did you ever notice with what delight many of our fiction writers picture the virtues of some worldling against the background of the failures and vices of some churchman? It seems to be a most joyful pastime with a certain type of author. The name of such books is almost legion. Take, for instance, *The Calling of Dan Matthews*. The only three characters in this book that the author would have us respect are an infidel doctor, a nurse who is a rank materialist and a preacher who is an utter coward and who gives up his Christ and his vocation for the love of a woman. Now there are folks that are like these, but they are not the folks who keep up the moral standards of the communities in which they live. Yet the author tires to make us believe that this is the case. . . . Take the work of that literary scavenger who took a stroll down 'Main Street.'

THE TWINS AND THE BIRTHRIGHT

He is not without ability. But he is a self-appointed inspector of street gutters and sewers. He has an eye for the moral carrion of the community. Now whom does he seek to have us respect? Who are the ones that when sickness comes do the self-forgetful and the self-sacrificing deeds of service? Not the people of faith. Not those who believe in Christ. No, there are just two characters in the book that the author thinks are worthy of our admiration. There are only two who have fine, heroic qualities. One of them is a renegade Swede who is anchored to no place and who is mastered by no principles: a physical and a moral tramp. The other is a little bunch of feminine ignorance and conceit and ingratitude. She is the wife of the physician of the book. She is the one who plays the heroine when sickness comes to the Swede's house. But she sees nothing heroic in the common duties of life. She has no appreciation of her social relationships. As a wife she is a travesty and as a mother she is a cynical joke" (MSBC, 116-117).

Esau lived his life *outside the temple*: he was profane. His sin was secularism. His life is described in one graphic statement: "He did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way." This sin—secularism—was the besetting sin of the people of the antediluvian world: "in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and they knew not until the flood came, and took them all away." This, our Lord tells us, will be the besetting sin of the age that will immediately precede His Second Coming: "so shall be the coming of the Son of man" (Matt. 25:37-39; cf. vv. 3:13, 29-31, also 16:27). (See also Gen. 6:11-13). Can it be that we are now entering upon these "last days"? "Even so, Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

GENESIS

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON PART THIRTY-SEVEN

1. What special significance does Gen. 25:19 have in relation to the over-all theme of the Bible?
2. Review briefly the circumstances of the early life of Isaac?
3. How old was Isaac at the time of his marriage to Rebekah?
4. How old was Abraham at the time of his death?
5. How old was Ishmael at the time of his death?
6. In what region of Palestine did Isaac continue to dwell?
7. How would you evaluate in general the life and character of Isaac?
8. How long after their marriage did Isaac and Rebekah live without children?
9. How many instances of the wife's protracted barrenness are related in Scripture? In what sense may each of these be described as a *providential* arrangement?
10. What did Isaac do about this barrenness of Rebekah?
11. What did Rebekah herself do about the pre-natal struggle of the twins? What was probably the method of her "consultation" with Jehovah about this experience?
12. What reason may be given for rejecting the view that this consultation took place at some established oracular shrine? What were the means usually employed to communicate Divine revelations in the Patriarchal Age? Cite examples.
13. What facts were presaged by the struggling of the twins in Rebekah's womb?
14. When the older of the two was born, what was he named and why?
15. When the younger was delivered what was he named and why?

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16. How were the names "Esau," "Edom," and "Seir" associated as to meaning?
17. How was Mt. Seir later associated with the life of Esau and his descendants?
18. Who were the Horites? Where was Mt. Seir geographically?
19. What was God's prophetic communication to Rebekah? What was the most significant part of this communication?
20. Does v. 23 teach us that God's choice of Jacob instead of Esau to be the progenitor of Messiah was an *arbitrary* one? Explain your answer.
21. What three parallel "explanations" are given of this Divine choice of the younger son above the older one?
22. What do we mean by saying that "when this communication, v. 23, is considered simply as *prophetic*, all difficulties vanish"?
23. Correlate Gen. 25:23, Mal. 1:2-3, and Rom. 9:12-13. In this connection, distinguish between Divine foreknowledge and foreordination.
24. What is meant by the statement that God does not *foreknow*, but simply *knows*?
25. Discuss the distinction between *real time* and *mathematical time*. Distinguish between *time* and *timelessness*.
26. Explain our statement that God's choice in this instance proceeded from His foreknowledge of the worthiness of Jacob above Esau, and of the Israelites above the Edomites, as demonstrated by *their* respective choices and deeds.
27. How old were Abraham and Isaac respectively at the time the twins were born?
28. How did the attitudes and pursuits of the two boys become indicative of their differences of character?
29. What reasons may be given to explain Issac's preference of Esau, and Rebekah's preference of Jacob?

GENESIS

- Show how these parental preferences caused domestic chaos in this household.
30. What lesson should we learn from this story about discord caused by such parental bias toward children? How was this folly of parental preference later repeated in the life of Jacob?
 31. What was the "pottage" that Jacob was cooking when Esau came to his tent?
 32. How is the name "Edom" associated with this "pottage"?
 33. What "hard bargain" did Jacob drive when Esau asked for food? Was it in any sense a "hard bargain" from Esau's point of view?
 34. What "rationalization" did Esau indulge to justify his nonchalant acceptance of Jacob's demand?
 35. What patriarchal privileges were included in the birthright? What special Messianic privileges in this particular case?
 36. On what grounds is Esau denounced in Scripture as a *profane* person?
 37. In what sense was the accompanying *oath* in this instance a source of additional guilt on Esau's part?
 38. What statement in v. 34 epitomizes Esau's attitude and life?
 39. How do Dr. Speiser and Dr. Skinner, respectively, appraise Esau's character and life?
 40. On what grounds does Leupold appraise Jacob's conduct "in a more favorable light"? Compare Murphy's appraisal.
 41. What is the significance of Deut. 21:17 in relation to the patriarchal birthright?
 42. What light is thrown by Hurrian law upon this incident of the birthright?
 43. How does Marcus Dods compare the characters of the two sons?

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44. What three important lessons do we get from this story in regard to parental influence and conduct?
45. What were the chief aspects of Esau's profane barter?
46. How is this profanity to be accounted for?
47. Review other Scriptural examples of such profanity.
48. How is this profanity exemplified in the attitude of many professing Christians toward the ordinance of Christian baptism?
49. What do we mean by saying that Esau's besetting sin was *secularism*?
50. Where do we read that secularism was the over-all besetting sin of the antediluvian world? Also that it will be the over-all besetting sin of the age immediately preceding the Second Coming of Christ? What should these facts indicate to all Christians of the present generation?