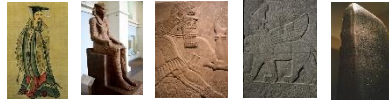


Genesis 36

Esau: the man, the myth, the lesson

During the time of Esau's life, Emperor Yu ruled in China. Also, the Intermediate Kingdoms existed in Egypt, Ramman led in Assyria, the Hittites took over the area that Turkey occupies, and Hammurabi held the position as the first ruler of Babylon.



Circumstances of his birth

Genesis 25 ²¹ Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was childless. The Lord answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. ²² The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the Lord.

²³ The Lord said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."

²⁴ When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. ²⁵ The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. ²⁶ After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them.

²⁷ The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was content to stay at home among the tents. ²⁸ Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Sold his birthright and despised his birthright

Esau had already concluded, long before the time that Jacob made the red stew offer, that his birthright was of no value to him. His horizon was bounded by earthly things. He did not care for the concept of the glory of the promises made to Abraham and to Isaac which were associated with the birthright.

Chose to marry two Canaanite women

He deliberately associated with the inhabitants of the surrounding lands, bringing in the beliefs and customs of outside people. This led to intermixture of the family, which God had stated was to be avoided. He did so without any consultation with his parents, leading to great grief and bitterness with Isaac and Rebekah. Through this Esau revealed his blatant disregard to some of the most cherished principles and hopes of his people.

Tried to obtain the blessing

Having lost the birthright earlier, Esau tried to get back at least the patriarchal blessing from Isaac. He must have realized some of the importance that would hold and tried to obey his father by going out to hunt for the meal. When he returned and discovered that he had lost the blessing also, he in his rage and fury was determined to kill his brother. He was a man of ungovernable impulse and anger, without any fixed principles.

Esau's third wife

It appeared that Esau, after trying to get the blessing and failing, continued to try to understand the importance of his family traditions and to get back into favor with his parents. Jacob had left and perhaps Esau saw an opportunity to re-establish his rights and position as the elder son. He then married someone related to the family, Ishmael's daughter. Even here one cannot help but notice his practical failure of understanding the spiritual importance of God's providence in his family. Although Ishmael was the half-brother of his father, it has been perfectly clear that there was to be no part for Ishmael in the inheritance of the promise and blessing of God as given to Isaac.

Esau and Jacob Meet Again

When Jacob returned from twenty years of exile, Esau met him with 400 men. It would seem at first he would be determined to take his revenge. Little did he know what transpired just before to Jacob, and how God was answering prayers by breaking down barriers between the brothers and preparing for a full reconciliation. Esau's hot impulses were quickly cooled at the sight of his brother and the anger died down as they met and settled their differences. Esau's warm-heartedness shines out at this moment and makes us all the more sorry that this kinder behavior played so small a part in the entire experiences of his life.

Last meeting of brothers

The two probably met for the last time when they buried their father, Isaac. This was also when they permanently separated themselves from each other. The land was not large enough to maintain both households so Esau moved far away to what will be the country of Edom. The two families, and afterwards the two races, were eventually kept apart not only geographically but also in almost every other respect. They eventually will come to hostilities in the future.

What can we say of Esau's character after reviewing his actions?

He was attractive and successful. He was devoted to his father. He was passionate and had the ability to forgive. He seemed to take life easily. He lived within the realm of his senses and purely physical desires and tastes. He lived for personal enjoyment at the present moment and was prepared to sacrifice anything else to gratify his desires. His willingness to barter his birthright for food and marry into ill-advised families were evident that his worldviews were earth-bound. He lived for himself and for his own enjoyment. But all this was only indicative of what was the foundation of his life. He had no true conception of the value of spiritual things. The promises of God had made no impression on him. He did not comprehend the spiritual lives of his father or grandfather and of God's working in their family. His life was purely secular, and there was no sacred part. Everything in him was of the world and the flesh, and no part was devoted to God. This was the root of his trouble. God was not in any of his thoughts.

Hebrews 12:16 (NIV) See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son.

Application

Superficial attractiveness is not enough.

There are many personal characteristics which are interesting and even fascinating on the surface of someone, but they all may hide an underlying indifference to God and his ways. The rich young ruler in Mark 10 who came up to Jesus had the splendid advantages of age, position, wealth, opportunity, and even moral integrity, yet when put to the test he revealed his unwillingness to surrender to Christ. Esau's life was lived entirely on an earthly plane. The superficial aspects of life were supreme, and when the test came, he sacrificed the spiritual opportunity that might have been his also. We must not be deceived by outward attractiveness in itself, unless it comes also with a genuine spiritual relationship with God.

Does being born into a Christian family make one a Christian? No! God has no grandchildren.

— Currie Ten Boom —

Choices come to us all. God has no grandchildren.

Clearly Jacob was the intended inheritor of the promises of the Covenant, but time and again Esau had the opportunity of enjoying blessings from God. His boyhood was spent at home under the influence of his father and mother. He would have been trained and taught to value the blessing of God learned from them and his grandparents. His story clearly states that he deliberately set these lessons aside and even despised them. Later he desired to inherit the blessings but was rejected since they had already been given to Jacob.

Hebrews 12:17 (NIV) Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done.

Thankfully we have Divine Grace.

We too might have made poor use of previous opportunities God had presented us. We may never be what we should have been, yet grace can do much to overrule our mistakes and our sins. Esau always had to be content with God's second best, but even for him there was a future of mercy and blessing. He was the father of many nations, kings, and rulers. He was blessed with such material success that he had move away to another land. Of interest is that just as there were twelve tribes from Jacob, there are twelve from Esau. This may suggest that in some senses Esau enjoyed a blessing on an equal footing with Jacob.

“Let us therefore be encouraged, in spite of our past, to put ourselves afresh into God's merciful and loving hands, feeling sure that His discipline will deal with us faithfully and lovingly, and in spite of all our sins and shortcomings bring glory to His Name out of the remnant of our life.”

Genesis 36 The Account of Esau

Commentaries:

Genesis alternates accounts of the non-elect patriarchs, Ishmael and Esau, with accounts of the chosen line—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As in Ishmael's case, the account of Esau does not contain much apart from genealogical information. The opening summary of Esau's career notes that, like Lot, he migrated out of Canaan for economic reasons.

Once again, this section shows how the promises were being fulfilled. Esau's migration left Canaan to Jacob. Rebekah had been told that two nations were in her womb and that 'the older will serve the younger'. The emergence of Edom as a kingdom, recorded here, and its later subjection to Israel fulfilled these ancient predictions. If these relatively minor predictions came true, how much more certain is the fulfilment of the central promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Esau, the father of the Edomites. The earliest mention of the Edomites outside of the Bible is in the fifteenth-century campaign list of Thutmose III. In records from Egypt during this period, the territory is inhabited by nomads (*Shasu*). Archaeologists have found no Edomite records or literature. Material remains from the Middle and Late Bronze Age are scarce, but this would be expected given the type of society represented by Esau and his descendants.

Not one of Esau's descendants is mentioned in God's registry of the faithful; all are lost in the obscurity of those who depart from the living God. They had temporary riches and the passing fame of this world, but nothing for eternity.

In this chapter we have an account of the posterity of Esau, who, from him, were called Edomites, that Esau who sold his birthright, and lost his blessing, and was not loved of God as Jacob was. Here is a brief register kept of his family for some generations. 1. Because he was the son of Isaac, for whose sake this honor is put upon him. 2. Because the Edomites were neighbors to Israel, and their genealogy would be of use to give light to the following stories of what passed between them. 3. It is to show the performance of the promise to Abraham, that he should be "the father of many nations," and of that answer which Rebekah had from the oracle she consulted, "Two nations are in thy womb," and of the blessing of Isaac, "Thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth." We have here, I. Esau's wives, [Gen. 36:1-5](#). II. His removal to mount Seir, [Gen. 36:6-8](#). III. The names of his sons, [Gen. 36:9-14](#). IV. The dukes who descended of his sons, [Gen. 36:15-19](#). V. The dukes of the Horites, [Gen. 36:20-30](#). VI. The kings and dukes of Edom, [Gen. 36:31-43](#). Little more is recorded than their names, because the history of those that were out of the church (though perhaps it might have been serviceable in politics) would have been of little use in divinity. It is in the church that the memorable instances are found of special grace, and special providence; for that is the enclosure, the rest is common.