

Jacob and Esau

Romans chapter 9, which is our New Testament reading for the day, contains very profound statements regarding Jacob and Esau:

“... when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our Father Isaac; (for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger, As it is written, **Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated**” (Rom. 9:10-13).

Here, we find two characters of men: one beloved of God, the other hated by Him. Even before they were born, it was determined that it would be so, based upon the foreknowledge and purpose of Yahweh. Esau is the only individual specifically named as being a man who God “hated,” being a man of the flesh who pursued fleshly things. Jacob however, was different, and was a man prepared of God for life in the kingdom to come.

Genesis chapter 25 describes how that these two brothers were at enmity with each other, from the moment of their birth. Speaking to Rebecca, “Yahweh said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and **two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels**; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger” (Gen. 25:23). Here, there would be 2 kinds of people separated from each other, though both emerging from the same woman’s womb.

These principles bring to mind the enmity between the two classes of men, styled the seed of the Woman and the seed of the Serpent, as described in Genesis 3:15. There is always enmity, not amity between the flesh and the spirit. So, just as Jacob and Esau struggled within the bowels of Rebecca, there is an internal struggle within those who seek to overcome the flesh, to do the Will of Yahweh:

“... this I say then, walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: **and these are contrary the one to the other ...**” (Gal. 5:16-17).

Again, the Apostle describes his own internal struggle:

“... I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, **warring** against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:22-24).

This internal warfare exists in the minds of all who delight in the law of Yahweh, who wish to do good, but find themselves sinning instead, because of the sin that dwells in their flesh (see Rom. 7:17).

Genesis chapter 25 recounts how “the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents” (Gen. 25:27). Here are two contrasting principles, a hunter and a plain man. Of Jacob it is said that he dwelt in tents: why do we need to know this? Hebrews 11 describes this feature as being an expression of faith. Speaking of Abraham, we read:

“By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, **dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob**, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:9-10).

If we were called upon to name a feature of Abraham's life which demonstrated his faith, what would we choose to mention? His departure from his homeland to go to an unknown land promised to him? The offering up of Isaac? Well, the Spirit in the writer to the Hebrews identifies the fact that he lived in tents as an illustration of his faith – and not only his, but Isaac and Jacob's also. By contrast to Esau, a man of the world, Jacob lived out the spirit of being a stranger and sojourner, having no permanent house, but living in tents with his father and grandfather.

DESPISING THE BIRTHRIGHT

The next incident regarding Jacob and Esau is that recorded in Genesis 25, where Esau "despised his birthright". The record describes to us how that Esau, the hunter, had been unsuccessful in his endeavours, and became very hungry: "Esau came from the field, and he was faint" (vs 29). Jacob was making pottage of lentils, and Esau in his hunger asked for some of that food:

"Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he swore unto him: and he sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright." (Gen. 25:30-34).

Here we see the exaggeration of a fleshly minded man. Esau was not at the point to die: after he had his meal, he got up and walked away – which he would not have been able to do if he had been at the point of death due to starvation. He was very hungry, but he was not at the point of death. But it is common for the flesh to exaggerate adverse circumstances so that they seem greater than they really are. The unfaithful spies reported their findings of the Land: "And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight" (Num. 13:33). Notice the hyperbole, the exaggeration: by comparison with the sons of Anak the people were as grasshoppers! But Caleb was a man of faith, and saw things in their proper context: compared to Israel's God, the "giants" were no problem, and so it is written that "Caleb drove out the three sons of Anak, Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmi the children of Anak" (Josh. 15:14). We must not magnify our problems out of all proportion, but be like Caleb who faithfully waged a victorious warfare against the flesh.

The divine commentary on this incident regarding Jacob and Esau exhorts us to be different from him: "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord ... lest there be any fornicator, **or profane person, as Esau**, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright" (Heb. 12:16). Esau was a "profane person", who placed instant gratification above the things of the spirit. Let us not do likewise.

The record in Hebrews continues to describe how that later, he did not receive the blessing from his father:

"For ye know that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears" (Heb. 12:17).

The record in Genesis chapter 27 recounts the way in which Jacob, through subterfuge involving his mother, obtained the blessing of the firstborn. The Divine Will had already been expressed before the birth of these brothers, that "the elder shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23). But Isaac, whose eyes were dim that he could not see, was blinded by his preference for Esau on account of his meat obtained by hunting. He purposed instead to convey the blessing to Esau, and not Jacob. We know the means whereby the situation was changed, by Jacob's deceit in representing himself to Jacob as

being Esau, and the scheme by which Isaac, thinking that he was blessing Esau, actually blessed Jacob. But there was no real need for Jacob and Rebecca to have done what they did, as it would seem that the blessings given were inspired by Yahweh, and He would ensure the right brother had the appropriate blessing. But be that as it may, through these circumstances Isaac blessed Jacob, and the inspired commentary is that “by faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come” (Heb. 11:20). The blessing given echoes the sentiment that the Elder would serve the Younger:

“let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee; **be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother’s sons bow down to thee**: cursed be everyone that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee” (Gen. 27:29).

The pretence was revealed in due course, and Isaac had a most dramatic response to the realisation of what had happened when he sought to bless Esau above Jacob. The marginal rendering has it:

“and Isaac trembled with a great trembling greatly” (Gen. 27:33).

Interestingly later, Jacob referred to Yahweh as being “the God of my father, the God of Abraham and **the fear of Isaac ...**” (Gen. 31:42, see vs 53). Isaac feared greatly, realising that he had intended to go against the Divine purpose, and that circumstances had changed who his blessing would be bestowed upon.

FINDING A WIFE

Genesis chapter 28 describes how that Jacob was sent out to the house of his mother to find a wife. The intention was so that he would not marry one of the daughters of Canaan. So, Isaac sent out Jacob with a blessing:

“God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; and give thee the blessing of Abraham to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave to Abraham” (Gen. 28:3-4).

So it was that Jacob was an heir of the same promise as that expressed to Abraham: “the blessing of Abraham” would be upon him. Interestingly, this phrase is also used in the New Testament to describe the position of Gentiles who would embrace the Hope of Israel:

“... Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law ... that **the blessing of Abraham** might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Gal. 3:14).

This aspect also comes out in the Genesis record. On his journey, when he had the vision of a ladder reaching to Heaven, the blessing of Yahweh was expressed to Jacob: “... thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad, to the west and to the east, and to the north and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall **all the families of the earth** be blessed” (Gen. 28:14). So it was, echoing the promises made to Abraham, through Jacob and his seed (the Lord Jesus Christ), all the families of the earth would ultimately be blessed.

Esau, however, being a man of the flesh, just could not understand what was the right thing to do:

“Esau, seeing that the daughters of Canaan pleased not Isaac his father; Then went Esau unto Ishmael, and took unto the wives which he had Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael Abraham’s son, the sister of Nabajoth, to be his wife” (Gen. 28:8-9).

It would seem that Esau was trying to keep his father happy, by not marrying the daughters of Canaan, but marrying Abraham's granddaughter instead. He seemed to realise that marrying the seed of Abraham was the thing to do, but he did not understand the reasons for it, and in a fleshly way, took to himself one who was not of the seed of promise. Our reading in Romans chapter 9 gives us an insight, albeit in a slightly different context:

"Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed" (Rom. 9:7-8).

Being a natural seed of Abraham does not mean that one is spiritual. The seed of promise are the children of God, and those who would be the children of promise must only marry other children of promise. Esau failed to understand that, as do men and women of the world who do not appreciate how that Christ's brethren and sisters must only marry within the household of faith.

JACOB AND THE ANGELS

Jacob then, went to the house of Laban, his mother's brother, to "tarry with him a few days" (Gen. 27:44). But those few days extended to a period of years, during which he served Laban for Rachael his wife, Leah his wife, and the cattle that he was to possess. In the process of time, Yahweh appeared to him, saying:

"I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowest a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out of this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred" (Gen. 31:12-13).

The following chapters describe Jacob's experiences with the Angels: chapter 32 recounts how the Angels of God met him on his journey, as he prepared to meet his enemy brother Esau, and chapter 32 narrates the occasion when Jacob is said to have wrestled with the Angel, holding on to him and not letting him go, until he had secured a blessing. These chapters are beyond the scope of our present considerations, but I'd just like to note the reference to this latter incident in the book of Hosea, speaking of Jacob:

"He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God: Yea, he had power with the Angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Bethel, **and there he spake with us**" (Hos. 12:3-4).

Here is an important principle: "there he spake with us". The events described in the inspired record of Genesis are not merely historical events that we look at as a matter of academic interest: in these events, we see Yahweh – our Great Creator – speaking "with us". We need to take heed to the example of Jacob and Esau therefore, and seek to emulate Jacob's trust in the angelic hand. At the end of his life, he referred to: "the Angel which redeemed me from all evil ..." (Gen. 48:16). Despite the subterfuge and deceit involved with obtaining his birthright and blessing, in it all, the Angel was at work, delivering him from the evil circumstances that befell him.

Though we do not have a direct sight of the Angels that surround us, we can also trust in their presence and deliverance. The Psalmist wrote that "the Angel of Yahweh encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them" (Psa. 34:7). We must trust in the Angelic Hand of Yahweh in our lives, so that in the final analysis we will be regarded as being loved of God, as Jacob was.

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