

Love, Hate, and a Birthright

- ¹⁹ These are **the generations of Isaac**, Abraham's son: Abraham fathered Isaac,
²⁰ and Isaac was **forty years old** when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife.
²¹ And Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because **she was barren**. And **the LORD granted his prayer**, and Rebekah his wife conceived.
²² The children struggled together within her, and she said, "If it is thus, why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD.
²³ And the LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, **the older shall serve the younger**."
²⁴ When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb.
²⁵ The first came out **red**, all his body like **a hairy cloak**, so they called his name **Esau**.
²⁶ Afterward his brother came out with his hand **holding Esau's heel**, so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.
²⁷ When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a **man of the field**, while Jacob was a quiet man, **dwelling in tents**.
²⁸ **Isaac loved Esau** because he ate of his game, but **Rebekah loved Jacob**.
²⁹ Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted.
³⁰ And Esau said to Jacob, "**Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!**" (Therefore his name was called **Edom**.)
³¹ Jacob said, "**Sell me your birthright now.**"
³² Esau said, "**I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?**"
³³ Jacob said, "**Swear to me now.**" So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob.
³⁴ Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Genesis 25:19-34

Election Apart from Works

This week we want to conclude the story of **the birth of Esau and Jacob**. Last week we began the story, but found that there was too much here to do justice to the whole thing at once, especially given that we looked at 18 other verses about nations and genealogies before it. I want to pick up where we left off last time. We were discussing the beginning of the birth story (**Gen 25:19-26**) and had come to the place where the LORD predicts, "**The older shall serve the younger**" (**23**). We then went to Romans 9 to see how the NT applies this verse in its teaching of the **doctrine of election**.

One point was made clearly by Paul prior to his citation of this verse. In fact, what he says is what leads him to cite the verse in the first place. "**Though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad-- in order that God's purpose**

of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls-- she was told, *‘The older will serve the younger’*” (Rom 9:11-12). And so we looked at how God does not choose people or nations based on anything he foresees in them good or bad, and this includes some kind of a supposed “choice for God” that someone is supposedly wants to make apart from regeneration.

Jacob I Love, Esau I Hated

But the Apostle cites a verse immediately after this in conjunction with **Genesis 25:23**. The verse he cites is from **Malachi 1:2-3** and he gives it as a second proof that God does not choose based on anything good or bad in a person. “As it is written, *‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated’*” (Rom 9:13). Now, seeing that later on in Genesis 25 we learn that *‘Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob’* (Gen 25:28), I wanted to open our time together this morning by thinking about this difficult passage in Malachi and Romans. I do so for three reasons. **First**, this passage is sometimes used to say things that are not meant. **Second**, What is meant is of such tremendous importance to our own lives, that we must learn to think properly about it. **Third**, how we think about this verse will have bearing upon how we think about Jacob and Esau in all the stories that follow in Genesis. We want do not want to get derailed by our assumptions before we even read the stories.

Common Misunderstandings

Let me start off then with some common arguments that are misunderstandings of both Malachi and Paul. First, there is the **Arminian argument** that I heard in Seminary. The argument goes that Malachi has in view only nations, not individuals. Therefore, Paul has to have in mind nations, not individuals. There is election in the Bible, but it is only corporate election, and it is not unto salvation.¹

The main problem I see with this view is that it **pits corporate election against individual election** and temporal blessings against eternal blessings in as much as they are given by God according to his good purposes. I often seen Reformed Christians failing to acknowledge corporate election, and neither position that eliminates the other is good, for both are true in the Bible.

¹ Cf. William W. Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990). I admit that the way I put it is too simplistic. But at the end of the day, I don’t see how this summary is not, in fact, correct. See Brian J. Abasciano who has a much more nuanced (and better) version of this: “Corporate Election in Romans 9: A Reply to Thomas Schreiner,” *JETS* 49/2 (June 2006): 351–71 (http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-2/JETS_49-2_351-371_Abasciano.pdf); Brian Abasciano, “Clearing Up Misconceptions About Corporate Election,” <http://www.thedivineconspiracy.org/Z5240L.pdf>. (His very expensive book is mostly on google books: http://books.google.bj/books?id=1N8RAuNk38oC&printsec=frontcover&hl=fr&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q=isaac&f=false).

But it seems clear to me from Romans 9 that even though Malachi does have in mind people groups, that Paul is in fact concerned with real, everlasting salvation. “Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved” (Rom 10:1ff). And thus, he mentions Isaac (9:7, 9) and Pharaoh (9:17) who are not nations, but individuals, and he talks about Jacob and Esau as individuals—twins not yet born (9:10-11) to prove his point.

The other main misunderstanding has to do with the love and hatred of God in the Malachi quote. I have heard both Arminians and Calvinists misunderstand this point. Arminians (though not exclusively Arminians) want to translate “Esau I hated” as “Esau I loved less.” Let me say two things about this. First, this is usually done in order to eliminate *any sense* of hatred towards Esau in God. “Any sense” is the important part here. Second, that said, I do not believe that the sentiment in wanting to translate it this way is necessarily off base.

Dr. Boice talks about this extensively in his commentary-sermon.² He quotes someone no less than the brilliant Reformed professor of the 19th century Charles Hodge who said, “It is evident that in this case the word *hate* means *to love less, to regard and treat with less favor.*”² What Hodge (and Boice) are both concerned with is the opposite extreme that thinks because God hated Esau here, that this means he had no love for the man whatsoever. I actually view this as worse than the Arminian error, because it is a fundamental denial of the very nature of God. “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8, 16), a passage that no person should ever feel like they have to qualify.

But the problem is, God most certainly did love Esau *in some sense*. For he gave Esau great promises. He made Esau into a great nation. He blessed Esau with much material blessing. He allowed Esau and Jacob to reconcile. And so on. Esau’s grandfather Abraham is the human type of this love, as he gave all of his sons gifts before he died. He simply didn’t give them the promise of the Seed, for the promise would come through Isaac because of God’s electing love.

We have an example of this kind of “hatred” later on in Genesis when it says that Jacob “hated” Leah (Gen 29:31). The idea is that Jacob did not love Leah the way he loved Rachel. In this sense, she was unloved, disliked, and rejected. But she was not viewed by Jacob as Satan incarnate, the Devil in human form, the epitome of all that is evil in the world, for he continued to be a good husband to Leah, even giving her many children. This very thing would later be talked about in the Law of Moses. “If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other unloved, and both the

² James Montgomery Boice, *Romans: God and History*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991–), 1061.

² Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on Romans* (Edinburgh and Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), p. 312. Original edition 1935.

loved and the unloved have borne him children, and if the firstborn son belongs to the unloved, then on the day when he assigns his possessions as an inheritance to his sons, he may not treat the son of the loved as the firstborn in preference to the son of the unloved, who is the firstborn, but he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the unloved, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the firstfruits of his strength. The right of the firstborn is his” (Deut 21:15-17). This law shows the heart of God towards those who are unloved.³

So let’s think about this idea of love and hate more carefully so that we will have the proper concepts in our tool box to know how to read it correctly. The Puritans regularly talked about different senses of love and hate.⁴ There is the *love of benevolence* and the *hatred of malice* or enmity. Love of benevolence wishes well to another person or to himself. Hatred of malice wishes ill towards another person. Therefore, these are opposites. You can’t do both simultaneously.

Nowhere in the Bible does God command us to have a hatred of malice, and nowhere does God exhibit a hatred of malice, where he simply wishes that horrible things would come upon a person. This kind of hatred is actually a gleeful delight in the ill-being of another person. *People* exhibit this kind of hatred regularly, but God does not wish anyone ill will, but rather, “he does not delight in the death of the wicked.” Opposite of this, God commands us to love our enemies, even as he has loved us—who were once his enemies. God certainly does not have malice towards Esau here or anywhere else. If he did, he would not be God, but Satan, for this kind of hatred is evil, not good.

There is another pairing of love and hate. There is the *love of complacency* and the *hatred of abomination*. The love of complacency delights in the moral qualities of another person. The hatred of abomination is moral disgust at the evil and sin that resides in us and in other people. This kind of hatred *is* something that God does exhibit and commands that we exhibit. God hates evil. We are to hate evil. God delights in moral goodness, obedience, and submission. We are to delight in the same.

There are two problems here as it regards Jacob and Esau. First, they haven’t done anything “good or bad,” and so this cannot be the kind of hatred that God exhibits towards Esau either. Second, if somehow God were showing this kind of ha-

³ A similar idea is found when Jesus says, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). Jesus is not commanding us to somehow disobey the fifth commandment, much less his own reaffirmation of “love your neighbor as yourself.” This kind of hatred means we are not to love anyone more than we love God. He is to have our first love. By comparison, all other loves are unworthy.

⁴ See especially the likes of Augustine, Aquinas, Samuel Rutherford, Thomas Manton, Geerhardus Vos, D. A. Carson and others at the site: <http://theologicalmeditations.blogspot.com/search/label/Hate%2FLove>, last accessed 10-7-2014.

tred in this verse towards Esau, he would also have to show it towards Jacob, because God hates all sin, no matter who commits it. It is unthinkable that God would hate Esau's evil moral behavior, but love the same behavior in Jacob.

This leaves us with a **last pairing of love and hatred**. These are called the *love of election* and the *hatred of preterition*. **The love of election is the setting of affection upon someone whom God chooses to set his affection upon, for no reason other than that he chooses to do so.** It is certainly not because of anything he foresees good in a person. **The hatred of preterition is the passing over of someone for election, thereby leaving them in their sins,** and giving them over to their own wicked choices and desires. The result here is that they then end up in hell of their own evil choices. **This is the kind of love and hatred that are clearly in view in our passage.**

John Collings, Puritan and participant in the Savoy Declaration wrote:

Love signifies some Specialties of Affection. A good man ha[s] Love for many Women, but Love's only for the Wise of his Bosom. Love signifie[s] both a common, and a singular and special Love. Christ ha[s] a Philanthropy, or common Love for all the Sons of Men; but he hath a ... special Love and Kindness for some. Joseph caused all his [Brothers], to have a Mess set for them, but for Benjamin, a double Mess. God gave Esau the Mountains of Edom. There was Love, but Jacob had the Blessing, Esau had his Love, Jacob had his Loves. That the Gospel is preached to every Creature, is from Christ's Love, but that any by the Gospel are made New creatures this is from his Loves. It is kindness to them that they have the Gospel, but a far greater kindness, a kindness of another nature to the Soul that it is enabled to receive the Gospel, and is turned into the likeness of it.

To put it another way, common grace is love, and common grace extends to all. But special, saving grace is greater love, greater kindness, and it is given in God's wisdom and electing love only to some, so that they might be thankful for his grace.

Let us consider what this means for Jacob and Esau. It means that God can in the birth and life of Esau **love** him in benevolence, **hate** him in abomination, **love** him in complacency, and **hate** him in preterition. As it regards Jacob, God can **love** him with benevolence, **hate** him in abomination, **love** him in complacency, and **love** him in election. Esau has two loves and two hatreds. Jacob has three loves, but only one hatred.

These same kinds of things are true of all people. **The non-elect** God loves in benevolence—he wishes them all well, he does not delight in their deaths, he would that they would all turn and obey him, and trust in his son. He gives them rain and

food and shelter and water and happiness. He hates, however, all the evil things that they do. He loves the good outward things that they do, but cannot love their motivation, for it does not come from faith and does not please God. He hates them with a hatred of preterition, meaning that his wrath for their sins will forever remain upon them, as he gives them over to do exactly what they want to do, no intervening in a miraculous, efficacious way to bring them to salvation. This is fair.

As it regards [the elect](#), God also loves them with a love of benevolence, wishing them well in all that they do, not delighting when they die, wishing that they would always obey and trust in the Son. Yet, he finds them born under a condition of his wrath, for they are sinners, born in original sin and those who commit actual sins. His wrath and anger abide upon them by nature. He does not delight in any of the evil they do before *or after* salvation. He continues to hate the elect with a hatred of abomination, until the day he eliminates all sin from their bodies and minds. He loves them with complacency when they do right, but also with a love of election. He does not leave them in their sins forever, but at some point actually [converts](#) them through the gospel by his power because of his electing, special love as that of a husband for his wife. In this, he is now able to love the works both outward and inward of the elect when they come to faith, because there is now always in them something that desire to please God at all times. The elect become the objects of God's good pleasure, while the rest remain the objects of his wrath and displeasure.

Consider the words of [Geerhardus Vos](#) as I conclude this, and try to internalize what he is saying:

The enjoyment of the common love of God outside of the kingdom does not exempt man from being subject at the same time to the divine wrath on account of sin. Love and wrath here are not mutually exclusive. Within the circle of redemption, on the other hand, the enjoyment of the paternal love of God means absolute forgiveness and deliverance from all wrath.”⁵

This is the Reformed teaching, and always has been. More importantly, it is the biblical teaching. Subjectively, this is what allows us to follow our Lord's example in loving even his enemies, and it is what allows us to truly come to grips with what it means that he has loved us with a special love. Let us now turn our attention to the rest of Genesis 25, including the completion of the birth story of Jacob and Esau. We will find that we will return to these categories later in our chapter.

⁵ Geerhardus Vos, "[The Scriptural Doctrine of the Love of God](#)," [The Presbyterian and Reformed Review](#) 13 (January, 1902), 25.

Out Come Twins

Esau

The story continues now by telling us about the birth. “When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb” (Gen 25:24). But what kind of twins would they be? First, we learn about Esau. “The first came out red, all his body like a hair cloak, so they called his name Esau” (25). The word “red” is the word *admoni* (). This will appear later in the story. “Hairy” is the word *sear* (). “Garment” is *addereth* (). “Esau” is *Esav* (). In other words, it is poetic, and there are some rather fascinating links to things that will come later in Genesis.⁶

While redness⁷ is not such a strange thing (David is described this way; 1 Sam 16:12; 17:42), the picture we get of Esau is fantastic, almost mythological,⁸ for what kind of a kid comes out of the womb with hair all over him? The Pseudo-Jonathan Targum, which makes a deliberate point to make Esau a villain and Jacob a hero even at this early stage, takes this in a direction Bible does not saying, “Because he was born fully completed, with hair of the head, beard, teeth, and molars” (PsJon Gen 25:25). No question what we read of Esau is strange, but it is not as strange as the Targum suggests. Have you ever seen a newborn with peach fuzz all over it?

Esau is contrasted now to Jacob who comes out second. Jacob is said to come out holding or grasping Esau’s heel, so they named him Jacob. Some think that Jacob may have been shorthand for *ya qob-el* (“may El protect, reward”), a popular Amorite name of that period. But the Bible takes it in another direction, because it wants us to think about Jacob, not as a hero, but as a questionable character even from birth. He grasps Esau’s heel, even as he fought violently with his brother in the womb. Jacob means “a heeler” (not a healer) or a “grasper, supplanter” or “one who trips up”). The idea of a supplanter comes from Gen 27:36, “Esau said, ‘Is he not

⁶ **GOING DEEPER:** One that we will not get into involves demons as discussed in Giants. I write, “Finally, there is a word play going on between the *satyr* (*sairim*) and Edom (*seir*). *Seir* is another name for Edom (cf. Num 24:18), but refers more specifically to the (giant) Horite ancestor who populated the region there before Esau (Gen 36:20-21). The root of *satyr* means “hairy,” and they are always depicted as hairy creatures. Esau, was of course a “hairy (*sair*) man” (Gen 27:11), who clothed himself in a hairy (*sear*) garment (Gen 25:25).” Douglas Van Dorn, *Giants: Sons of the Gods* (Erie, CO: Waters of Creation Pub, 2013), 196. We will look at most of these connections later on in Genesis.

⁷ It probably refers to a ruddy complexion, but may refer to red hair.

⁸ Here, some have wanted to make associations with someone like Enkidu, the hairy wild half-man, half-beast who ends up becoming great friends with Gilgamesh. On the popular level, I recommend Brian Godawa’s *Gilgamesh Immortal* in his *Nephilim Chronicles* for a retelling of the ancient story with a Christian spin on it. Though there are similarities, this is where it must remain. Enkidu is not Esau, nor is Esau a half-man, though there are certainly strange things that come out of the land of Edom that are related to Esau in Jewish stories and traditions. Again, see *Giants*.

rightly named Jacob? For he has cheated (supplanted) me these two times.” Figuratively speaking, this is talking about deceiving, which is where Jacob as a deceiver comes from.⁹ It concludes, Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them (Gen 25:26; and this is where we know that Abraham is still alive for 15 more years, see last sermon).

The picture of Esau is one of odd complexion. The picture of Jacob is one of already dubious actions. The next verse tells us about the two men. Let me read the Targum and the Scripture together. I do this to show you how easy it is for us to read things into the Bible that aren't there (and I'm highly doubtful that the insertions here are tradition).

Regarding Esau, the Scripture says, “When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field” (Gen 25:27). But the Targum adds, “able to hunt birds and wild beasts, a man who would go out into the field and kill people. It was he who killed Nimrod and his son Henoch.”³⁵ You can see how it colors our view of Esau, while at this point in time, the Scripture does not. The same goes for Jacob. The Scripture says, “... while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents.” But the Targum adds, “But Jacob became a man who was perfect in his works,¹⁰ ministering in the schoolhouse of Eber,¹¹ seeking instruction from before the Lord.” Eber is the ancestor of Abraham, and their point is to make Jacob out to be a saint.

Does the Scripture permit us to do this? No. Rather, for most of Jacob's life, we are left questioning God's choice of this man. For he is a scoundrel and a cheat. Often, I find the Targum's fascinating, and this is no exception. Many times they seem to be providing oral tradition of some event or some kind of explanation of the text. Here I think their tradition (if that is what it is), is confused and its interpretation is dangerous. Beloved, we must beware of the very natural tendency to idolize our heroes and make them out to be better than they are. Likewise, we must beware of the tendency to demonize those who are villains in Scripture. Very often,

⁹ “Deceit/Treachery” is found in the previous verse, “Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing” (Gen 27:35). It is followed later by Laban who pulls a reverse on Jacob, “And in the morning, behold, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, ‘What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?’” (Gen 29:25). The root of these words is the same: *rmb*.

³⁵ *PRE* 24 (177–178) says that Esau slew Nimrod because he coveted his garments. See *Gen. R.* 63,13, which says that Nimrod was seeking to kill Esau. According to *Sefer Ha-Yashar* 27 (77), Esau killed Nimrod and two of his men; cf. Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1, 318; 5, 276, n. 38. Ps.-J. does not explain why Esau killed Nimrod and his son.

¹⁰ “Perfect in works.” Perfect (*tam*) is the same root word used for Noah in *Gen 6:9* (*tanim*; blameless or as I suggest, physically pure). The Targum is getting its idea of perfect from this. The ESV says “a quiet man.”

¹¹ Here, they are taking “tent” as a “schoolhouse.” Earlier, it had said that Rebekah went to inquire of the Lord in the school of Shem the Great (PsJon Gen 25:22). Their idea is that Shem preserved the worship of Yahweh through the generations, at least until Heber, Abraham's ancestor.

the outward moral character is not very different. In fact, often times, the villain acts more virtuously than the hero.

This tendency is natural to us because we naturally think that religion and salvation is about how people act and what they do: good or bad. But the first and most important point is that it rests on the goodness of God, not the goodness of man. Secondly, it rests upon faith in Christ. And only after this does moral goodness mean anything to the Lord. We must look to the promises of God and how our heroes (and ourselves) respond to them, sometimes in spite of the way our heroes actually behave.

Choosing Loves

Nothing could demonstrate this any clearer than the remaining portion of our chapter. The next verse. It says, “[Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob](#)” ([Gen 25:28](#)). This is a profound verse that demonstrates exactly what I’m talking about. Isaac is shown here as looking at the outward appearance. He loves Esau because Esau seems to take an interest in his father’s interests. Isaac loves wild game; Esau loves wild game. Sadly, far too many fathers love their children, and especially sons, for this reason—the son likes what the father likes, and end up sacrificing the love of other children for the opposite reason. And it has caused tremendous damage to children that are not exactly like their fathers.

The [love of benevolence](#) is to be absolutely unconditional. No one is allowed to have malice in their hearts towards another. We are to wish all people well equally. The [love of complacency](#) is conditioned upon actions, but those actions are moral actions. There is nothing moral about eating the game that your father likes. It is simply amoral, neither right nor wrong.

The final love—the [love of election](#)—is a love that you and I are not allowed to choose for ourselves, because this kind of love belongs to God alone. We are, however, to have our hearts filled with a special love for those who are of the promises. This is exactly [what I think Rebekah is doing](#). I am being somewhat speculative, since the exact reason for Rebekah’s love of Jacob is not stated, and yet just a few verses ago, God had told her [the older would serve the younger](#). It is reasonable to assume that she believed God and treasured this up in her heart, a sign of the promise of God that the blessing would come to Jacob, not Esau. This will become much more apparent in another chapter when Rebekah schemes with Jacob against Isaac and Esau.

But even here, there are warnings. First, [none of us is like Rebekah](#), being told by God that any of our children (or any particular individuals that we know of) are going to have the promises of God come through them. And so, we cannot trust

in the promise *the same way* that she did. Instead, those of whom we are to have a special love are those who have come into the promises of God **by faith**. These are our brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers. But again, this does not mean that because we have special love for our family, that we are not to love anyone else. We are to **love our enemies** as we love ourselves. We are to pray and seek the Lord that he would save all that we love. We are to forever act in love towards those who never make a profession of faith. Yet, we can know that a special love with one another, because of the fellowship that we have, as something that the world knows nothing about. This is not simply a common interest like loving a the same sports team or having going to the same school. It is a bond in the Holy Spirit who has adopted us into the same household of faith. Because we know God, or rather are known by him, we share a spiritual bond of love.

Is not love the chief commandment of God? The church must love all people and at the same time the church must show love towards one another. Love here is not a feeling, but a behavior. It is kindness, patience, humility, lack of arrogance, not rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but in truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. And it never ends. This is what churches are to be known for. This is what you are to be known for by one another. Consider your own hearts, the love you have for your enemies, and the love you have for your brothers in this very room. If something is not right, get right with God, then make it right with them.

Birthright

Now let's finish our story. It is the fairly well known story of Jacob scheming to steal Esau's birthright. The story begins with Jacob cooking some stew (*nazid*; **Gen 25:29**). What kind of stew? The next verse in the ESV says "**red stew**" (**25:30**). But "stew" is a different word. It is literally, "**this red, red**" (*min-hä'ädöm hä'ädöm*). "Red" is very similar to the word Edom (see chart below), which Esau is sometimes called, and so the Scripture tells us that this is the root of that name for Esau.

Jacob and Esau Word Plays in Genesis					
Gen 25:23	shall serve	Ya'abod (; y'vd)		Jacob (vs. 26)	Yaaqob (; y'qv)
	younger	tsair (; ts'yr)		Seir (32:3)	(; s'yr)
Gen 25:25	red	admoni (; 'dmn)		garment	addereth (; 'ddrth)
	hairy	sear (; s'r)		Esau	Esav (; 'sv)
Gen 25:26	heel	aqeb (; 'qv)		Jacob	Yaaqob (; y'qv)
Gen 25:30	red	admoni (; 'dmn)		Edom	Edom (; 'dm)
Gen 27:36	supplant	aqab (; 'qv)		Jacob	Yaaqob (; y'qv)

I like the translation, “Give me some of that red stuff to gulp down, for I am famished” (Gen 25:30 TNK). Other than the color (and by the way, “Laban” means “White.”), we do not know here if Jacob may have been cooking lentils or meat, though the word for blood (*dam*) sounds a lot like *'adom*.

Why is Esau famished? Listen to the Targum one last time. “he was exhausted because he had committed five transgressions that day: he had practiced idolatry; he had shed innocent blood; he had gone in to a betrothed maiden; he had denied the life of the world to come, and had despised the birthright.” Apparently, Esau was a very busy man that day, busy sinning that is. This is actually a very popular Jewish tradition.¹² Philo the Jew, who loved to allegorize, says that Esau’s hunting was a “vice, which hunts after the passions, is unfit by nature to dwell in the city of virtue, but pursues a boorish and undisciplined life in complete senselessness” (*Allegorical Interpretation of the Laws* 3.2).¹³ Again, its purpose is to paint Esau in a very bad light.

But the Scripture is again much more guarded, at least at this point in the story. All it says is that he came in from the field. Was he killing animals or killing people? Was he tired from plotting against God or from working hard? We are simply left to wonder. And this is the beauty of the Bible over and against all other commentaries on it, for we naturally love speculation. We are uncomfortable with ambiguity. We want to know that Esau is purely evil, so we tell ourselves that, whether it is true or not true.

But there is something strange here. Esau actually says, “Please.” And he manages to get out the words of how near to death he is from hunger. Someone points out that this probably shows that he is exaggerating. If he was that near the end, Jacob would have found him lying near death on the ground unconscious. Perhaps it is his love of game that causes Esau’s mouth to water and drool in jealousy. Perhaps Jacob is also planning something here.

In fact, the very next words out of Jacob’s mouth are, “Sell me your birthright now” (Gen 25:31). Esau says, “Please.” Jacob says, “Now!” There is no way this is accidental. Jacob is definitely up to something. He has managed to find a weak spot in his brother’s will, and he takes full advantage of it in order to “make the older serve the younger.” The birthright became very important in Israel, and it was generally the firstborn who had all the privileges. But as we saw with Ishmael and Isaac, God often chooses the opposite of the natural way. Again, we are left in the uncomfortable position of wondering if Jacob did this because he was righteous and

¹² E.g., *Gen. R.* 63,12; *Exod. R.* 1,1, *b. B. Bat.* 16b (84); *Tanh.*, *Toledoth* 8 (91) and *Shemoth* 1 (160).

¹³ Cited in F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 350.

believed the promise, or if he was simply a schemer and trickster, or a third option that he believed the promise but was going to make it come about through scheming just like Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar tried to do.

Esau was indignant and relentless. “I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?” (Gen 25:32). Whatever is going on, Esau is dying (either literally or physically) for this food. Is this an unnatural craving, an addiction to something? Is it a natural bodily reaction to extreme hunger?” Whatever the case, the crucial part is that Esau despises his birthright, the most important thing that was legally his in all the world, especially given that it was his right to be the father of Messiah! Yet, he does so on very pragmatic grounds—what good is it to me if I die? How many wicked acts have been done in the name of pragmatism in God’s church?

It is because he despised his birthright, therefore despising Messiah—the one who is called the firstborn (esp. Heb 1:6), and the church—which is called the firstborn (esp. Heb 12:23), by failing to believe that God would preserve him through this deep physical trial he was enduring that Hebrews takes this verse and says, “See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal” (Heb 12:15-16).”¹⁴ If Hebrews is following Jewish tradition, it may have both sexual immorality and religious profanity in mind with Esau, but if it is only taking Genesis at this point in the story, it probably has in mind the unholy act of selling his birthright, thereby profaning his only hope of salvation.

Based on Hebrews, my view is that Esau knew exactly what his birthright entailed, but didn’t care. This was not a matter of innocently giving up something that he knew little to nothing about. Jacob certainly seems to think this is a vital thing to obtain, and he is doing everything in his power to get it. So he repeats himself, “Sweat to me now” (Gen 25:33). The Targum shows that Jacob and Esau knew exactly what this was about calling this birthright “a portion of the world to come” (Gen 25:32, 34).

And Esau swore to him and sold his birthright (Gen 25:33). And Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew (now we learn that it was beans, not meat!), and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright (34). Despising his birthright was demonstrated by his actions of eating, drinking, rising, and going his way. Let me close with some thoughts I had while reading this sad, pathetic verse.

¹⁴ We will deal with vs. 17 from this passage in a later sermon.

Solomon said, “There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God ... Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment” (Ecc 2:24; 11:9).

Isaiah saw the ruin of his beloved city and exclaimed, “In that day the Lord GOD of hosts called for weeping and mourning, for baldness and wearing sackcloth; and behold, joy and gladness, killing oxen and slaughtering sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine. “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (Isa 22:12-13). Daniel witnessed a similar event when, on the very night the great city was sacked, king Belshazzar threw a feast of food and wine for a thousand lords, apparently to drink themselves straight to the Babylonian equivalent of Valhalla, Sheol, Hades, Hell.

Such is the same mad rush of our culture obsessed with ignoring the vital and elevating the trivial. But Jesus once said, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” So told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’” (Luke 12:15-20).

The Apostle says, “What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die’” (1 Cor 15:32). Christ is raised, and has come through the seed of Jacob. The promises have been fulfilled. Beloved, what price is your soul? What is its cost? Esau valued his soul at approximately the cost of one bowl of lentil stew and a little bread. How about you?