

Why did God hate Esau?

The apostle John writes, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16); yet, in rare instances, the Bible records God as hating Esau as a prerogative of His choice.

The pronouncement of the word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi: "I have loved you," says the Lord. But you say, "How have You loved us?" "Was Esau not Jacob's brother?" declares the Lord. **"Yet I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau,** and I have made his mountains a desolation and given his inheritance to the jackals of the wilderness." Though Edom says, "We have been beaten down, but we will return and build up the ruins"; this is what the Lord of armies says: "They may build, but I will tear down; and people will call them the territory of wickedness, and the people with whom the Lord is indignant forever." And your eyes will see this, and you will say, "The Lord be exalted beyond the border of Israel!" (Mal 1:1-5)

for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written: **"Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."** (Rom 9:11-13)

The time of the Patriarchs is unique in biblical history. It represents the period when God makes His unilateral and unconditional covenant with Abraham and affirms it with the descendants of Abraham until the formation of the nation of Israel. Esau, the grandson of Abraham and fraternal twin of Jacob, is of the third generation; but, it is with Jacob that God affirms the Abrahamic Covenant (Isaac: Gen 26:2-5, 23-25, Jacob: Gen 28:12-15; 48:3-4).

But what is it that God hates about Esau especially in light of "though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls" (Rom 9:11)? In providing some historical data, the Bible does shed some light to this question.

Esau and Jacob were portrayed as contentious twins from the very beginning:

But the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is so, why am I in this condition?" So she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said to her,

"Two nations are in your womb;
And two peoples will be separated from your body;
And one people will be stronger than the other;
And the older will serve the younger." (Gen 25:22-23)

Esau failed to appreciate the significance and rights of the firstborn and was dishonest in not revealing his oath, selling his birthright to Jacob, to his father:

When Jacob had cooked a stew one day, Esau came in from the field and he was exhausted; and Esau said to Jacob, "Please let me have a mouthful of that red stuff there, for I am exhausted." Therefore he was called Edom by name. But Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." Esau said, "Look, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?" And Jacob said, "First swear to me"; so he swore an oath to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and got up and went on his way. So **Esau despised his birthright.** (Gen 25:29-34)

When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me, me as well, my father!" And he said, "Your brother came deceitfully and has taken away your blessing." Then Esau said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob, for he has betrayed me these two times? He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing." And he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" (Gen 27:34-36)

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The Bible indicates the primary reason for God's hatred of Esau: **Esau despised his birthright**. The significance of this is not perceived until the New Testament, when it becomes very clear that God operates within a legal structure and birthright matters. This is seen in God's process of initial salvation when a person comes to faith.

1. With a genuine faith, God declares one righteous. Righteous is a determination made by God based on whether you have faith in God and obey Him. While it may reflect upon your character, God's determination is not based on it.

Then he believed in the Lord; and He credited it to him as **righteousness**. (Gen 15:6)

2. Justify, from God's perspective, is a judicial conclusion that a person is proved right and acquits a person of accusations or the charge of sin.

Just as Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. Therefore, recognize that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. The Scripture, foreseeing that God would **justify** the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU." So then, those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. (Gal 3:6-9)

3. Adoption establishes a legally binding relationship and formalizes a covenant relationship. Adoption entitles Believers to be a part of a divine family and heirs of God / co-heirs with Jesus Christ - this refers to all the promises God made to Abraham about his descendants (blessings including eternal life and land including a place in heaven).

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the **adoption** as sons and daughters. Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying out, "Abba! Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God. (Gal 4:4-7)

4. In being "born again," regeneration changes the origin of birth and establishes a natural relationship to God. Occurring at this time as well is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which seals the Believer as a child of God, and serves as a deposit guaranteeing the Believer's inheritance. Regeneration validates the Believer's legal adoption by God.

Jesus responded and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3)

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of the promise, who is a first installment of our inheritance, in regard to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory. (Eph 1:13-14)

When Esau despised his birthright, he was rejecting God's judicial process that was embedded in the Abrahamic Covenant. When God affirms the Abrahamic covenant with Isaac, He places an emphasis on Abraham's obedience to His commandments, statutes and laws (Gen 17:19; 26:4-5). While the Bible does not record what these "commandments, statutes and laws were," it seems unlikely that Esau would have been obedient to them:

When Esau was forty years old he married Judith the daughter of Beerli the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite; and **they brought grief to Isaac and Rebekah**. (Gen 26:34-35)

Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-aram to take to himself a wife from there, and that when he blessed him he commanded him, saying, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan," and that **Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother** and had gone to Paddan-aram. So Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan displeased his father Isaac; and Esau went to Ishmael, and married, besides the wives that he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth. (Gen 28:6-9)

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God knew the condition of Esau's heart before he was born and that he would despise his birthright in the future, in essence despising the One who gave the birthright, which is why God hated Esau. With that knowledge, Joseph was chosen for the purpose of carrying on the Abrahamic Covenant, and Rebekah was informed that the "the older will serve the younger" (Gen 25:23; Rom 9:11-13).

It is noteworthy to consider that God will give those who He knows will oppose Him in the future a role in His plan of salvation.

Pharaoh was used to establish the reality of God's existence and basis of faith (Ex 19:4-6).

Herod the Great was used to fulfill two Messianic prophecies that validated Jesus as the Christ and Son of God (Hos 11:1; Matt 2:13-15 | Matt 2:19-23)