

# Esau

## And the Demolition of Easy-believism

Why is Esau such a prominent person in scripture, being mentioned 92 times, despite being of little importance to the development of the nation of Israel; indeed he fathered one of Israel's great enemies - Edom? His name appears 89 times in the Old Testament in seven books, also being alluded to in the first and last books. Esau figures three times in the NT, appearing in the two most complex doctrinal arguments about the Gospel (Romans and Hebrews).

Neither was Esau a very winsome character. One can feel sympathy or sorrow for many people that God rejected for failure, whose lives seemed to fall apart, such as Saul; but few spare any emotions for Esau.

Yet Esau speaks very clearly about the sovereignty of God. If there was ever a person whose life screamed of God's absolute, sovereign choice - it is Esau; and this is why the apostles focussed critical arguments on him.

We could spend time looking at his life and discussing various details, but this is common knowledge. We could evaluate his standing as the father of the Arab peoples, but that is clearly understood.<sup>1</sup> What I want to do in this paper is examine the great importance Esau has theologically. Why is Esau so important to the principles of the Gospel?

### Esau is the chief example of the divine election of individuals

The first important principle is that Esau demonstrates God's sovereign choice of people. God's selection of Jacob instead of Esau had nothing to do with what Esau had done since the choice was made before their birth. Paul focuses on this in his explanation of election in Romans 9:6-16:

For they *are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel, nor *are they* all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called.' That is, those who *are* the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. For this *is* the word of promise: 'At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son.' And not only *this*, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, *even* by our father Isaac (for ***the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls***), it was said to her, 'The older shall serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.' What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.' So then *it is* not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

Here Paul specifically states that Esau was an example of the divine decree of election to demonstrate that:

- the purpose of God according to election might stand
- not of works

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<sup>1</sup> The enmity between Jew and Arab began with Esau (Gen 25:22-26) and open warfare ensued after the Exodus from Egypt. The tribes of Esau had joined with Ishmaelites and consolidated the hill country of Mt Seir, originally taken from the Horites by Esau.

- **but of Him who calls**

Election to eternal life is according to God's purpose, is according to God's choice and has nothing to do with our works but is all about God's calling. This purpose was decreed regarding Jacob and Esau before they were both born. In eternal terms one was rejected and one chosen; in human terms the elder would serve the younger, in national terms there would be enmity between them forever.

The strength and hunting skills of Esau or the cunning and intelligence of Jacob had nothing to do with this choice; the election of Jacob and the reprobation of Esau was according to God's good pleasure alone (Eph 1:5).

It is important to understand that this is a personal election and nothing to do with subsequent divine judgment on nations, such as Edom. The election spoken of is individual - God chose the younger and rejected the elder, against all normal protocol. God has mercy on whomever he chooses. He selected Jacob for this mercy but not Esau. Just because Esau was the firstborn son of Isaac, there was no guarantee that he would inherit blessing. Esau stands as an example that even those who may presume some kind of tribal right to the covenant blessings promised to his grandfather Abraham, can be rejected; in actual fact can not only be outside the covenant, but be enemies of the covenant. **For they *are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel, nor *are they* all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called.'** That is, those who *are* the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. Esau was not of the spiritual line of promise due to God's decree to reprobate him.

### **Proposition 1**

God has decreed that those who are elected by him in eternity, out of his sovereign good pleasure, are the ones who will be saved. Only the elect are given grace since grace is the gift of God that leads to salvation.<sup>2</sup> Esau is revealed in scripture as the prime example of this sovereign choosing. He is rejected before birth, while his brother is selected for grace.

### **Jacob is the chief individual example of the connection between God's love and election; Esau that of God's hate and reprobation.<sup>3</sup>**

As it is written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.' What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.' So then *it is* not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

Jacob was elected to life; and this is categorically stated to be due to the fact that God loved him. Esau, however, was not loved and was therefore not chosen. But he was not only 'not loved', he was hated. This cannot be watered down, it does not mean 'to love less', as some commentators pretend.<sup>4</sup> It means what it says. Esau was hated by God before he was even born.

<sup>2</sup> Faith is a divine gift: Acts 14:27, 18:27; Eph 2:8-9; Phil 1:29; Jn 6:29; Heb 12:2. Repentance is a gift: Acts 5:31, 11:18; 2 Tim 2:25-26; Heb 12:1. Conversion is believing and repenting.

<sup>3</sup> Reprobation is the term that applies to sinners who are not elected to salvation, those who are left by God in their sins.

<sup>4</sup> Hate is the Greek word **mise,w miseo**, [Strong's number 3404] from a primary word *misos* (hatred). It means: to hate, pursue with hatred, detest, to be hated, detested, to dislike strongly with the implication of aversion and hostility. Expressions for 'hatred' frequently involve idiomatic phrases, for example, 'to kill in the heart' or 'to spit at someone in the heart.' This hate is spoken of in the NT as sometimes leading to murder (Matt 24:9; Jn 15:25; 1 Jn 3:15; Rev 17:16). See Thayer's Expanded and Louw-Nida Lexica.

We need to explain this a little further.

The whole of fallen humanity ought to be under God's hatred. Man rebelled against the creation and provision of a compassionate God who had put the whole earth under man's control as the regent of God's sovereignty. Instead, man submitted to God's enemy and disobeyed his creator, seeking equality with God himself. Having fallen into sin, man became the very blackness that God hated and could not fellowship with. Man, the creation of God's own loving hands, had become despicable. It would be divine justice for all men to be hated by God. Sin, as the exact opposite of God's purity and holiness, must be hated. It is everything God is not. Man as sinner is justifiably hated by God. There is nothing surprising or strange that God hates sinners. This is a divine necessity and the outcome of holiness - the essential attribute of God. After the sin had occurred there was a necessity, in the order of God, for there to be a judgment. Sin once committed in God's world had to be punished. As soon as Satan [in heaven] and Adam [on earth] fell, hell had to exist forever. This could not be altered. God's wrath and justice must be evidenced to deal with sin.

However, God is also full of mercy and grace. In his surpassing love he chose to save a portion of mankind; to initiate a salvation that would result in a new world, peopled with his chosen sons in Christ who would all be holy as a result of the great atonement wrought by Jesus at Calvary. This holy nation would exist in fellowship with God for eternity, being materially changed to cope with everlasting life. These people are loved by God.

This choice as to who is selected for eternal life and who is chosen to suffer condemnation in demonstration of holy wrath, was made by God before time:

- He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will. (Eph 1:4-5)
- The vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory. (Rm 9:23)

If the elect were separated from the rest of humanity in eternity, then all the reprobate were determined at that time also. Scripture confirms this in many places; for instance:

- The wicked are reserved for the day of doom; they shall be brought out on the day of wrath. (Job 21:30)
- They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. (1 Pt 2:8)
- For certain men ... who long ago were marked out [written beforehand, designated in advance] for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. (Jude 4)

God allowed the Fall to take place, and understood that the heart of man would succumb to temptation, but he had decreed in eternity that a portion of this sinful race would be loved and saved from the destruction that man threw upon himself. Even though most of humanity must be hated, God decreed that some would be loved. This is grace; none needed to be loved, but millions were. This process was necessary for God to establish an elect population for his family.

Modern evangelicals who feel that God loves everyone are mired in a heresy that would be shocking to our godly forbears. One can only entertain thoughts of a universal love of God to all if one lowers one's understanding of God's sovereignty and his decree of election. The Biblical revelation does not allow us to do this. It states, in very clear terms, that God hates sin, sinners and those practising error. For example:

- You hate all workers of iniquity. (Ps 5:5)

- The LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man. (Ps 5:6) [*Abhor* = ‘to loathe’, ‘to regard as an abomination’, it is worse than ‘hate’.]
- The wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates. (Ps 11:5).
- But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ... you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. (Rev 2:6, 2:15)
- And you shall not walk in the statutes of the nation [Canaanites] which I am casting out before you; for they commit all these things, and therefore I abhor them. (Lev 20:23)

It is impossible to honour the Bible and state that God loves everyone; he clearly does not.

Now the outstanding example of someone specifically stated to be hated by God is Esau. This is repeated in the Old And New Testaments.

- ‘I have loved you,’ says the LORD. ‘Yet you say, “In what way have You loved us?” *Was not Esau Jacob's brother?*’ Says the LORD. ‘Yet Jacob I have loved; But Esau I have hated, And laid waste his mountains and his heritage For the jackals of the wilderness.’ (Mal 1:2-3)
- As it is written, ‘Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.’ (Rm 9:13)

Esau is given to us as a specific individual who is hated by God, before he was born, as an example or model of the reprobate person. The idea of election and reprobation is not just given us in theoretical terms of dogmatic argument, but is laid out for us in the lives of actual people on whom judgment or blessing was meted out.

## Proposition 2

The basis of God’s election is love. This love is placed upon the elect and also results from God’s sovereign good pleasure. The elect are loved by God from eternity and are always loved since all that God does is from eternity and all he does is full and complete. The reprobate cannot be loved since they are left in their sin. God cannot love something that remains in sin. The elect are always loved (despite their sin before conversion) as they are seen as in Christ from eternity. The ‘lamb slain from the foundation of the world’ answers for their sin. The reprobate are hated. They were hated from eternity and will continue to be hated in hell, the place of their eternal condemnation. Esau is given to us in scripture as the prime model for this hate. The clear connection between God hating a person and God rejecting a person are evidenced in Esau.

## Esau proves that repentance is not a work of man

The prime foundation of Arminianism, or the Gospel of easy-believism, is that anyone can make a decision for Christ at any time. Repentance and faith are placed into man’s hands and scriptures which state that they are a gift of God are ignored. The Gospel is preached as if anyone can accept Christ at any moment, and that rejection of the Gospel message is the choice of man. All of these notions are lies.

Now we could go through many texts to show this, or we could develop a scriptural argument to prove that it is false theology. However, God has given us key statements by an apostle who tells us that Esau demonstrates the folly of this teaching in his life. This appears in Hebrews 12:16-17

... lest there *be* any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

Firstly, we see here that Esau was a ‘profane’ person; that is someone who is godless, irreligious, worldly. He despised his birthright, disobeyed his father and did many wicked

things; yet at one point he sought repentance. Now if repentance is easy, if it is within the right of man, Esau should have found grace for he sought his repentance with tears. Not only that but he sought repentance diligently, that is, he sought for it carefully, he scrutinised everything for it, and he craved it. But he could not repent, he could not change, he could not become holy, he could not enter the covenant, he could not be blessed, he could not find fellowship with God. Why? Because he was already rejected. Esau could not repent unto life and be blessed because God would not give him the grace to repent. Why? Because only the elect are given this grace.

If grace were available to all, if repentance is in the remit of all men, then this scripture should not exist. Esau demonstrates that repentance can be desperately sought, and yet not experienced since it is only for the elect who are given the divine strength to turn and be saved. This wasn't superficial, Esau sought it with tears and he sought it diligently. He was the grandson of Abraham and knew all about God from his father and family; if any man should have been able to repent it was Esau. But he couldn't because he was rejected.

Men cannot chose God. Men cannot repent when they like. Men cannot believe without God calling them. Men cannot come to God unless he draws them first. Men are lost if God doesn't seek them. If you are not of Jesus' flock, you cannot come to the shepherd.

### **Proposition 3**

Esau clearly teaches us that repentance is a gift and cannot be achieved by man's strength or will.

So then *it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.* (Rm 9:16)

The Arminian notion that anyone can believe and repent at any time is false.

## **Conclusion**

This establishes why Esau is important and is mentioned so many times, in such key passages, in scripture. Esau demonstrates that God elects those he chooses unto salvation, and only those. The elect have been earmarked for eternal life before the world was made, and placed into Christ, their surety of salvation. This selection has nothing to do with who they are, what tribe they are from, how they will perform or even how good and bad they are. It is a sovereign decision made by God in his good pleasure. Some bad men are chosen, such as Saul who persecuted the church, while some privileged people are rejected, such as Saul whom God made king of Israel.

The elect are loved by God. They are always loved because they are seen as in Christ, the apple of God's eye. God can only love fully and perfectly, he does nothing by half. Neither does he set his love on something temporarily, and then take it away later; God loves to the end. Only the elect are loved because they are placed in the beloved Son, and they are loved from eternity past into the depths of the everlasting future. The reprobate are never loved but are of their father, the devil. They may be treated with compassion and much patience; they may be kept in God's providence, they may be rich or poor, and may live long or short lives - but they are all equally hated. To God, even their honest work is sin (Prov 21:4).

This is a hard thing to accept, but scripture forces this understanding on us. We have no right to question it, or subvert it. We must just accept it and teach the truth. God's love is sovereign and particular. It is a full love expressed only to his elect.

Only those who are chosen and loved will find the grace to repent and believe through the Gospel message. When they hear the truth, the Holy Spirit calls them and convicts them

before empowering them to have faith and change. He does this by renewing and regenerating their hearts when he calls them. Salvation is all of God.

Those who are not elect hear the same message but receive no power to change or believe. In fact, the words of the Gospel harden them and confirm their rejection. The more they hear the words of eternal life, the more they reject it and go deeper into sin and rebellion.

Esau is the prime Biblical example for all these things. He was rejected by God before he was born and the covenant birthright was denied him. God expressly states that he hated him in both testaments and also shows us that Esau could not repent, even when he wanted to. Esau is typical of all sinners who reject God because they are reprobate. In Esau's case this degenerated through the tribe he founded, the Edomites, who became a significant enemy of Israel for years to come.

Arminians, and all those who preach that God loves everyone and that men can repent at any time, need to cut every reference to Esau out of their Bibles if they wish to be consistent.

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