

## Exegetical Notes – Genesis 25:19-34

### *“Esau and Jacob”*

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(Genesis answers three basic theological questions. The first question is, “Whose world is it anyway?” The text answers the question by affirming that it is God’s world by right of creation. It is God’s world because God made it. The second question Genesis asks is “How do we get along in God’s world God’s way?” The answer is by trusting God and obeying Him. To this point in the text, Abraham has been the model of a man who trusts God and obeys Him even though Abraham is not a perfect model of trust and obedience. The first two questions have been answered. At this point in the Book of Genesis the text turns toward the third question which Genesis asks, “How do we get along in God’s world God’s way particularly with the members of our own family?” Abraham’s family has grown with the births of his sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Abraham has an extended family with the births to his brother, Nahor (see Genesis 22:20-24). Family becomes the concern. And Genesis continues to answer the third question.)

### Genesis 25:19-34

#### Verses 19-20

<sup>19</sup> *This is the account of the family line of Abraham’s son Isaac.*

*Abraham became the father of Isaac,<sup>20</sup> and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram and sister of Laban the Aramean.*

- In this text, we continue to look at and learn about family by looking at the family of Isaac, the son of Abraham. This discussion of families began in Genesis 18:1 and will continue to the end of the book of Genesis.
- Isaac was 42 years old when he married Rebekah.

#### Verses 21-22

<sup>21</sup> *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. <sup>22</sup> The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, “Why is this happening to me?” So she went to inquire of the Lord.***

- Isaac was concerned because Rebekah was unable to conceive. They had been married for 18 years and she had not conceived (see verse 26). So, he took the matter to God and his prayers were answered. Rebekah conceived.
- But the pregnancy seemed abnormal. In fact, Rebekah was carrying twins and the babies seemed to be struggling with each other in her womb. So, she took the matter to God and asked him what was happening in her body.
- Note that the text does not say that either Isaac or Rebekah took the matter to YHWH. The text uses the word Elohim. But they did take the matter to God, indicating that they had a world view which accentuated the importance of God. They took their concerns about life to God.

### **Verse 23**

***<sup>23</sup> 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.”***

- God’s response to Rebekah’s prayer was in some way audible and lyrical. He responds to her in a poem or a song explaining that she is carrying two “nations” in her womb. They will be separated from one another in life and the first born will serve the interests of the second born.

### **Verse 24-26**

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

- Rebekah gave birth to twin sons.
- The first born was reddish and had more hair. So, she named him Esau. The name is a form of the Hebrew word “Edom” which means red. The name Esau has become synonymous with hairy in Hebrew culture.
- The second born came from the womb holding onto or grasping his brother’s heel. So, she named him Jacob which means “heel catcher” in

Hebrew. In time, the name came to mean “tricky one” and/or “supplanter” in Hebrew culture.

### **Verse 27**

***<sup>27</sup> 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.***

- When the boys grew up, they were very different in nature. Esau was a hunter and enjoyed being outside. Jacob was more of a home-body. He enjoyed being at home among the women.

### **Verse 28**

***<sup>28</sup> Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.***

- Isaac favored Esau and Rebekah favored Jacob. The parents’ preference for one child over the other was known, and so the family was divided, Isaac and Esau against Rebekah and Jacob.

### **Verses 29-34**

***<sup>29</sup> Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. <sup>30</sup> He said to Jacob, “Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I’m famished!” (That is why he was also called Edom.)***

***<sup>31</sup> Jacob replied, “First sell me your birthright.”***

***<sup>32</sup> “Look, I am about to die,” Esau said. “What good is the birthright to me?”***

***<sup>33</sup> But Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob.***

***<sup>34</sup> Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left.***

***So Esau despised his birthright.***

- It happened that one day Jacob was at home cooking. Esau, who had been out hunting, came home hungry and asked for some of the reddish stew his brother was cooking. Jacob said that he would give Esau some of the stew if Esau acknowledged Jacob as Isaac’s rightful heir. (In Hebrew culture, the first-born son would inherit 90% of his father’s estate. The remaining 10% would be divided among the other sons. Girls did not inherit.)
- The conversation indicates that Esau thought Jacob was joking with him. So, he agreed to sell his brother his right to 90% of their father’s estate. Jacob gave Esau some stew which Esau ate. Esau then went on his way as if nothing had happened. But Jacob was not kidding with Esau. He had put his

brother in a compromising position intentionally. Esau had been tricked because he was too frivolous about an important matter and was not careful.

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